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A Complex Fate: Jewish-American Experience in the Fiction of
Leslie Fiedler, Edward Wallant, Chaim Potok and Jerome Charyn

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For John Woolf

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Introduction: Another Complex Fate

I

Henry James thought that the fate of Americans was complex. No body of fiction exhibits greater complexity than the Jewish-American novel in the years of its emergent maturity. The work of Fiedler, Wallant, Potok and Charyn reveals a spectrum of expanded possibility. In the years 1960 to 1975, simple models of Jewish-American experience become inadequate. This thesis, therefore, seeks to examine the richer and more complex condition of Jewish-American fiction reflected in the works of the novelists discussed.

The Jewish-American novel is conventionally seen in dualistic terms. In that view it emerges out of particular tensions deriving from the convergence of Jewish and American social mores. Irving Malin's Jews and Americans establishes one aspect of this duality. In After the Tradition Robert Alter expands the cultural range to include the Israeli scene, but there is no essential deviation from a basically static model of a fiction evolved from tension between two cultural forces. For Allen Guttman those forces are shaped around the issues of assimilation and ethnic identification. Sol Liptzin contrasts the image of the Jew as developed in Jewish and non-Jewish literature.

The nature of these dualistic models clearly differs according to specific intention and emphasis. Loren Baritz defines a conflict between Jewish and American attitudes to history. Samuel Bellman evokes the archetypal conflict between father and son as a shaping impulse. Philip Roth's Portnoy's Complaint is, on one level at least, a comic re-enactment of the archetype that Bellman identifies, a conflict that is forged out of the transformation of authority from father to mother. Harold Fisch in The Dual Image establishes, from a Zionist perspective, a comparative analysis of the Jew in American and English literature.

Critical activity has for the most part focused around duality for perfectly valid reasons. The Jewish-American novel, as the words "Jewish"

and "American" indicate, is identifiable in so far as it contains elements of these perceptions existing in some kind of relation to each other. The object here is to suggest that the contemporary situation is more complex than has been previously suggested. No single model will enable a coherent portrait of the culture to emerge unless there is an awareness that the terms "American" and "Jewish" are malleable rather than fixed elements in the novelist's consciousness, and that the interaction of these two elements is further modified by the impact of contemporary sensibilities. One aspect of that impact, and a subject that is focused upon throughout this thesis, is the way in which notions of Judaism are repeatedly invented and re-invented. The invention of Judaism is a persistent characteristic of this fiction, and evidence of the continued identifiability of a Jewish-American literature. There is, though, no single school of thought or set of assumptions that can be used to categorise contemporary Jewish-American fiction. The concept of such a fiction justly exists because cultural pressures deriving from Jewish, American and contemporary sensibilities are visibly interwoven, and set in creative tension, within a significant body of recent literature.

The fiction of Norman Mailer illustrates a further problem of category. It is arguable that a nebulous Jewish sensibility can be identified within Mailer's work, but the fiction does not significantly concern itself with the pressures discussed here. For these purposes contemporary Jewish-American fiction is defined as that which is written by Jews and, in a variety of explicit or implicit ways, illustrates, dramatises or analyses the condition, meaning or implication of contemporary Jewish experience in America.

A modification of that definition that excluded the ethnicity of the author clearly would not preclude discussion of fiction produced by non-Jews. A wide ranging historical survey might take note of Hemingway's Robert Cohn, a Jewish archetype who, "heart-wounded" in Bellow's terminology, is seen from a basically hostile point of view. John Updike's Bech: A Book would stand with Sukenick's The Death of the Novel and Other Stories in a discussion of self-conscious fictive treatments of the theme. The theme of

the Jew in America has been widely treated by Jewish and non-Jewish authors, and a survey would take note of the impact of the figure of the Jew in American literature in general.

This work is not, however, a survey and a narrow focus identifies the collapse of duality in a limited number of examples. The assumption is that close focus serves to illustrate major changes in the culture as a whole. The primary dynamic force is seen to be the modification of the significances of the categories, Judaism and Americanism.

Abraham Cahan, as Zangwill had done for the British-Jewish tension, established meanings for those categories that have some persistence. Judaism still tends to be associated with Europe and tradition, America with change and the absence of tradition. The basic impulse behind American cultural forms tends to be futuristic, to exploit a sense of making anew. The essence of Judaism tends to be retrospective, a commitment to impulses deriving from history. The tension between the two is often expressed in a scepticism about the idea of progress, and an ambiguity towards American alienation from the past. The dramatic expression of this tension often makes the price of American progress morally problematic. It involves discarding crucial elements of Jewish identification.

The persistence of the meaning of these categories is illustrated in Bellow's Humboldt's Gift where Charlie Citrine's commitment to the past is seen as an essentially Jewish characteristic. His brother's rejection of the past locates him firmly in the materialistic present of America. While Bellow identifies Judaism with spiritual longing and America with material action, Malamud evokes, in part of his fiction, an image of Judaism as stoic acceptance of suffering invested with moral validity in America:

What kind of man did you have to be born to shut yourself up in an overgrown coffin and never once during the day, so help you, outside of going for your Yiddish newspaper, poke your beak out of the door for a snootful of air? The answer wasn't hard to say--you had to be a Jew. They were born prisoners.¹

The "born prisoner" of Malamud's fiction is linked with a concept of the morality of suffering, an attempt to invest meaning into Jewish past experience and to offer that as a moral alternative to the values operative in the American present.

While in "Eli, The Fanatic" Philip Roth exploits a similar version of Jewish versus American value conflicts, he creates an alternative satirical version of conflict in Portnoy's Complaint. Judaism creates a vast range of limitations whereas the gentile world offers, or seems to offer, unfettered liberty.² The narrator's consciousness expresses the fictional persistence of a dual tension between Jewish and American cultures.

The nature of that tension is fragmented, however, in a significant body of fiction since 1960. Impulses toward change and new aspects of consciousness have become visible, and it is the object of this thesis to recognise diversity and multiplicity as characteristic of contemporary Jewish-American culture. The focus on relatively less well-known figures serves to expand the range of critical activity and to suggest that Bellow, Malamud and Roth represent only one area of a wide field of investigation.

The authors discussed here are of literary merit and their work illustrates a spectrum of possibility. The orthodox commitment of Chaim Potok to both religious and fictional convention contrasts with the experimental impulses in the later work of Edward Wallant and the radical inventions of Jerome Charyn. Co-existing with the religious and fictional continuities expressed by Potok, a new Jewish-American novel has emerged. That emergence is illustrated within the careers of Leslie Fiedler and Edward Wallant through the development from their early to their later fiction. For Charyn this "new" perception has been a central, persistent characteristic of fictional procedure. This new Jewish-American novel modifies traditional preoccupations and strategies through the complexities and self-conscious sophistication of Post-Modernism. The fiction, of necessity, forms somewhere at the point where Jewish, American and Post-Modernist concerns converge. The nature of this convergence, and the

form of interaction, creates a range of possibility rather than a single or simple category that can be described in dualistic terms.

Within this literature it has become clear that Judaism is a flexible commodity, a structure or structures that may be re-invented and manipulated like any other fictive artifact. It is not, in a secular environment, a given or inflexible item. The fluidity of interpretation creates a less coherent whole but a richer complexity. The novelist shapes the elements that comprise his self-consciousness and, at the same time, is involved in the modification, invention and re-definition of his cultural environment. He is both product of that environment and the inventor of that which produces him.

II

This fiction exists at the centre of a number of formative influences that exert perceptible pressures. The writers, with the exception of Chaim Potok, are largely secular Jews, and, in this age of the university teacher/novelist, they are likely to have a fairly well developed sense of the American literary tradition. They are also likely to react in one way or another to the figures of European Modernism, particularly Joyce and Kafka. Out of the synthesis of these influences and roles a series of paradoxes and contradictions emerge which are creatively manipulated within the fiction.

To understand a central paradox in contemporary American Judaism, it is necessary to distinguish the secular and the theological. While orthodox commitment to religious practice has been in decline, secular and "pop" Judaism has enjoyed an enormous popularity. Jewish comedy and language patterns run through all levels of American culture. Philosemitism has for a long time begun to appear as a conventional stance.

In the absence of religious commitment, that condition has led to problems of identity and definition. Acculturation has taken place on so large a scale that it is difficult to identify a separate Jewish life style except on the orthodox fringes of Hassidic fervour. The elements of "pop" Judaism that permeate the culture are as likely to be expressed by non-Jews as by Jews. "Pop" elements of vestigial Judaism are characteristic of American culture in general, rather than defining signs of a specifically Jewish culture.

The Jewish-American author, in the face of religious decline and simultaneous "pop" resurgence, has a number of options open to him. He can, with the critic Sol Liptzin, champion religious conservatism with some sense of cultural exclusiveness: "Angoff feels himself to be in the deepest reaches of his soul part of his people and never does he seek to weaken his ties to his historic heritage, as do far too many of his

better known contemporaries."³ This position, however, not only leads to ideological distortions of critical judgement, but also requires religious commitment and a strong sense of nostalgia for a past that is often idealised to permit that nostalgia.

The contemporary Jewish-American writer is faced with a choice between two versions of the immediate Jewish-American past. To share Liptzin's view he would need to be largely in accord with Yuri Suhl's 1948 version of the immigrant experience: "America was a wonderful country; the gentile boys didn't pluck at my earlocks and no one threw stones at me."⁴ That view is enforced by Harry Golden in books like So What Else is New? and So Long as You're Healthy. The comforting cliches of nostalgic recall create a popular and idealised version of immigrant poverty. The alternative view comes from Henry Roth. David Schearl experiences the Jewish area of Brownsville in the 1930's as surrealistic nightmare:

Across the street the bar of green light in the photography shop blazed out. People passed leisurely, self-absorbed, and as they entered the radius of the light, it fixed them momentarily in caustic carrion-green. None marked him there, but drifted by with too buoyant and too aimless a gait for his own misery, drifted by with bloated corroded faces, as if heaved in the swell of a weedy glare, as if lolling undersea.⁵

There is no sense of the warm security expressed by Suhl and Golden.

To regret the present and to commit himself to a version of the past that combines religious identification and cultural exclusiveness, the contemporary Jewish-American author must create a sympathetic model of that past or, like Chaim Potok, retain a genuine commitment to religious practice. For the author who engages with the dynamics of the contemporary American experience, the creation of a lost and idealised past is rarely an available option both because he does not have a sense of religious commitment, and because his aesthetic and

historical sense rejects the kind of past that Suhl creates.

Another option for the Jewish-American author is to treat the decline of traditional Judaism as comedy. In these novels the Jew is a comic victim burdened with ethnic identity but without religious conviction. Judaism becomes a largely negative pressure upon characters who tend already to be overburdened by the conditions of urban existence. These problematically comic Jews appear in novels throughout the 1960's. Bruce Jay Friedman's Stern, or Jay Neugeboren's Listen Ruben Fontanez are vivid examples of the form.

These Jews are problematic because the decline of identity is partial and the remnants of Jewish association cause discomfort. The process of decline is both comic and painful. Roth's Alexander Portnoy is a typical case. He aspires to the freedom without guilt that gentile America seems to enjoy. He can share that freedom but not without the guilt that derives from the pressures of Jewish community social ethics. He sustains two fantasies. On the one hand he enjoys the sexual liberation he associates with gentile America, but that enjoyment is undermined by what he sees as Jewish guilt. At the same time, he imagines himself securely located within the Jewish community as a husband and a father. He is, as Tanner argues, caught between "the cacophony of conflicting imperatives that beset him."⁶ The imperatives of that conflict derive from the clash of Jewish and American values. Portnoy's anguish, close at times to surreal nightmare, is expressed as comedy that only at the end erupts into the cry of sheer animal terror that it has always threatened to become. Leslie Fiedler in "The Last Jew in America" similarly sees the decline of Judaism as simultaneously "a catastrophe" and "a joke":

And if this one turned out to be the last Jew in America, Jacob could not help thinking, as he watched him slap his broad-rimmed hat against the tops of his boots in an ecstasy of shame, what a catastrophe, what a joke. But he was not sure what it meant finally that the last catastrophe of the Jews be a joke.⁷

A further option open to the contemporary novelist may, at times, co-exist with the comic procedure, as it does in the work of Philip Roth or Leslie Fiedler. Judaism may also be seen as a cluster of characteristics accumulated around a protagonist until ethnic identity is established by a set of symbolic associations. Edward Wallant in The Pawnbroker and Bernard Malamud in The Assistant have created characters who, in cities that exist metaphorically as hell, are a constant reminder of suffering. They exist, on one level at least, as symbols of a Jewish experience and they enable the contemporary writer to express obliquely a historical experience that exists outside of his own but within his cultural awareness. From this emerges a symbolic Judaism which operates as a moral counter to a contemporary reality seen as antipathetic or hostile.

Similarly certain characteristics and acts may be seen as symbolically Jewish whether performed by Jew or gentile. Ethnic identity as an assumed stance is behind the gentile, Clem's, argument with the Rabbi in Fielder's The Second Stone:

I'm the real Jew too, Mark. The real Jew, Rabbi, if to be a Jew means to live on the margins of the world in failure and terror, to be in exile. Not to rise on the third day. You're righteous, that's the charge, justified. I accuse you of being well-adjusted you--you goy!⁸

The same point is made by Mailer in "The White Negro" where he argues that to be "hip" is to assume the status and life style of the Negro. Underlying these concepts is the idea that ethnic identity can be symbolically assumed. This leads toward ethnicity as invention where the issue becomes part of the process of fictive creation, a literary stance rather than a cultural fact. Neugeboren in Big Man and Charyn in Eisenhower, My Eisenhower have exploited the potential of that condition, and, in Why Are We in Vietnam?, Mailer freely manipulates the

ethnicity of the narrator to achieve specific literary objectives. Ethnicity becomes, like landscape or characterisation, a non-static element in the fictive enterprise. It is invented and re-invented becoming a flexible and changeable factor.

It is clear that the contemporary Jewish-American author confronts Judaism in a variety of ways. He may nostalgically recreate religious identity and cultural cohesiveness, and regret will inevitably be part of that nostalgic act. He may treat the decline of Judaism as problematic comedy, or see it as a symbolic stance assumed by Jew or gentile. In any case, the desire of the writer to come to terms with the nature of Judaism arises to some degree out of the paradox of the simultaneous rise of "pop" Judaism and decline of traditional identification. Somewhere near the centre of contemporary Jewish-American culture, this paradox confronts the Jewish artist.

This writer not only necessarily confronts his Jewishness but also the nature of his American identity. He is an ambiguous American securely located in American culture but his sense of belonging is modified by European-Jewish experience. Judaism, however peripheral, links the writer to the European past with the accumulation of historical and mythic pressures that arise out of that past. His awareness of America exists on a number of levels. There is the experience he directly knows, the suburbanisation of the American Jew and the upsurge of "pop" Philosemitism. Behind this there is the traumatic period of the Great Depression when some Jewish voices, Nathanael West or Henry Roth, seemed to speak with particular authority and clarity. Beyond that is the distant American past and its literature, the significance of which he can only invent for himself as myth or history. In addition to this cultural awareness, there is the consciousness of the holocaust with its reverberations and imperatives.

A number of these elements are synthesised in Philip Roth's "Eli, The Fanatic." The Jews of Woodenton are secularised, acculturated

suburban Jews enjoying prosperity. They are confronted by their own European origins, and by the recent past, through the figure of Tsuref, the kind of symbolic Jew discussed earlier. Around him, and the "greenhorn," a cluster of characteristics is accumulated and these serve to confront the prosperous Jews of Woodenton with experiences to which their ethnic origins link them. Tsuref (almost the Yiddish word for trouble or pain) stands for persecution and traditional Judaism, and those are precisely the elements of ethnicity that the Woodenton Jews seek to discard. Tsuref carries the burden of Jewish suffering and, in that respect, his role in the fiction is similar to that of Nazerman's in The Pawnbroker or Morris Bober's in The Assistant. The symbolic resonances around Tsuref and the "greenhorn" focus on the greenhorn's clothing and it is these clothes that Eli, discarding the symbols of assimilation and suburban prosperity, finally puts on. His relationship to Tsuref and "the greenhorn" is parallel to the relationship between Morris Bober and Frank Alpine. Eli, like Alpine, becomes a symbolic Jew through the assumption of traditional Jewish identity. It is a painful assertion of a sense of community and moral responsibility. Eli is alienated from his present, seen as deranged, because of an action that restores the link between him and the Jews who have suffered poverty and persecution. This becomes a moral action through which Roth confronts the self-satisfied, comfortable prosperity of the American present. In this way Roth examines a pervasive feeling in Jewish-American fiction, that material success is a kind of moral failure or, even more radically, a kind of treachery.

There are also discernible pressures in this literature that derive from the experiences of the 1920's and 1930's. Norman Podhoretz has described "making it" as a primary objective in that era, and "it" is the journey from the Jewish ghetto to the gentile world, an act of assimilation:

One of the longest journeys in the world is the journey from Brooklyn to Manhattan--or at least certain neighborhoods in

Brooklyn to certain parts of Manhattan.⁹

In the same period the dissemination of Marxist ideas led toward an ambiguous attitude to violence, a kind of secular messianic impulse that Leslie Fiedler describes in Waiting for the End. A flirtation with radical political concepts was characteristic of a significant part of Jewish-American society in that period, as Irving Howe has pointed out in The Immigrant Jews of New York.

The radical energy of the 30's is, however, now largely dispersed and, for the most part, the contemporary author has "made it." Kazin's autobiographical volumes are another chronicle of the process. The contemporary author is left with a further dimension to his sense of material success as a moral failure. Assimilation and comfort affront not only the kind of Jewish experience that Tsuref represents, but also the values of the generation that experienced the radical political exuberance of the 1930's. The grandfather's voice out of Europe merges with the father's voice resonant with the struggle of the 30's in a single note of moral accusation. Wallace Markfield examines this formative, traumatic period in Teitelbaum's Window. He locates his novel in a 1930's heavily re-made into black-comic absurdity. The novel is an act of exorcism through comedy, a long impressionistic Jewish joke that never minimises the anguish that co-exists with the laughter. The period nags at the contemporary Jewish-American conscience.

Bernard Malamud's The Assistant can also be seen as an attempt to re-examine the tone of the 1930's. The landscape of the novel exploits the rituals of urban poverty in a manner that suggests an act of retrospection rather than contemporary analysis. The critical interest in writers like Fuchs, West, Henry Roth and even Mike Gold, is part of the tendency described here. The contemporary Jewish writer or critic, enjoying assimilation and prosperity, looks back uneasily at a period that challenges the moral validity of his comfort.

That feeling is further complicated and intensified by the dark

image of Nazism. The attempt to relate that experience to contemporary security has not often been directly made although the need for some kind of statement has been repeatedly felt. Malamud, for example, skirts around the issue writing allegories of persecution like "The Jew-Bird," or examining anti-Semitism in an earlier period in The Fixer. Charyn invents versions of ethnic isolation to examine the experience of persecution while Cynthia Ozick has created a parable of violence in "Bloodshed." Potok approaches the subject through the responses of American Jews to the historical events. Markfield most directly approached the issue in "Notes on the Working Day." The reality of the experience is a persistent pressure, a burden that becomes a dream/nightmare without cessation:

The clock gave him five more minutes, yet he knew that this dream of death would be with him always, carefully plotted out, stamped within him like an economist's chart, rising higher and higher each day, yet never touching the heights of marginal utility.¹⁰

The holocaust restored the mythic figure of the persecuted Jew to modern historical relevance. It is that relevance that Wallant uses in The Pawnbroker, and Roth uses in "Eli, The Fanatic." The general tendency is to avoid the direct rendering of the holocaust in the fiction but to present the experience as a factor in the character's consciousness. The figure of the persecuted Jew makes appearances in the fiction discussed here and his existence is another dimension of a moral critique of contemporary comfort. His recurrence is an indication that the secular Jewish-American writer has not, and cannot, easily slough off his own sense of himself as a Jew related to the Jews who have preceded him. The paradox at the root of the Jewish-American writer's attitude to the 1930's and 1940's is the sense that success is a burden, a moral failure and a shameful act of historical betrayal. To dispose of an

identity that links the writer to pain and suffering in favour of an Americanism that is painless and secure is not a process that can be accompanied without guilt. A Jewish sensibility clashes with the American reality, and association with the Jewish experience is often a moral action that serves as a critique of contemporary America. That clash reveals another aspect of the tension between the Jewish and American consciousness and is further evidence of the fact that the contemporary Jewish-American writer confronts issues that are not precisely the same as those confronted by the gentile author.

Another element of this tension is apparent when the Jewish author relates to the distant American past and its primary myths. Loren Baritz describes one aspect of that relation: "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 part. To be a Jew is to remember. An American must forget."¹¹ Certain basic American myths and attitudes to history contrast with orthodox views of what Judaism means. The idea of the West, with the related sense of making a new society unencumbered by history, clashes with that aspect of Judaism that tends to sanctify the past. The literature of the frontier locates its moral values, for the most part, outside of the settlements. The solitary figure in a virgin landscape is a pervasive mythic shape. In contrast, when the figure is drawn in English literature, in Defoe's Robinson Crusoe for example, he gains moral value in so far as he recreates the conditions of civilization in the wilderness. Cooper's Natty Bumppo gains his moral status in so far as he retreats from civilization and its values. His ethical system rejects the exploitation and development of the virgin landscape. The frontier, ever moving westward and then inward into metaphysical discovery, is symbolically renewable. The figure on the frontier in retreat from the encroachments of civilization makes successive acts of discovery and is symbolically re-born into a landscape that is perpetually renewable. That landscape is a mythic

rather than historical or geographical place.

The Jew, however, in so far as he retains a sense of ethnic identification, locates his values in relation to the past. The act of cultural assimilation is, as has been suggested, a distinctly problematic process and the Jewish writer, encumbered with a consciousness permeated by historical awareness, exists in an uneasy relationship with that central American myth. Furthermore, the American Jew has been a predominantly urban man. The idea of a frontier Jew is an old culture joke, part of the humour for example of the Mickey Katz, Yiddish rendition of Davy Crockett. Philip Roth has re-worked that joke to create a comic paradox in the last section of Portnoy's Complaint. The idea of a frontier Jew as an active element in Israeli culture is, at least in part, the cause of Portnoy's bewildered impotence. When the Jewish author has treated this pervasive American myth, it has been seen largely in terms of dream or fantasy. In Miller's Death of a Salesman the frontier becomes "the jungle" or "Alaska," locations which, in Willy's desperate fantasies, become areas of rich possibility. Saul Bellow remakes the frontier into a symbolic Africa in Henderson, the Rain King, a fantastic Africa of the mind that lacks any sense of real, geographical existence. Based in virgin territory and expressing the idea of a historical symbolic renewal, this myth seems alien to the Jewish author.

With the growth of university sponsorship and creative writing fellowships, the contemporary author may well be actively involved in teaching American literature, and is, at least, likely to be aware of the roots of a native American literature. The act of creating a distinctive American "voice" was, no less than the political act, revolutionary. It involved the invention of native forms that were not simply pale imitations of European art. That process was enforced by the critical pursuit of standards of judgement that would respond to the particularly American elements. There was a need to establish aesthetic judgements that would perceive literary value in work that developed and

was developing independently of European models.

The Jewish author exists, though, in an intimate relationship to European models. Alienation from those models is no easy matter. Wallace Markfield's debt is clearly, primarily, to Joyce. To An Early Grave, for example, echoes the structure of Paddy Dignam's funeral in Ulysses. In Reading Myself and Others, Philip Roth cites Kafka and Gogol as primary influences in The Breast, a novel that adopts the shape of "Metamorphosis." Leopold Bloom-type figures appear in Bruce Jay Friedman's Stern, in Jay Neugeboren's Listen Ruben Fontanez and in Markfield's To An Early Grave. European literature is, in these books, not discarded but actively re-interpreted in the American context. The novel with roots securely in the American literary and mythic landscape, books like Kesey's Sometimes a Great Notion or Larry McMurtry's Leaving Cheyenne and The Last Picture Show, is rarely produced by the Jewish author.

There is another sense in which American options and strategies are less apparent in Jewish-American fiction. There is a tendency in the contemporary novel to see reality as an absurd cosmic conspiracy, and to take the protagonist through the archetypal American act of retreat from the conditions of civilization. John Updike's Rabbit Run ends with the character enjoying the exuberance of escape:

His hands lift of their own and he feels the wind on his ears even before, his heels hitting heavily on the pavement at first but with an effortless gathering out of a kind of sweet panic growing lighter and quicker and quieter, he runs. Ah: runs.

Runs.¹²

The act of running liberates the character from the novel's reality without identifying arrival at an alternative location. Ken Kesey concludes One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest with a similar strategy:

I ran across the ground in the direction I remembered seeing the dog go, toward the highway. I remember I was taking huge

strides as I ran, seeming to step and float a long way before my next foot struck the earth. I felt I was flying. Free.¹³

Among contemporary Jewish-American authors only Joseph Heller in Catch 22 employs this concluding strategy. Yossarian also heads toward an area of new possibility, a territory which is essentially another form of the frontier as a symbolic location. These novelists respond to an archetypal shape in American literature, the escape and retreat into new territory which derives from the transformation of the historical wilderness into a symbolic option. Natty Bumppo moves westward, barely one step ahead of the settlements, in a series of escapes. Ishmael flees the land with its oppressive symbols of death. Jake Barnes searches for his wilderness in Spain. Above all, Huckleberry Finn sets off down the river on the mythic journey that pervades American literature.

The Jewish author with his cultural roots reaching eastward as well as westward tends to deny his characters this option. In Humboldt's Gift for example, Citrine is involved in a persistent pursuit of "significant space," but Bellow records the failure of retreat and the location of that space in Humboldt's grave. The protagonists in the Jewish-American novel tend to remain to confront the disorder and absurdity of the contemporary world with a humanist face. Their stance is often bewildered, anguished and/or comically impotent. A commitment to humanist moral values is seen to conflict with the nature of the contemporary environment, and the protagonists are, thus, often profoundly anti-realistic, dreamers, schlemiels and madmen. In those roles they defy contemporary reality in a manner that establishes a moral critique of their world. The Jewish writers who use this procedure are, in this respect, at odds with the American myths they often teach in the universities. They face in two directions and stand at a point of interaction between East and West, Europe and America.

The Jewish-American writer also writes in a special relation to certain notions of Post-Modernism. While this is no place for a

full-scale discussion of Post-Modernism, it is appropriate to outline the boundaries of possible definition that are discussed more fully later in relation to theoretical propositions made by Fiedler, Charyn and Potok. The concepts outlined by David Galloway in The Absurd Hero in American Fiction, and by Robert Alter in Partial Magic: The Novel as Self-Conscious Genre are of relevance. For the purposes of this argument, Post-Modernism is used as a "short-hand" term for a set of literary tendencies that have become clearly visible. Those are particularly the tendency toward parody, self-conscious structural manipulation, formal introspection, exploitation of the fictiveness of a text, disjunction, experimentation and playfulness.

Not all of the novelists discussed here illustrate these tendencies in their fiction, nor do they share Charyn's view that "the contemporary writer has been left with little else than a sense of dislocation, a splintered reality and the shards and bones of language."¹⁴ They all, however, respond to an environment where that sort of proposition is apparent, and those sorts of tendencies are visible. They inevitably confront that kind of version of the contemporary literary environment in one way or another. While Charyn partially modifies his own assertion in his fiction, Potok thoroughly rejects what he sees as an interpretation of the universe as meaningless. Wallant's work illustrates a movement toward a manifestly contemporary tone and sense of comedy that, nevertheless, co-exists with a profoundly affirmative sense of religious possibility. Fiedler, locating emphasis differently, occupies similar theoretical ground to Charyn in so far as he sees a radical discontinuity in literary production, and responds to an essentially Post-Modernist view of reality in his essay "Cross the Border - Close the Gap." His fiction reflects that view while, as does Charyn, simultaneously sustaining elements of traditional Judaism modified through alternative notions of Judaism. Post-Modernism, albeit an inexact term, recognises the impact of the contemporary situation on the literary sensibility. That recognition,

expressed by Fiedler, is part of the furniture in the contemporary house of fiction:

We are living, have been living for two decades--and have become acutely conscious of the fact since 1955--through the death throes of Modernism and the birth pangs of Post-Modernism. The kind of literature which had arrogated to itself the name Modern (with the presumption that it represented the ultimate advance in sensibility and form, that beyond it newness was not possible), and whose moment of triumph lasted from a point just before World War I until one just after World War II, is dead i.e. belongs to history not actuality. In the field of the novel, this means that the age of Proust, Mann and Joyce is over; just as in verse that of T.S.Eliot, Paul Valery, Montale and Seferis is done with.¹⁵

David Galloway makes a useful summary of the thematic dimensions of Post-Modernist concepts:

Since the death of the Genteel Tradition the theme of the exiled individual in a meaningless universe--a universe in which precepts of religious orthodoxy seem increasingly less relevant--has challenged the imagination of American writers with an almost overwhelming urgency.¹⁶

The recurrence of that theme has led to an over-emphasis on the figure of the Diaspora Jew as representative of contemporary man. It is an oversimplification to assert that "we are all outcasts now." In a sense, the American Jew is less of an outcast, more located, than his gentile contemporary. While the Jewish author is conscious of "a meaningless universe," he also remains in a state of tension with elements of Jewish identification. These remnants offer vestigial images of order and security in the face of enveloping disorder. The primary agent for

the propagation and dissemination of these images remains the family. Rosemary Friedman overstates her case for ideological and religious reasons, but there is some truth in her argument:

In the Middle Ages the Jewish home was a haven of rest from the storms that raged around the gates of the ghettos; today it stands as a bastion in a world of shifting values and as a bulwark against the increasing malaise of insecurity.¹⁷

There is rarely, except perhaps in Potok's work, total accord with that view, but retrospection presents the Jewish author with images out of Jewish social and religious forms that radically contrast with his present condition. Portnoy's Complaint may be seen in those terms. The attraction and repulsion that Portnoy feels toward contemporary anarchy is balanced by the attraction and repulsion he feels toward the Jewish family. Exactly those tensions exist in Neugeboren's Sam's Legacy, and they pervade the work of Jerome Charyn. A sense of absurdity and alienation is modified by the consciousness of Judaism.

As has been argued, the protagonists of Jewish-American fiction are often in a humanist confrontation with the conditions of their contemporary environment. That struggle is largely seen as doomed to failure, sometimes insane and often ambiguously comic, but it remains a morally valid response. Through this procedure, success, "in the system," can be seen as amoral. In failure, impotence and madness, the protagonist may achieve, paradoxically, a significant moral position. Norman Moonbloom's actions in Wallant's The Tenants of Moonbloom are seen as indicative of mental disorder. Eli, in "Eli, the Fanatic," is thought of as having suffered a nervous breakdown. Jacob, in Fiedler's "The Last Jew in America," is seen as an eccentric nuisance, and Charyn's Going To Jerusalem ends in an asylum. The commitment to values that derive from humanitarian elements in vestigial Judaism are set in direct contradiction to the values that derive from the contemporary environment.

In Back to China, Fiedler stresses the successive states of Baro's isolation by reference to the ambiguously comic impotence of his humanitarian perspective. That perspective identifies him as a "clown" in the enveloping reality: "He hesitated a second time, feeling something like wisdom form in the back of his head, but he could not say it, doomed as ever to exit as the clown."¹⁸ One of Baro's students precisely defines his burden: "The trouble with you is you care...."¹⁹ The source of the anguished comedy of much of Jewish-American fiction is the sense, expressed by Fiedler, that a humanitarian position is at odds with the nature of contemporary reality. The protagonist is doomed to confront that reality with impotent dreams and moral gestures that will inevitably be seen as comic and/or deranged.

Modernism, that period of innovation that falls roughly within the first two decades of the twentieth century, goes beyond anything yet discussed here. This is not the place to indulge in a full-scale analysis of the impact of Modernism but it is necessary to establish the context that contemporary fiction shares with Jewish-American fiction. This introduction has stressed the points at which Jewish-American fiction differs. There is of course, though, some common ground.

In the aftermath of Modernism, two areas of literary endeavour have come close together. The creation of fiction and the critical commentary on fiction no longer seem totally separate activities. On a purely superficial level this may have something to do with the role of the universities in sponsoring the creative writer. As a teacher in these universities, the writer is necessarily exposed to current critical thought, and is often part of the process of the creation of that thought. From that situation a genre of university novels has emerged in England and the USA which tend to satirise the institution. Most of these books, Bradbury's Eating People is Wrong, Malamud's A New Life, Roth's Letting Go, Alison Lurie's Love and Friendship or David Lodge's Changing Places, integrate critical perspectives to a greater or lesser degree, into the text, and they become the subject of comic manipulation.

The reasons for the undermining of distance between critic and writer go much further than the sociological fact of university sponsorship however. The impact of Modernism on contemporary modes of perception is a well-documented area, and the overall effect might be said to be to challenge previous concepts of the relationship between reality and literary perspective. There is an emphasis on the degree to which perception modifies the external world, and the degree to which that world becomes a malleable item that may be formed and re-shaped in a novelist's imagination. The experience of World War I served to stress the process by which reality could take on the shape of apocalyptic nightmare. In short, it began to be clear that "out there" was changeable not only by social or political action but by an act of perception. The distance between reality and what was dreamed or feared seemed ever smaller.

The implications for literary form were numerous. The theory of fiction inevitably became a central issue in the literary enterprise because a given approach to fiction had a direct and dynamic relationship with the mode in which reality was perceived. The Post-Modernists are, in view of this, critics of a kind. Implicitly or explicitly they respond to, and create, theories of fictional form. The cultural environment formed in relation to Modernism makes such a theoretical position an inevitable characteristic of a given literary artifact.

Out of this, it is possible to identify the embryonic development of two genres. The first is the fiction that tends to look like literary criticism. Borges has made a contribution to this form with stories like "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote." Nabokov's Pale Fire is a novel in the form of an edited poem with critical commentary. In Bech, A Book, Updike writes about a fictitious novelist in a series of chapters that always threaten to turn into lectures. The highly self-conscious stance of Leslie Fiedler in The Second Stone makes that novel, at least partly, an oblique commentary on Hawthorne's The Marble Faun. In The French

Lieutenant's Woman, John Fowles, closer than most English writers to American cultural practice, has written what amounts to a Post-Modernist commentary on the nineteenth century English novel. Philip Roth's The Professor of Desire is, on one level, a critical clarification of issues defined earlier in The Breast. Charyn's The Tar Baby is in the shape of a literary periodical and contains a critical commentary of itself, making the critical activity an integral part of the text. Sukenick's title, The Death of the Novel and Other Stories, is an ironic commentary on the critical position referred to. The title story is punctuated by a running critical commentary which operates as a sub-text.

There is also the reverse tendency, less developed as yet, for literary criticism to look more and more like fiction. D.H. Lawrence and Charles Olson on his work on Moby Dick signalled this direction, which has gained intensity in the work of Ihab Hassan and Leslie Fiedler. In the preface to the second edition of Love and Death in the American Novel, Fiedler argues that:

Love and Death can be read not as a conventional scholarly book--or an eccentric one--but as a kind of gothic novel (complete with touches of black humor) whose subject is the American experience as recorded in our classic fiction.²⁰

It is clear, then, that the context in which Jewish-American fiction may be identified is not simple or single. There are special characteristics that result from the novelist's Judaism and there are, of course, areas of geographical, historical, political and cultural experience that are common to Jewish and gentile author. However, the Jewish writer works within a context that contains a set of crucial paradoxes. His relationship to these cultural conditions is both the subject of his fiction, and the element that makes a distinct Jewish-American literature visible in the contemporary context. In so far as he is a Jew, his position conflicts with certain basic American myths,

his attitudes conflict with the orthodoxies of a secular age, his awareness of certain models of order conflict with widespread notions of alienation and disorder. Underlying, modifying and shaping the work of the particular novelist is the degree to which he retains or relinquishes Jewish identity, and the degree to which his concern over the issues of identity is an integral part of the fiction. With his contemporaries, he stands in the shadows of the great Modernists and shares a sense of the American literary and cultural environment.

At that convergence of pressures and conditions, the Jewish-American writer builds his art. From the particular synthesis of these tensions, a spectrum of possibility emerges. Leslie Fiedler, Chaim Potok, Edward Wallant and Jerome Charyn are representatives of a range of possibility. They are also significant figures whose work deserves closer consideration than that previously given.

This thesis seeks to describe the significance of these authors as practitioners of the art of fiction. They are also seen as symptomatic of developments within the Jewish-American novel in the years 1960-1975. In those years, the process of development became clearly visible and a Jewish-American novel emerged in a mature form. In one way, this body of fiction was clearly related to notions of Judaism. The persistence of that relationship sustained the identifiability of a separate Jewish-American fiction. In another sense, though, modification and re-invention of the meaning of Judaism transformed the body of fiction. It was clear that Jewish-American fiction could no longer be seen as parochial or regional literature. New dynamics of change created multiplicity of possibility out of which a mature Jewish-American fiction emerged.

Notes

- ¹ Bernard Malamud, The Assistant (London: Ace Books, 1961), p.68.
- ² That version of cultural distinction has more than fictional existence. It is, for example, a primary theme in Norman Podhoretz's article "My Negro Problem and Ours," Commentary, 35, No.2 (February 1963), pp.93-101.
- ³ Sol Liptzin, The Jew in American Literature (New York: Bloch, 1966), p.200.
- ⁴ Yuri Suhl, One Foot in America (New York: Paperback Library, 1968), p.48.
- ⁵ Henry Roth, Call it Sleep (New York: Avon Books, 1964), p.404. First publication, 1934.
- ⁶ Tony Tanner, City of Words (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), p.313.
- ⁷ Leslie Fiedler, The Last Jew in America (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p.13.
- ⁸ Leslie Fiedler, The Second Stone (London: Heinemann, 1966), p.252.
- ⁹ Norman Podhoretz, Making It (London: Jonathan Cape, 1968), p.3.
- ¹⁰ Wallace Markfield, "Notes on the Working Day," Partisan Review, xiii, No.4 (September-October 1946), p.463.
- ¹¹ Loren Baritz, "A Jew's American Dilemma," Commentary, 33, No.6 (June 1962), p.525.
- ¹² John Updike, Rabbit, Run (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p.249.
- ¹³ Ken Kesey, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (London: Picador, 1973), pp.254-255.
- ¹⁴ Jerome Charyn, ed., The Troubled Vision (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1970), p.ix.
- ¹⁵ Leslie Fiedler, "Cross the Border - Close the Gap," in The Collected Essays of Leslie Fiedler (New York: Stein and Day, 1971), II, p.461.

- ¹⁶ David Galloway, The Absurd Hero in American Fiction (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1970), p.5.
- ¹⁷ Rosemary Friedman, "The Ideal Jewish Woman and Contemporary Society," in Confrontations with Judaism, ed. Philip Longworth (London: Anthony Blond, 1967), p.134.
- ¹⁸ Leslie Fiedler, Back to China (New York: Stein and Day, 1965), p.102.
- ¹⁹ Fiedler, Back to China, p.166.
- ²⁰ Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (London: Paladin, 1970), pp.9-10.

Chapter 1: A Flight from Fact: Leslie Fiedler

I

Leslie Fiedler has conducted a campaign, on many fronts, to re-interpret critical and social orthodoxies seen as complacent gestures rather than deeply argued or strongly held convictions. His writings on the Rosenbergs and Alger Hiss in An End to Innocence have alienated the left in the U.S.A. by re-evaluating those iconoclastic figures. His radical attempt to re-interpret classic American fiction, in Love and Death in the American Novel, has driven to fury no less a critic than Richard Chase.¹ He has championed the reputations of major 1930's novelists who have suffered from critical neglect. Through Fiedler's insights Henry Roth, Daniel Fuchs and Nathanael West have come to be seen as major figures who are symptomatic of the mood of the 1930's. With this effort he has, in a sense, re-defined the meaning of the period for the contemporary critic.

As a critic he occupies a central place in contemporary American culture, challenging assumptions, provoking anger and attacking the categories into which American literature is conventionally seen. In many ways his critical stance is, however, an old fashioned one. Fiedler's preoccupation with the cycle of innocence, lost and regained, and with its corollary, symbolic death and re-birth, links him with the tradition of Romanticism. Like Coleridge, he is engaged in a radical flight from fact, an assault on the truths that he perceives beyond the observable world:

If the artist copies the mere nature...what idle rivalry! If he proceeds only from a given form, which is supposed to answer to the notion of beauty, what an emptiness, what an unreality there always is in his productions.... Believe me you must master the essence...which presupposes a bond between nature in the highest sense and the soul of man.²

In The Collected Essays of Leslie Fiedler, a similar stance is apparent. The "essence" of a situation is established through a creative act of invention. The reality of the American experience, for example, can only

be understood if the dreams and myths, that underlay that experience, are understood:

We have always been aware that ours is a country which had to be invented as well as discovered; invented even before its discovery ...and re-invented again and again both by the European imagination ...and by the deep fantasy of its own people....³

In "Voting and Voting Studies" he challenges the idea that the accumulation of fact, the preoccupation of sociology with statistics, can do more than restate the obvious things that are known instinctively. He champions the primacy of instinct and the imagination over the scientificism of sociological investigation. His view of ethnic identity is similarly based on the belief that the significance of ethnicity is definable in terms of what we have imagined each other to be: "Redskin, Paleface, Negro and Jew--we were all of us each other's invention, no one of us more real than another...."⁴ Characteristics of a particular ethnic group are made in the imagination of other groups.. Ethnicity becomes then an act of fictive invention. This is a "truly subversive notion"⁵ that would appall the sociologist, and it reveals Fiedler's engagement with the concept of the imagination as an active agent in the perception of reality. At every level of his writing, myth and dream are crucial elements of perception.

The arrangement of the Collected Essays defines the three areas that Fiedler has been concerned to examine in his social and literary criticism. As a Jew he has repeatedly grappled with the meaning of Judaism in secular America. As an American he has been concerned to make sense both of the American experience he knows and those influences and forces from the past that he sees as culturally crucial.

As a contemporary writer he has tried to evaluate the role of the artist in the Post-Modernist world. In each of these areas of investigation which, of course, repeatedly overlap, he has brought to the subject a willingness to locate significance in paradoxes that derive, partly, from a quasi-romantic belief in the primacy of intuitive perception, and, partly, from his

self-conscious position as a contemporary intellectual. He repeatedly sets conscious statement against what he sees as underlying truth. The source of this truth he sees as myths which express cultural archetypes. In this belief he looks back toward the Romantics and forward toward the "myth critics." He is concerned with "a coherent pattern of beliefs and feelings ...widely shared at a level beneath consciousness...."⁶ To place Fiedler within a cultural context it is necessary, therefore, to see him as a later-day Romantic, championing the irrational and the instinctive, as a post-Freudian with a belief in paradox at the root of human experience, and as a self-aware literary intellectual. In all of these roles he seeks to define the crucial cultural characteristics that exist "beneath consciousness."

Fiedler's self-awareness is manifest in a number of explicit ways. He is a self-declared moralist: "That the practice of art at any time is essentially a moral activity I have always believed; indeed, I do not know how to begin to make a book, or talk about one without moral commitment."⁷ He is aware that that assumption is in contradiction to the standard orthodoxies of "New Criticism" and purist textual analysis. Fiedler indicates that "in the critical world in which I grew up, a moralistic approach to literature was considered not only indecent but faintly comic."⁸ In addition to a moralistic role, he stresses the significance of his awareness of both American and Jewish dimensions. His critical stance can be seen in "categorical terms."

His self-consciousness is made explicit:

I have managed to tell what still seems to me to be the truth about my world and myself as a liberal, intellectual, writer, American and Jew. I do not mind...thinking of myself in such categorical terms; being representative of a class, a generation, a certain temper seems to me not at all a threat to my individuality.⁹

That degree of self-awareness emphasises the elements out of which a contemporary Jewish-American fiction emerges.

As an American, Fiedler has made, and investigated, two mythic journeys which, for him, embody vital aspects of the American experience. He has chosen to see these consciously through an American mythic and historical perspective. The journey to Italy, and Europe, is "a Pilgrimage to the shrines of an idea of man (or more accurately, I suppose, to the visible forms of a culture in which that idea is entombed) and a Descent into Hell."¹⁰ He makes it clear that he sees it as a literary pilgrimage, a choice between Hawthorne or Twain, "between melodrama and comedy."¹¹ The other significance of the journey is expressed in the paradox apparent in the title of the essay from which the above quotation comes, "Italian Pilgrimage: the Discovery of America." He spells out that paradox more precisely in an essay called "Our Country and Our Culture": "The End of the American artist's pilgrimage to Europe is the discovery of America."¹² It is in Europe, a kind of death, that the meaning of America becomes clear. The return of the exile is a kind of re-birth and a return from Hell. This experience is re-worked to form the basis of the novel The Second Stone.

The other mythic American journey that Fiedler has undertaken is the movement westward. The frontier is, for Fiedler, "the margin where the dream has encountered the resistance of fact, where the Noble Savage has confronted Original Sin."¹³ This encounter is clearly not a historical fact. The frontier on the ultimate West (for him, and for Hemingway he argues, Montana) is "not a fact of history defined once and for all and there to be accepted or rejected forever after; it is a fiction: the place to which we have not yet come or at which we have just arrived, a theoretical place."¹⁴ As such its status is mythic and its relevance can be re-invented over and over again. Fiedler has drawn upon this inexhaustible relevance in Back to China and in the shorter fiction.

Fiedler exploits a range of "theoretical" locations, and the most radical is perhaps the margin where present meets future. In The Messengers Will Come No More he gives fictional form to his critical concept of a "present-future." The elements of his self-consciousness are examined in a far-future projection. The characteristics of that future are constructed

from the theoretical possibilities of the present.

The interaction of Fiedler's identities (American, Jew and contemporary man) is actively felt throughout his writing and the rest of this discussion will be devoted to an analysis of these elements in the fiction. Fiedler's impact has been felt almost exclusively through his critical work and this is, in a sense, just. His truly original contribution has probably been made there. However, he is a novelist of some merit and his fiction expresses some of the concerns of the Jewish-American novelist. The object of the ensuing discussion is primarily, therefore, to emphasise those aspects of Fiedler's fiction that may be thought of as symptomatic of tensions in Jewish-American fiction in this period, while not losing sight of those failings and qualities that are unique to him. His work signals issues that are repeatedly confronted by his contemporaries. Potok, Charyn and Wallant, with a less explicit critical awareness, occupy the same complex cultural space.

II

The Second Stone is, in many ways, an untidy and confusing novel but most of the confusion derives from the scope of Fiedler's ambition. Within the single structure he has tried to examine many of those things that have preoccupied him as a critic, so that the reader comes away from the novel with the sense that the book is a fictional demonstration of the elements that make up Fiedler's critical stance. The motives behind actions are often not sufficiently developed to carry the symbolic resonances that those actions are meant to carry. It is always, unlike Back to China, a self-consciously critical novel that rarely transcends its theories or that rarely gives convincing flesh to these theories, transforming a critical stance into authentic art. The failure is, however, a failure of technique not of imagination or ambition.

The novel ranges around many themes. It can be seen as a novel of American exile in Europe. It examines the paradox by which the American author goes to Europe to discover America. On another level, it examines the nature of Judaism in the secular age and it sees Judaism both as a symbolic stance and as a structure that, without religious meaning, is comic. It is also a record of itself, a novel concerned with the way the novel is made. On yet another level it brings a Romantic perspective to the problem of communication, giving moral weight to the instinctive over the rational. The nature of language, as a system that obscures rather than reveals meaning, is an underlying theme in the novel. It is also, as the sub-title suggests, "A love story," but an ambiguous one. The way people talk about love is set against the development of a particular love affair.

The overall perspective that Fiedler brings to each of these themes is a comic one. The potentially dramatic is, throughout the novel, translated into burlesque and this manoeuvre exposes one of the critical weaknesses in the novel. On the one hand Fiedler establishes a series of symbols and symbolic actions that threaten profundity but these are countered by the absurd burlesque that the action generally reflects. Fiedler's intention was to establish these two elements, drama and burlesque, meaning and non-meaning,

in some kind of creative tension. On the one hand, he is trying to invest the novel with mythic significance through the use of symbolic resonance and, on the other hand, he is trying to create an absurd fictive structure.

The failure of the paradox derives from the failure to find and develop appropriate symbols that carry mythic significance. The novel's successes are almost all achieved through the rendering of comic action. The meaninglessness that the action generally reflects undermines, rather than co-exists with, the symbolic significance. He fails, in short, to achieve the balance that Wallant creates in his later novels.

The novel can most clearly be seen in the context of novels of American exile and, indeed, Fiedler, through various pointers, insists that the reader see the novel in relation to Hawthorne's The Marble Faun. The first superficial pointer that the reader comes across is, of course, the name Hilda. Hawthorne's Hilda is, as Fiedler has pointed out, an archetypal Light Lady. Devoid of sexuality, her purity is set in contrast to the archetypal Dark Lady, Miriam. In The Second Stone Hilda is an ambiguous Light Lady and the ambiguity is emphasised when she is described as, "so blood-red and milk-white in the late light that she could have been no more atrocious or dazzling stark naked.... But her nakedness was American, which is to say innocent and expensive."¹⁵ The allegorical simplicity of Hawthorne's equation, dark versus light, sexuality versus purity, is undermined but Fiedler suggests the comparison for a precise reason. The narration of the book is in a first person disguised as a third person (this point will be explained more fully later on) and it is through Clem's perceptions that the events are structured or, more precisely, the reader is meant to feel that it is Clem in America who is, in retrospect, narrating the events that happened to Clem in Europe. Hilda is related to Hawthorne's Hilda because the reader is not meant to experience Hilda as a complex reality, but as an event in Clem's life where reality (the Hilda the reader only glimpses) meets myth, dream and literary artifact. Clem experiences Hilda as a dream, with literary and mythic antecedents, and it is as a dream, via Hawthorne

and Lady Brett Ashley of Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises, that the reader experiences her.

Character and event comes to the reader structured through experiences, seen as archetypal, that are recorded in The Marble Faun. The Second Stone is, on one level, a critical discourse on the mythic relevance of Hawthorne's novel. Italy is experienced, both by Hawthorne and Fiedler, as essentially unreal. In the preface to his novel, Hawthorne makes clear that the Italy of the novel is basically a dream-artifact: "Italy, as the site of his Romance, was chiefly valuable to him as affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon as they are, and needs be, in America."¹⁶ It is precisely that Italy that clashes with, and overwhelms, the reality of contemporary Italy in Clem's consciousness. Clem's outburst early in the novel reflects the clash of the mythic Rome, and the mythic Hilda, with the external Rome and with the Hilda at his side: "Hilda. It's a name out of a book no one reads, a time no one remembers, a Rome no one..."(p.9). Appropriately Clem finds no language to complete the rejection of the mythic Rome from which Hilda seems to come. The reader can complete the sentence. Clem clearly wants to assert that Hilda is a name from the Rome no one lives in anymore. It is a mistaken judgement and one he is unable to complete because that Rome, Hawthorne's "fairy precinct," is actively present in the novel.

It is not only through Hilda that Fiedler stresses the connection with Hawthorne's novel. Two episodes in The Second Stone are clearly meant to relate to the episode in the catacombs in The Marble Faun. The Second Stone opens in the catacombs. The episode flirts with symbolic significance. Surrounded by the dead, Clem discovers Hilda's pregnancy. The descent into the catacombs is followed by a retreat from the dead, toward the surface. In Clem's remark, Fiedler hints at the symbolic significance that descent and ascent are to assume: "'Drink and be whole again beyond confusion' he told her"(p.16). There is also a symbolic reverberation set up around the image of the fountain, the flow of water into which Clem and Hilda immerse

their hands. Fiedler establishes an early symbol of death followed by symbolic re-birth that is central to the novel. The process, central also in Back to China, reveals a recurrent procedure in Fiedler's work.

In the second episode the symbol is more fully developed: " 'To go down,' she said, pretending she had asked no questions at all, 'is to die, Clem, to die' "(p.47). In this descent, Clem and Hilda are also literally surrounded by water and symbolic overtones accumulate around the episode. The flow of water in the novel is developed into an image that carries not only overtones of baptism, but also of the dynamic and instinctive flow of Clem and Hilda's love affair: " 'Let's walk on water,' Hilda cried, 'let's walk on water some more' "(p.41). Clem, however, wants not to walk on it but to transform that act into a baptism, a commitment: "Fountain-crawling is what you want is it? All right. But before we walk on water, we'll have to plunge into it"(p.41). The symbolic ambiguity in the descent in San Clemente arises, then, from the interaction of a number of elements. The descent is a kind of death, but it is also a descent into the waters, a symbolic baptism and re-birth. The pumps, clearing the water, inject a sense of life into the underground location. The noise they make is compared to heartbeats.

Clem and Hilda are re-born into love. Surrounded by water, having symbolically descended toward death, they commit themselves to love, and Fiedler achieves the full ambiguity of the association of love and death. A kiss is "like the touching of skeletons, and the boneless bulge in her belly that would some day be a child seemed momentarily annulled"(p.49). Fiedler's description strips the characters of flesh. Kneecaps, pelvis and skulls embrace. The spectre raised in Fiedler's descent into symbolic death is not a gothic terror, like Hawthorne's, but is a love that co-exists with death. It is destructive and wounding. Clem emerges from an embrace looking "more wounded than kissed"(p.51). Fiedler has, in effect, given fictional life to the idea behind Love and Death in the American Novel. That theory is given flesh in The Second Stone.

Those episodes relate to The Marble Faun not only in the fairly

superficial terms of comparable event and location but also in a more profound sense. The mode of perceiving reality that Hawthorne operates is followed by Fiedler. Hawthorne's "reality" is dream-like and fantastic. He reminds the reader again and again that the location of the novel, and its characters, belongs to a realm outside of what is normally thought of as "real":

our individual affairs and interests are but half as real here as elsewhere.¹⁷

the result was to render her sprite-like in her ordinary manifestations.¹⁸

It resembled one of those unaccountable changes and interminglings of identity, which so often occur among the personages of a dream.¹⁹ their visible atmosphere is so like the substance of a dream.²⁰

Hawthorne's desire to avoid explanation of the mysterious events in the novel endorses the point that these quotations make. He wants to preserve the sense that the events defy explanation. A primary purpose in the novel was to render Italy as unreal, to perceive it as a dream.

Clem repeatedly struggles between waking and dreaming. Part of the dilemma is precisely Clem's inability, as the participant rather than the narrator, to distinguish the reality from the dream: "He seemed to recall its having rained for a little while, or had he only dreamed?"(p.97). The external world is experienced as hallucination, at times being invested with a kind of surrealistic distortion: "Above their heads, the Virgin and her entourage tilted crazily, the church rocked to the same rhythm to which they danced"(p.107). Landscape, as in "Nude Croquet" is an objective correlative of an emotional condition.

The significance of this sense of unreality is only established when one realises that the narrative is, in fact, a disguised first person. Clem is telling the story:

"No, Clem, write a book instead. A book!" He laughed, yet saw

the title in the air: My Second Best Bed, and lying with his nose upon her spine, composed the opening sentence, "At first, Hilda, one hand pressed against the wall, had only retched."(p.215)

The rendering of Italy as dream becomes, with that knowledge, a vital aspect of the book's meaning. The Clem in Italy thinks of writing a book, the first sentence of which exactly corresponds to the novel we are reading. It is, however, not exactly that novel, as it might have been if John Barth or Jorge Luis Borges were the author. The title is different and the Italian Clem was going to change Hilda's name to Selma. The novel also is narrated in the third person. Clearly, Clem is the narrator of a novel somewhat different from the one he imagined in Italy but the novel is nevertheless recognisably from the same source. It is in this sense that the novel is about itself. It is about the way experiences are accumulated and transformed into art.

A more important difference, between the novel we are reading and the novel that Clem imagines, is that the narrator of the novel we are reading records the distinction between reality and dream that Clem has difficulty in perceiving. At this point, for example, the narrator Clem is in a position to evaluate the participant Clem's actions with insights not available to the participant: "He knew that somehow the sense of his own simultaneous death and bereavement had brought him to where Browning's Bishop had once ordered his tomb; but he had not suspected that he also sought a womb...(p.230). Distance has enabled narrator Clem to see his own actions more clearly. The clear implication is that after Clem has returned home, to America, he has written this novel about his experiences in Italy. In America he is able to achieve the distance necessary to evaluate the Italian events and to turn them into art. American Clem writes about Italian Clem going through the experiences the novel dispassionately records. The choice of the third person narrative to describe the events is appropriate because there are essentially two modes of perception operating. The first is that of the Clem in Italy, for whom the distinction

between reality, myth and dream is shadowy. The second is that of Clem in America structuring those experiences and distinguishing those elements.

Fiedler, through this device, makes his essential point about the American experience in Europe. Europe is a myth, a dream pervaded by death and the return from exile is a return to reality, a symbolic re-birth. Clem, the artist, "dies" in Italy when he destroys the manuscript of his first novel. Clem, the lover, "dies" in Italy when he loves Hilda because that act of love is indistinguishable from death. Clem is re-born in America, as an artist at least, and the evidence is the novel one is reading, a novel produced after the escape from dream to reality. The parallel with Hawthorne is inescapable. At the conclusion of The Marble Faun, when Hilda and Kenyon have declared their love for each other, Hawthorne makes the following comment:

And now that life had so much human promise in it, they resolved to go back to their own land; because the years, after all, have a kind of emptiness, when we spend too many of them on a foreign shore. We defer the reality of life, in such cases, until a future moment, when we shall again breathe our native air....²¹

Fiedler makes essentially the same point through a manipulation of narrative identity. The thematic implications of form are grounded here in Post-Modernist narrative procedures, and Fiedler's achievement is to exploit those implications to reveal the symbolic and mythic view of Italy that he shares with Hawthorne. By distinguishing the perceptions of the narrator, American Clem, from those of the Italian Clem, he makes the point that mythically America represents reality against the dream/nightmare of Italy.

The preceding discussion in no way exhausts the range of the novel's concerns. In a sense it might be a more coherent novel if it did. The distinction between American Clem's perceptions and Italian Clem's perceptions, with the overtones that that distinction suggests, is swamped by the mass of other themes that cut across that central issue in the novel. Clem is not only the "American Artist in Exile." The character carries

additional symbolic weight. He is "Man in Exile," in Fiedler's terms a symbolic Jew who is set in contrast to Mark, the secular Rabbi, whose Judaism is entirely vestigial. Fiedler's view of Judaism is revealed. The authentic Jew is a man who assumes the traditional symbolic stance of the Jew, exiled and alienated from the culture he lives in the midst of. The figure is exploited by Fiedler in the short fiction and, most extensively, in The Messengers Will Come No More.

The essential contradictions of Judaism in secular America are given flesh in the parallel that Fiedler draws between Clem and Mark. Together they represent a theoretical analysis of American Judaism given a fictional form. They share a common name, a common past and a single woman. The dispute over the authorship of the poem is a rather mannered device to emphasise that Mark and Clem were once the same but are so no longer. Mark points to this in his argument with Hilda: "I've told you, Hildie, in those days we hardly knew which of us was which. I never knew at least, because it didn't seem to matter. An academic distinction"(p.242). In what they have both become, essential contradictions in American Judaism are expressed.

Mark has become a secular Jew, fully and comically assimilated. He is "the spokesman for a return to religion without a commitment to God":

When Mark had become head, three years before, of a new Reformed Seminary, a Jewish Existentialist (since converted to Catholicism) and a Zen Buddhist from Japan (since made a full professor at the University of Chicago) had spoken at the inaugural ceremonies on, Clem seemed to recall, the religious implications of popular culture.(p.23)

Mark rides the "pop" wave of Philosemitism, a small culture hero, admired everywhere. His position reflects the degree to which Jewish identity, stripped of religious and symbolic meaning, has become a sought after commodity. In contrast, Clem has chosen the role of dissatisfied exile, despite the knowledge that, in the contemporary world, the choice of such an identity is an absurd act. It commits him not only to loneliness and

and poverty but also to a ridiculous role. However, the reader is meant to feel that this role is morally superior to that assumed by Mark. The absurd, comic stance is the only valid moral option in the contemporary world where success is a kind of moral failure; Mark has outgrown his youth. The values expressed in his first innocence have been undercut by the success he now enjoys. For Clem, and for Fiedler, another dimension to that betrayal is the fact that Mark takes that success seriously.

Clem, like Jacob in "The Last Jew in America" or the Jacob of The Messengers Will Come No More, assumes the symbolic status of the traditional Jew because he chooses exile with all its associated poverty and pain. The moral weight that Fiedler gives to this stance derives not only from the assumption of the role but from Clem's self-conscious recognition of its comic absurdity: "The man with no money and no claims on dignity must be a clown or nothing; this at least Clem knew, and knowing it, could face the evening, the ending of it all"(p.238). Clem stalks through the novel, relishing the absurdity, relishing his role as the clown, while suffering anguish, "condemned forever to play the butt in a badly written farce"(p.58). It is precisely the synthesis of the two roles, exile and clown, that enables Clem to stand as a symbolic Jew while remaining a relevant contemporary figure. The gentile, who chooses Jewish identity because of the desire not to belong, is an ambiguous clown. He chooses to suffer without dignity because this is the price that must be paid for the right not to belong. Fiedler's negativism is presented here. The most moral act, he insists, is the act of refusing to belong, of maintaining a symbolic rejection of success and its values. Clem's position, therefore, rebukes not only Mark's version of Judaism but also his success:

"It's no use. I'm the real Mark Stone," Clem cried, knowing for the first time what Hilda had meant. "I'm the only one of us who's continuous with whichever of us it was who wrote the poem.... You're a success."(p.252)

Clem argues, in effect, that he, unlike Mark, has not betrayed the values of

their innocence. The negative, moral stance confronts comfortable belonging. In the same conversation Clem's symbolic Judaism confronts Mark's vestigial, "pop" Judaism: "I'm the real Jew, too, Mark. The real Jew, Rabbi, if to be a Jew means to live on the margins of the world in failure and terror, to be in exile"(p.252).

Fiedler, thus, uses the contrast between Clem and Mark to express two paradoxes that occur and re-occur throughout his writings. The first paradox is that success is a kind of moral failure, a rebuke to innocence. The second is that Judaism is both a popular commodity and an agonised, if comic, symbolic moral stance.

Fiedler's attitude toward language and its relationship to his attitude toward the irrational and instinctive is also apparent. This is effectively the last major theme of the novel and is expressed in two ways. It is obliquely revealed in the language of the novel itself, and expressed in the contrast between the love affair and the Love Conference,

Dialogue exceeds third person narration in the novel and there is a precise thematic reason for this stylistic choice. By the end of the novel, there is a sense that the language is exhausted, the continual speech has reduced meaning and has become ritual gesture. The extent of dialogue enforces Clem's exasperation with all the talk that seems to go on endlessly. The comic and anguished climax of the novel further enforces this. Mark's emotions are revealed and his commitment to what he sees as logical and reasonable discussion gives way to a genuine expression of anguish. Significantly the article from which he is about to read falls from his hand and, having thus stripped himself of the defence of language, he wordlessly expresses his anguish. The Buber joke enforces the comic element of the episode without obscuring the pain:

And so he beat his wife on head and shoulders with a rolled-up copy of Thou, unable to stop stuttering, "I-I-I-I"; though now it would have been hard to say whether he tried to begin a sentence, or merely, like his ancestors, wailed, "Ai! Ai! Ai! Ai!"(p.302)

Not only does the breakdown of Mark's language reveal anguish but it also ironically re-relates him to the symbolic Judaism that he has retreated from in success. Previously he has been a rather turgid mouthpiece, constantly talking, qualifying, explaining and discussing until meaning is exhausted.

Clem's last articulated sound in the novel is similarly wordless: "Mark's hand rose and fell as if forever; Hilda bowed her head beneath the blows; and Clem cried cock-a-doodle to the room, the world. In a minute he told himself he would bark like a fox"(p.303). Various meanings are revealed in the two sounds. Clem's sheer animal anguish is revealed but the cock cry is also comment, an absurd response to an absurd situation. Sound without meaning is his final comment on language divested of meaning. The cock cry is also, however, the dawn cry and it carries the exuberance of re-awakening, re-birth. Clem is to return to America, to reality, to be reborn and he is leaving behind shattered ambitions and a moral stance. If the return to America is a kind of re-birth, it is also a defeat and the sounds express both pain and animal exuberance.

Fiedler repeatedly undercuts the dialogue of the participants in the Love Conference. He renders these conversations as comically absurd. The first conversation between Littlepage and La Rosa is, for example, undercut by the bitchiness it reveals. Communication is not the intention. The object is to score points. Fiedler makes the conversation ridiculous by making the participants ridiculous. A simile transformed into a metaphor is allowed to characterise La Rosa: "Wrinkled and blotched, his dewlap hung over his collar like a Gila monster's"(p.22). The transformation of the simile to a metaphor effectively de-humanises La Rosa. He becomes, "The Gila Monster" and "Loose-skin"(p.23). In the same conversation Mark responds to Clem's insult with the comment that "the seeming insult was the only term of endearment we would permit ourselves. Is this not correct, Clem?"(p.27). Clem's answer reveals the view of language that permeates the novel: "You were always correct, you shmuck, always correct and never right"(p.28). The implication is that Mark's arguments are logically sound and reasonable

but, nevertheless, lacking in a non-verbalised sense of truth.

However, the basic way in which Fiedler reveals this attitude toward language is by contrasting, throughout the novel, the love affair of Clem and Hilda with the Conference on Love. Instinctive emotions are contrasted with tedious, and ridiculous, categorisation. Emotion is rendered with some sympathy but reason is turned into burlesque. The conversation of the participants in the Love Conference reveals only ritual gestures and local spite despite its sophisticated trimmings. The very articulate nature of the participants is felt as a barrier to real understanding and communication. Indeed, the more articulate the character is, the less moral weight Fiedler gives him.

In contrast, the conversations between Hilda and Clem grope uncertainly toward understanding. They are inarticulate and carry emotional overtones beyond anything the words actually say: "Why do I keep asking why, Clem? Why do I ask you why I keep asking why?"(p.49). In Hilda and Clem's conversation literal meaning gives way to instinctive feeling. Clem's contributions are, thus, sometimes literally meaningless while revealing authentic emotions. Communication is established not with the help of language but in spite of it:

"Popcorn! Candy Bars! Hot Dogs!" Clem tried to cry, but in the eternal dusk of the Mithraeum his words faded to a whisper.

"Mithra loves us that I know," he sang, "'Cause Zoroaster tells us so." It was easier to sing than to speak, easier to pretend to kiss Hilda than either.(p.50)

This point is emphasised when Mark's speech to the Conference comes to the reader filtered through the narrator's description of Clem's thoughts. The effect is to reduce Mark's speech to a series of unconnected extracts. Fragments of pomposity are set against Clem's struggle to fix Hilda's face in his mind.

The final collapse of the Conference is caused, inadvertently, by Clem

when he delivers a political speech which leads to a demonstration. Language is seen as having an impetus of its own. It runs incoherently onward, activating an absurd situation into which Clem and Hilda, unable to resist the pressure of the crowd, are drawn. Clem throws the stone and cries, "AMERICANS GO HOME!"(p.197). It is the climax of the fantasy he lives in Italy, a symbolic last act that precedes the decision to return.

The title of the novel refers not only to Clem as the second Mr. Stone but also to this symbolic act. Water, with overtones of re-birth and baptism, splashes against his face as he heaves the stone away from him. The stone that he throws is an image of the everlasting Rome, the buildings and statues that survive their relevance, and the material which survives even when those are destroyed. It is the eternal element which, by the very nature of its immortality, accumulates around it associations with centuries of death. Around the image of death reverberates the image of female love, and the symbolic resonances are also complicated by the echo of Christ's reproach to the crowd who wished to stone the woman. This episode reflects the kind of tension that Fiedler tries to establish throughout the novel. An absurd speech motivates a ridiculous demonstration during which an act takes place that is meant to carry complex and profound symbolic meanings. The action, however, works most effectively on the level of comic absurdity. The symbolic meanings of the act are established by too simplistic a one for one equation. On that level, the action totters uneasily on the edge of allegory, self-consciously meaningful, while the impetus for the action derives from a point Fiedler is making about language divested of meaning. The two elements in that action, meaning and non-meaning, seem to undercut each other rather than co-exist in creative tension. Thus when Fiedler, at a later point, wishes explicitly to exploit stone as a symbol, the effect is unconvincing:

What Michelangelo sculpted was not a living statue but his own defeat, a statue died in the arms of the stone from which it came. Only the stone, he said across the years to Clem, is strong, only

the woman.... The artist-son hangs from a rough hewn female tree, a tree of stone; his mother is the cross on which he dies.(p.236)

The symbol fails to carry the meanings that Fiedler wishes it to carry. Its significance has been established in a too transparent manner and, therefore, the emotional impact is minimal. The link between stone and woman is made by the rhetorical device of the repetition of "only," rather than by any effectively established association in the reader's mind.

There are, however, some moments when symbolic resonances enhance an episode. Probably the most effective of these enforces the point that this discussion of language has been making. Hilda and Clem walk into a square in Rome and its silence is felt as a positive presence that undercuts the need for speech. Language is inappropriate both to the setting and the instinctive emotions that flow between Clem and Hilda: "Oh, Clem, its beautiful. Tell me I'm beautiful, too. Tell me to be glad I'm beautiful, Clem. Don't say anything Clem"(p.103). The only sounds are "the whisper of falling water in the fountain..." and "the tinkle of silver on china..."(p.103). That sound merges into the flow of the water, and the symbolic resonances that have accumulated around flowing water enforce the sense of silent, instinctive communication. Mark's mother, yet another comic Jewish mother out of the Bruce Jay Friedman, Philip Roth, Wallace Markfield mould, breaks the silence and the momentary stasis in the headlong, comic momentum of the narrative.

The novel is an enormously ambitious book that ranges widely over the themes that have concerned Fiedler in his criticism. His preoccupations with American myth, Jewish identity and the nature of the fictive enterprise in contemporary culture interact in the novel to an often confusing degree. Fiedler looks in different directions. In one direction the novel relates to, what may be called, the Romantic tradition. The use of the symbol of descent and ascent, to stand for symbolic death and re-birth, is recurrent in nineteenth century European Romantic fiction. Victor Hugo's Les Miserables is the clearest example. The escape from the sewers in that novel is a

dramatic representation of symbolic re-birth. The novel is essentially a record of the spiritual renewal of Jean Valjean, his ascent into the light and transformation from Underground man. The reverse side of that symbolic coin was, of course, given particular emphasis by Dostoevsky in Notes from the Underground and Crime and Punishment. In Dickens the symbol is repeatedly exploited. The landscape of evil assumes the quality of a dank underground, populated by men who thrive on darkness, like Fagin and Sykes in Oliver Twist.

Fiedler's view of the superiority of the instinctive, in The Second Stone, can also be related to the tradition of Romantic fiction. Clem shares many of the attitudes that Tolstoy gives to Levin in Anna Karenin. Although the comparison is, on most counts, inappropriate, there are parallels. Tolstoy champions the instinctive over the intellectual. If Clem is Fiedler's Levin, then Mark may well be seen as Fiedler's Karenin. The parallel spills over in their attitudes to language. Both Clem and Levin exhibit a mistrust, even a contempt, for intellectual language that is ritual gesture, not communication. In this respect Fiedler is responding to something deep and pervasive in Romantic fiction. Kenyon in The Marble Faun makes the statement that could stand as almost the defining attitude, toward communication, in a certain kind of Romantic nineteenth century fiction. It is a statement that establishes the link between that fiction and Fiedler's The Second Stone: "It is a great mistake to try to put our best thoughts into human language."²²

It is precisely at this point, however, that the other direction that Fiedler looks toward can be perceived. The contemporary author is, inevitably, aware of the paradox at the heart of the Romantic attitude to language. The writer is precisely engaged in the process of trying to put "our best thoughts into human language" and, even, to make meaningful, "a world not only absurd but also chaotic and fragmentary."²³ Fiedler's novel is, at least on one level, a record of itself, and thus, a record of the struggle of the artist with language and experience. He brings to Romantic perceptions, a Post-Modern consciousness of form and the contemporary tone of anguished comic absurdity. His awareness of the thematic possibilities

of narrative identity, his choice of burlesque as the prevailing tone of the action and his rendering of comic dissent as a morally valid position, all clearly define Fiedler's contemporary stance.

In The Second Stone Fiedler confronts issues that recur throughout Jewish-American fiction. In a sense they inevitably arise out of the words "Jewish American." It will be clear that the issues that Fiedler confronts in this novel occur throughout his fiction and that these issues, in various forms, belong within the preoccupations of a significant body of contemporary American fiction.

III

The Second Stone is essentially concerned with examining the mythic implications of the European journey for the American artist. The characters in that novel exist primarily as symbolic projections, and can be defined by a series of labels that identify the archetypes that these characters derive from. Clem is "the Artist in Exile" and "the symbolic Jew." Mark is "the secular Jew," Hilda an inversion of "the Light Lady" and so on. They rarely transcend those definitions but remain theoretical figures given flesh. The interaction between their identities rarely does anything more than dramatise certain critical positions that Fiedler has analysed in his non-fictional works. One is reminded of the sort of comedy that Iris Murdoch produces, where the interaction of fictional characters serves to examine certain metaphysical propositions. The comedy of the action is generally more effective than the anguish implied as a paradoxical element within the comedy, because the characters remain inert symbolic projections. It is hard to believe in their human anguish precisely because they never seem quite human enough.

In Back to China, however, Fiedler has produced a central character, Baro Finkelstone, who is effectively rendered on both levels. The sort of tension that Fiedler works for, and fails to achieve, in The Second Stone (between a character's symbolic status and his human comic anguish) is far more successfully established. Superficially this might have something to do with the obvious autobiographical elements in the novel. Some of the experiences presented as fiction in Back to China clearly relate to episodes that Fiedler discusses in Being Busted. This, in itself, does not, of course, create the greater sense of human depth in the novel. That is fundamentally a question of the quality of the perceptions and the quality of the language in which they are expressed.

A comparative discussion of the use of time in the novels will help to establish some of the central concerns in Back to China. Fiedler's manipulation of chronological movement in Back to China not only accounts for the structural development but also becomes a theme in the novel itself.

Time, itself, becomes a central issue. There are basically three positions with regard to time in The Second Stone. There is the point in time from which the novel is being narrated by Clem in America. There is that period of time that the narrator recalls and this moves forward in a conventionally chronological manner. Finally, there is, what may be called, mythic time or timelessness. Actions are made to echo actions, recorded in The Marble Faun, which are seen as archetypal, having a pervasive relevance for all time and, thus, outside of time. These three positions are distinguished by the manipulation of narrative identity and by the use of symbolic action to point toward the mythic, timeless dimension.

In Back to China two time structures are distinguished by the use of two different form of the past tense. The novel's present, that point of time at which Baro fictionally stands, is recorded in the simple past (he asked, he jumped etc.). The past-perfect (he had jumped, he had asked) is used to recall the past that Baro remembers from the point of time at which he stands. A number of questions arise from this fact that are central to both the meaning and the language of the novel. It is important to see this in relation to other formal choices made.

It would seem, at first sight, that the choice of the first person narrative form would have been most appropriate. The reader's consciousness of the events comes through Baro's perceptions. The reader also feels the continuing pressure of the past on Baro's present in the novel. Fiedler had before him an obvious example of how to render these elements most effectively. In Ulysses, Joyce is able to present events through various characters' perceptions and to show the past operating as a felt presence within those consciousnesses. The technique of interior monologue, or stream of consciousness, enables the author freely to associate any number of pasts within a character's present. It also gives the reader a particular sense of intimacy with the development of that character's thought. However, Fiedler chose interior analysis over interior monologue and he chose to distinguish memory and the present by the different forms of the past tense.

The choice of form is made for specific thematic reasons and, the choice

of different past tenses is made because the texture of the two pasts is to be distinguished.

Interior analysis is chosen rather than interior monologue for a number of reasons. It enables Fiedler to preserve distance from the character while presenting his perceptions in some depth. The intimacy of interior monologue might unbalance the tensions that Fiedler wants to maintain around Baro. He is to be seen as an individual, and as a representative figure of a particular generation and a particular set of moral attitudes. The technique of interior monologue tends to undercut moral perspective by intimately associating the reader with the flow of a character's thoughts. The technique also tends toward an amoral assessment of the particular character. The reader directly co-experiences with the character and consequently the distance between reader and character, necessary to establish moral perspective, is diminished.

It is also true that interior monologue might work against a sense of history that the novel may seek to establish. The technique is most appropriate to the author who wants to undermine or render problematic, conventional, chronological development. The Modernists used the technique to challenge the reader's sense of time and, thus, his sense of reality. Joyce establishes moral perspective by the interaction of different interior monologues, linked by passages of third person narrative. It is the third person narrative that enables the reader to see the separate interior monologues in relation to each other and, thus, to evaluate them, to some degree at least, against each other. The historical context of Ulysses is, similarly, not established through the interior monologues but when that technique is abandoned and third person narrative takes over. The action then is recorded in a succession of parodies of literary form that virtually make up a history of the development of literary language. In The Sound and the Fury, it is also apparent that the overall sense of moral and historical perspective is established, primarily, in the fourth section which takes the form of the third person. Dilsey is the character who restores, to the novel, a sense of chronological perspective that the interior monologues have undercut. It is only in the last section that the perspective widens

out and the reader can recognise the moral and historical significance of Dilsey's statement: "I've seed de first en de last...."²⁴

The technique of interior monologue, or stream of consciousness, tends, in very general terms, to undercut moral and historical perspective. It also tends to represent best a particular kind of thought and to give it a particular kind of texture. It best renders thought as a "stream," a continuous flow, and lends itself to the representation of freely associative thinking that is most appropriate to a consciousness ranging over a variety of experiences, establishing connections and interconnections that are not logically apparent. In this sense, it can, at times, approximate the form of poetry by synthesising unlikely elements into an image that obtains its effect precisely by the unexpected interaction that results.

The tendencies inherent in that form would work against some of the basic intentions in this novel. It has been pointed out that Fiedler's concerns are fundamentally moral and moral implications concern him deeply. Two series of past events intrude into Baro's consciousness: his experiences in China just after the war and the events preceding George's death. Both series of events act as a source of anguish for Baro because they reveal the impotence of his humanitarian stance. The choice he makes of actual sterility reflects his anguished awareness of moral sterility. In an argument with Shizu, these elements become clear. He looks at a picture of the destruction of Hiroshima after Shizu has told him, falsely, that she is pregnant with his child. Baro's rage is not only with Shizu's deceit but also at the moral implications of the Hiroshima bombing: "Who has the right to bear children in such a world?"²⁵ Shizu's response embodies two central concerns in the novel: "What are the living supposed to do, look at old pictures, or live?" (p.105). It is precisely "old pictures" that continually assert themselves in Baro's consciousness. The accusation, inherent in his awareness of past experiences, spreads an overwhelming sense of moral failure and guilt over his life. He is engaged, like Nazerman in The Pawnbroker, in a continual struggle with memory. The past is not something he chooses to recall but something that, despite his efforts, intrudes into

his consciousness: "Do not remember, Baro warned himself. You have remembered enough for one day. But he could not drown out the voice that had cried inside his head: Guilty! you are guilty of George's death"(p.138). Baro's position in a sense overlaps with Clem's. He is condemned to see his role as essentially ridiculous because of his commitment to values that are not shared in the contemporary world and which clash with the reality around him: "He hesitated a second time, feeling something like wisdom form in the back of his head, but he could not say it, doomed as ever to exit as the clown"(p.102).

However, unlike in The Second Stone, comedy is not developed as the primary tone of the novel. Some of Baro's actions have ironic, rather than comic, consequences and there is hardly any sense of the "knockabout" farce that permeates the other novel. The balance between anguish and comedy is undercut here in the other direction. Thus, when Baro characterises himself as "only an unemployed comedian"(p.223), there is no temptation to concur in the judgement. The narrator's judgement is by far the more convincing: "And then, quite suddenly, he was weeping instead of laughing (no less a clown than ever, but a clown in tears)..."(p.224). Baro is the kind of clown whose role expresses anguish more readily than laughter.

The source of all Baro's pain derives from his moral sense. He cannot, as Shizu urges him to, shrug off the past. He cannot cease to care even though the fact of his caring has had no effect and even possibly a harmful effect, on George, for example. In China, his humanitarian stance forced him into isolation from his fellow Marines. In the contemporary post-war world, his stance is seen as alien to the new generation to which he commits himself. Thus the conversation with Shizu can be seen not only as an indication of Baro's moral consciousness, but also as a pointer to the degree that that consciousness separates him from the values of the younger generation, the futurists who, like Melissa-Melinda in The Messengers Will Come No More, seek to deny connection with the past.

In the conversations with Rod this is more fully developed. Rod is out of the pages of Jack Kerouac, and re-made with Mailer's essay, "The White Negro"

somewhere in mind, Baro, at one point, sees him as a symbolic negro: "But he looks like a negro from behind, Baro thought, for all that thick blond, blond hair curling over his collar--not looks so much maybe as seems, walks, moves, somehow is"(pp.174-175). Rod can be seen as representative of the kind of generation that Paul Goodman writes about in Growing Up Absurd. The attitudes Rod holds directly conflict with those held by Baro. Rod radically rejects the past and emphasises the contemporary inappropriateness of Baro's humanitarian stance: "Nobody, Nobody digs Hiroshima. That's the message"(p.171). The confrontation creates moral and historical perspective. As the conversation with Rod reflects, Baro is representative not only of a certain set of attitudes but also of a certain generation and, on both fronts, his stance in the contemporary world is doomed to failure: "The trouble with you is you care--about George, about me, about your wife, about peace. My generation couldn't care less, but if we could we would. Even less, are you with me?"(p.166). Baro's isolation derives from his moral position and because that position relates him to a particular generation. The issues that concerned that generation are seen, by the young, as dead issues.

This argument exposes the extreme pessimism that runs through the novel. Clearly Baro is a sympathetic figure. He is, in effect, the only moral voice that carries weight in the novel but he is seen as doomed to defeat and burdened by failure. He is, as such, a figure that appears throughout contemporary Jewish-American fiction. In a contemporary world in which certain moral values are being eroded, he is unable to shrug off those values from his past which make repeated demands upon his present. He, like Wallant's Nazerman, Neugeboren's Harry Myers, Charyn's Yankel Rabinowitz and many others, carries a burden of consciousness that isolates him from his environment.

In the way in which Baro's thoughts are presented, this becomes more apparent. There is no sense of a free-association of ideas. Nothing is "free" about the way Baro thinks. He is compelled, by his moral sense, to compulsively return, again and again, to experiences in the past. Fiedler finds an effective metaphor for Baro's consciousness: "tangled in the coil

of his remembering"(p.135). This argument leads back to the points developed earlier. Fiedler's choice of interior analysis over interior monologue can be seen as having thematic repercussions. The mode of perception that the use of interior monologue tends to imply can best be suggested by the metaphor "stream of consciousness." Past events though are not freely associated in Baro's consciousness. His perception is literally nightmarish, returning irresistibly to past events. The word "coil," suggesting movement around a central point and twisted progression from the source, more effectively describes the texture of Baro's thought than the word "stream." The choice of form crucially enforces the thematic concerns of the novel as the manipulation of tenses further indicates.

The events recorded in the simple past, the moment in time at which Baro stands, occupy far less space in the novel than the events recorded in the past-perfect. The simple past is used to present Baro's actions on a single day. It records the immediate responses he has to awkward or ridiculous situations he finds himself in during that day. The past-perfect records that more distant past and identifies the sources of Baro's anguish. Basically, the simple past reveals Baro as a confused, ineffectual buffoon, while the past-perfect reveals the depth of pain beneath that ineffectiveness. The co-existence of the two pasts establishes the tension between clown and moral sufferer, while the greater use of the past-perfect emphasises anguish over comedy, the reverse of the tone that emerges in The Second Stone.

The use of past-perfect injects a distinctive texture into that distant past. This can be seen by comparing variant readings of a section of the novel. The peyote eating ceremony formed the basis of the short story, "Bad Scene at Buffalo Jump." The novel uses the past-perfect, while the short story employs the simple past. The effect is to make the events in the novel seem less directly perceived than consciously recalled. The short story records the event that ambiguously happened to Baro. His response to the experience, when ambiguous, is fixed within that ambiguity. The simple past defines the significance of the event within the fictive time scale. The past-perfect of the novel, however, suggests greater chronological

distance from the events and carries an implicit sense of a continuing process in which significance is re-assessed and interpreted. The event is further distanced and its importance becomes more deeply problematic.

This is clearer when seen in relation to the word "seemed." The word itself implies some distance between what is felt to be true and what is actually true. The short story uses this form: "the chanting, which seemed to him to have gone on for a thousand years, was now in English...."²⁶ In the novel that becomes: "the chanting, which had seemed to him to have gone on for a thousand years, was now in English..."(p.122). The first version simply carries the sense that he felt this to be true although it, clearly, could not have been. The second version carries that sense but also implies that as it "had seemed" it might not necessarily always seem so. Distance creates further uncertainty and permits the possibility of further re-interpretation of the event. The past is rendered more distant and more ambiguous, and this is precisely the correct texture for a past that is meant to be experienced as a morally problematic dream verging toward nightmare. Baró's past is seen as distant but, paradoxically, still vitally operative in the present because of the moral impact it makes, and because its moral significance is continually being interpreted and worried over. The choice of the past-perfect serves to enforce this sense both because of the implicit characteristics of the tense, and because of the mechanism by which Fiedler sets it in contrast to the simple past.

Time is clearly a central issue in the novel. Chronological perspective is undermined in Baró's consciousness where past is seen to have more impact than present. This retrospective impulse is seen as symptomatic of a generation (ex-Marxist liberals) that Baró is representative of. The conversation between Rod and Baró identifies a chronological perspective; it places Baró in time and within a particular cultural context, but, paradoxically, the idea of historical perspective is undermined within his own perception. The novel presents a figure who can be seen in categorical, historical and cultural terms, but whose perception of reality undermines a sense of history.

As in The Second Stone, Fiedler is also concerned with the issue of ethnicity. He exploits the idea of ethnicity as an assumed stance, in Rod's case the symbolic assumption of a negro identity. Shizu and Sussanah similarly assume identities that reflect what they most aspire to be:

Just as Sussanah had longed apparently to become a good Jewish wife, Shizu had tried desperately to pass as a midwestern co-ed; and the young, whatever their origins--George, certainly, and Rodney and the rest of the kids with whom he had practiced their vices and pleasures learned from negroes--yearned to be black.(p.212)

In the most American of settings, the West, this "game of ethnic musical chairs..."(p.213) takes place. Baro conceives of two options, neither acceptable, with regard to his own Jewish identity. He could assume an alternative identity, or accept the traditional identity of the Jew without real conviction. His dilemma illustrates a paradox of contemporary Jewish-American life, taken up, for example, by Norma Rosen in Joy to Levine!

Through this character, Fiedler shows that neither rejection nor acceptance of Jewish identity is unambiguously possible. The character simultaneously rejects and accepts his Judaism. Baro "had not wanted to huddle amid the remnants of a dying, meaningless Jewish culture, eating gefilte fish and belching the stale breath of his ancestors"(p.211). However, in China, the recognition of the role he is playing is a horrified one, precisely because it conflicts with his Jewish consciousness. His moral sense associates with the persecuted, whereas his role places him in the position of persecutor. The image he uses to express his horror makes it clear that he feels his actions to be a reproach to his Judaism that should link him with the persecuted: "'I am in a bad movie about the Gestapo,' Baro had told himself, and then in amazement, 'But I am the Gestapo who should be its victim'"(p.48). The Jewish experience is seen to impose a moral imperative on Baro with which his role conflicts. Vestigial Judaism is seen still to carry moral force partly because for Baro, the relevance of the persecuted mythic Jew has been re-made by the Nazis.

Judaism is also an issue for Baro because he, like Jacob in "The Last Jew in America," has come to the West. In that location, the Jew is an outsider both because of the prevailing social attitudes and because of the mythic resonances that surround the West. The social attitudes link Baro with Shapiro, "a professional Jew..."(p.212). He is constantly confronted by attitudes that will not let him relinquish his ethnic identity, that link him with Shapiro whether he likes it or not:

So that taking out of the mailbox the black printed card which read: JEW COMMIE GO HOME, Baro could never be sure it was really him rather than Shapiro for whom it had been intended.(p.36)

It is as a Jew that Baro experiences the peyote eating ceremony. He feels his isolation from the Indian prayer, which seeks to synthesise "Jesus and Mary and Peyote..."(p.123). The interaction between the Indian and the Christian does not enlist him into the ceremony. He remains firmly excluded both by his scepticism and by his Jewish identity. He sees the ceremony as a parody of the Passover service. His sense of Jewish identity is, however, a negative characteristic. It serves to enforce his sense of isolation from the ceremony, and from the West, but it gives no sense of community in return. Baro joins a whole series of characters in contemporary Jewish-American fiction who are not sufficiently Jewish to merge into the Jewish community and, who are not sufficiently assimilated to escape from the vestiges of Judaism that exert pressures upon them. Judaism is widely seen as another factor, that interacting with a humanitarian stance, enforces the protagonist's isolation.

The peyote ceremony is made up of "shabby pretenses to primitivism..."(p.124). The decline of Indian identity into sham mysticism is emphasised by Grayfox, for whom identity is a selling gimmick. Fiedler, as does Charyn with the invention of the "Azazian" gypsy, broadens the issues of ethnic identity from a Jewish perspective, making some kind of parallel with the decline of Judaism. Baro, in trying to find appropriate Hebrew words to

respond to the Chief's prayer, can only recall the Jewish prayer for the dead. His recognition of the moribund nature of the ceremony leads him to the decision to try and gain a scholarship for George. The prayer for the dead takes on another meaning. It is both a prayer at the death of Indian culture and a prophetic prayer of the father for the death of his symbolic son:

George will be the first Indian ever, surely the first Indian from the mountain west I have ever known to break out of the indignities of his situation and become a full participant in world culture.(p.129)

His attempt is to liberate George from the vestiges of his ethnic identity, to do for him what he has been unable to do for himself. George is, however, "The Vanishing American," a vestigial Indian who exists at the point of interaction of three cultures: as an American, as a symbolic Negro and an Indian. His death is a retreat from world culture and, in Fiedler's terms, a recognition of the burden of ethnicity. It is only at the points of interaction that George's life is viable within the fiction. The parallel with Baro is inescapable. His Judaism is a burden that fixes him in isolation, excluding him from many things but joining him to nothing. The situation, recurrent in Jewish-American literature, reveals a synthesis of social isolation and humanitarian consciousness.

The pressures upon Baro are fragmented and pull him both back to the past and forward into the future, firstly through his symbolic son George, and then through his wife's pregnancy.

The unanswered, and unanswerable questions, that Baro asks himself throughout the novel, reflect the multiplicity of pressures and the anguished need to understand these. These questions are attempts to understand the moral issues arising from the past, the failure of a humanitarian stance and the problematic nature of Jewish identity. The need to ask questions derives from Baro's position as a humanitarian, a teacher, an American and

a Jew. The ambiguity of an identity formed at those points is made clear as Baro seeks, like Toby in Eisenhower, My Eisenhower, to understand, "the riddle of himself"(p.167). The fact that these questions remain unanswered reflects Baro's bewilderment in the fragmented, disordered, irrational world he remembers and lives in. The paradoxes that this world asserts remain riddles: "Can I save no one, nothing?"(p.17), expresses the very essence of Baro's anguish. George, Horishige and the tortured Japanese prisoner fill Baro's consciousness, and "his old bafflement still alive..."(p.74) haunts him.

The metaphor of a haunted consciousness is entirely appropriate. Even the two locations, China and the West, are given the texture of dream (or nightmare) rather than real locations. There is almost no location that is rendered as real in the novel, only alternative dream/nightmare places. The arrival in China is seen as a fall out of reality into dream: "It had been China, then, this land to which one came as if falling out of a war not into a place but a troubled sleep..."(p.2). It is a country "more legend than place, more dream than legend..."(p.2).

Montana, the other location, offers no alternative sense of reality pervaded, as it is, with mythic overtones. Baro wakes from the nightmare of China into another kind of unreality: "Certainly he had never seemed to himself less real, less convincing than at the moment (now, in Montana)..." (p.5). It is the ultimate frontier, a wilderness with all the associated mythic implications: "I am in a place of innocence, a world newer not older than the one into which I was born"(p.109). These are landscapes that, like Rome of The Second Stone, exist to enforce a condition of consciousness.

Baro's situation, in these two landscapes, serves to illustrate the interaction of the Jewish and American identities. In China, he is unable to avoid the role of the persecutor of the weak. He is enough of an American to be isolated from the people of China and from the Japanese living there. He is also enough of a Jew, suffering moral anguish at his "gestapo" role, to be isolated from the other Americans. The interaction of these two

elements is seen, therefore, to have a deeply negative effect. His Americanness and Jewishness, neither being unproblematic, serve to isolate him from things, not to unite him with anything. In the West he is not American enough to feel at home in the mythic landscape. He is "a visible stranger in this ultimate West"(p.31). His vestigial Judaism serves only to enforce his prevailing sense of isolation. He is in a dilemma familiar throughout the novels discussed here. Like Charyn's Japanese or Azazians, Potok's "torn and lonely boys," and Wallant's Bertha in The Pawnbroker or Berman in The Human Season, Baro suffers at the centre of a problematic conjunction of pressures emanating from some level of association to ethnic culture in contrast to some manifestation of contemporary American mores.

This discussion makes clear the kinds of interactions that are at work. Fiedler is concerned with the issue of time and attempts, on one level at least, to undercut the conventional distance between past and present, dream and reality. A moment in the past becomes, "the dimensionless instant that alone gave reality to his life in time"(p.54). This radical undermining of chronological perspective is enforced by the undercutting of reality, the rendering of place as dream. Montana is pervaded with the mythic resonances of the ultimate West. The events in China are recorded as recurrent nightmare. Even on the first page of the novel, before the reader is aware that the description of China is being recalled, the texture of the language renders the atmosphere dream-like. No aspect of the landscape is emphasised. The sense of "a single color, a single texture..." (p.1) is reflected by the way in which the structure of the sentence isolates no particular phrase. There is a simple accumulation of phrases, with no element allowed to become distinct from another: "The bellies of the birds, like the river-mouth, the rice paddies, the low thatched huts barely breaking the line of the horizon, had shared a single color, a single texture..."(p.1). The animate merges, through the simile, into the inanimate. In the same way, the distinction between sea and land seemed not to exist: "only the yellow-brown waters becoming imperceptibly yellow-brown mud"(p.1).

The action recorded also has an unreal, almost nightmarish, quality. The Marines break into a rhythmic chant, almost devoid of meaning. There is something inhuman and mechanical about the chant:

their red faces turning purple, their neck cords standing out taut against the collars of their tunics, their mouths stretched impossibly wide and their spittle flying into the still evening air:
 "Back to China! Back to China! BACK TO CHI-NAAAAAAAAAH!"(pp.1-2)

The sound builds into a crescendo of meaninglessness. The repetition of "their," by not distinguishing any individual response, creates the sense of a de-humanised body of men engaged in an action that, although without meaning, builds into a deafening crescendo of something like menace.

Fiedler brings Post-Modernist preoccupations and techniques to the themes that run through the novel. A central concern is with the moral stance taken by Baro and, with the failure of his humanitarian position. His ethnic identity, as a Jew and American, is seen to have only negative implications, isolating him from things but joining him to nothing. The anguish that derives from Baro's sense of failure, and his loneliness, is balanced, unevenly, against the comic role that he sees himself taking. The ironic implications of action are exploited, especially in the conclusion where events push Baro toward the future. A note of ambiguity is injected into the overall, pessimistic, tone. Baro stands, at the end, looking both backward to the dead and forward to the as yet unborn. A sense of the perpetuation of life ironically concludes a novel predominantly concerned with death. The irony of Baro's situation, the comic implication, is transformed not only by the language but by the ambiguous note of optimism that is allowed to reverberate against the prevailing tone of the novel:
"Hiroshige, George, he shouted silently to the listening dead, I will be the father of sons. George, Horishige, we will not any of us die. And yet I am sterile"(p.248). Fiedler heightens the sense of ambiguity, and diminishes the comic element, by the nature of the rhetoric, the sense of sudden insight,

a tone of profundity which, up to that point, has been alien to Baro. This novel, like The Second Stone, is content to let its meanings rest within paradox.

Unlike The Second Stone, there is a sense that the formal choices Fiedler makes serve to enforce the thematic preoccupations. Fiedler has found a language appropriate to his concerns as a Post-Modernist writer, an American and a secular Jew. Back to China is, in this respect, the most successfully sustained fiction that Fiedler has produced. However, the short fiction is worth some consideration, both because of the relationship these stories have with the novels and because there are, among them, real literary successes.

IV

In the two collections of shorter fiction, the pre-occupations that are apparent in the novels, recur. A sense of pessimism is more nakedly apparent. The short stories are, for the most part, studies of isolation and failure and examinations of the disintegration of ritual positions. Nude Croquet. The Stories of Leslie Fiedler includes all those stories originally collected in Pull Down Vanity and adds some not collected there. The Last Jew in America is a collection of three linked novellas that are set in the same Western location.

In the story "Nude Croquet" Fiedler establishes those elements that are examined and re-examined in the collection. The title gives an implicit sense of ritual game stripped bare. Successive layers of failure, political, artistic and matrimonial, are revealed. It focuses on a group of intellectuals who have shared the experience of having their actual innocence correspond to a period of political innocence, the thirties. The process of growing into middle-age is anguished because it is both a loss of real youth and a separation from the innocent, radical values of the recent past. On a public level the characters are successes but in their own consciousnesses they are rebuked by the values they have grown away from. On one level, therefore, the story is basically political, about the loss of faith in Marxist radicalism. The theme is complicated by the fact that this loss of faith corresponds to a loss of youth and, therefore, the story is, on another level, about the anguished process of growing old.

Overlaying these themes is the sense that relationships exist only at the level of ritual. The link between husband and wife, friend and friend, is now habitual because the shared passions and concerns that forged these links have faded:

Suddenly they had nothing more to say, and they looked away from each other in pained silence...wondering what dead and irrevocable passion had left them stranded in an association that without it was merely absurd.²⁷

It is at this point that they move into the game of nude croquet which ends, melodramatically, in Marvin's death. Fiedler establishes a sense of the ritualisation of human relationships, breaks it down, as he does so often in these stories, with drunkenness and then leaves the characters either metaphorically or actually, as here, naked.

The story opens with an atmosphere of menace and purposelessness. The landscape is, through the use of various similes and metaphors, rendered as appropriately menacing, even gothic. The pond is "infested"(p.8) by lilies. The sound of the sea is compared to an absurd, ritualised, despairing and menacing image: "Like a man in an empty house, he thought sadly, banging a table, banging a table and shouting into the darkness..."(p.9). Another simile carries the sense that this meeting is both unreal, dreamlike and an attempt to re-establish relationships that are now without meaning, the meaning lost in an irretrievable past. The sea "was roaring now, not thumping, roaring like the coming of sleep or the reaching back into childhood"(p.11).

Marvin is the link with the lost values that once united the group: "In a sense, he held them in trust for them all, their one-time papa, now the keeper of the museum of their common past"(p.33). Marvin's death at the end of the story is thematically appropriate, the death of their common past, the ritual exposed, but aesthetically disturbing. It seems too obvious a conclusion. The point that has already been established, through the development of the action, is crudely highlighted. It does, however, relate to the gothic, unreal, atmosphere that Fiedler has created, a symbolic death in a symbolic landscape that recalls the procedures exploited more extensively in The Second Stone.

The story is permeated with the sense of ritual action and communication. The first exchange between Howard and Jessie is a gesture of habitual hostility. Howard "snarled ritually" and Jessie "snapped back automatically..."(p.7). Identities are assumed and relinquished like masks. Even before the croquet the flow of conversation is compared to a game in

which it becomes "time to switch sides"(p.21). As Leonard points out, the language of the conversations obscures rather than reveals the truth: "This is a language for unhappy people--a way of pretending that unhappiness is a virtue"(p.32). The sense of ritual becomes focused in the game of croquet, "the confusion of the endless and pointless game"(p.51).

In this story, Fiedler establishes some of the themes that are central to the whole collection; a sense of failure and a loss of innocence is associated with the process of ageing in which middle-age success confronts values and aspirations that the characters held in their youth. The characters are confronted by the fact of their own mortality. A primary theme emerges through the sense of ritual. The shorter fiction is, to a large degree, concerned with the question of identity and the way in which the character confronts the world with a ritually assumed mask linked to a sense of human isolation. The shorter fiction can be seen, on one level at least, as a study of ethnic, social and political isolation.

"The Teeth" belongs with the group of stories in this collection that are primarily concerned with the failure of the middle-aged artist. The story opens, like "Nude Croquet," with the environment made hostile. The location moves from the almost gothic country house to the city in summer. The sun is "inimical"(p.55). Warren moves through the city and assumes a defensive identity, that of the cripple, to protect him from hostility, and a set of comic teeth to protect him from intimacy. The masks assumed are revealed as paradoxically true. Fiedler points to the problematic nature of the real and the true. The ostensibly false, the mask, reveals an inner truth so that when the teeth are removed the actual face is an illusion of truth. The comic teeth are a recognition of inner absurdity. The handsome face revealed a lie: "That was the truth; what you think you see now lies..."(p.66), Warren thinks as he removes the teeth. The dream noted at the end of the story, in which he is unable to remove the teeth, represents the inner truth of Warren's predicament. Dream, then, is seen as profoundly true, reality illusion. In "The Stain" the merging of reality and dream is made much more explicit.

"Let Nothing You Dismay" and "Dirty Ralphy" focus directly on the problematic nature of Judaism. The first brings a child's perceptions to the anguished rejection of Jewish identity by her father. The landscape of menace moves from the gothic mansion or the city to the clutter of a small girl's bedroom. The room is "half-ghetto, half-jungle"(p.69). The light from the toy gun she fires "blinked like an eye in the intermittent flame..."(p.69) revealing "brutal shadows of half-disabled toys"(p.69). The room is metaphorically filled with fire and transformed into a symbolic ghetto/concentration camp. The merging of the two cultures, and the predominance of the American, is pointed to by the nature of the Messianic intervention that in Elissa's consciousness rescues her. Roy Rogers, archetypal American hero, rescues her from the room transformed into the symbolic landscape of Jewish suffering. This mode of rendering American landscape through a perspective shaped by historical Jewish suffering is found throughout the works discussed here. Wallant's Nazerman, Potok's David Lurie and Charyn's Rabbi, as examples, re-perceive a variety of American environments in ways that recall specific landscapes of Jewish suffering.

Judaism, in Elissa's consciousness, is precisely associated with that suffering and merges, through snippets of overheard conversation, with what she calls "the Castle face"(p.73). The link with Kafka and the presence of Mrs Jovanich establish the European roots of this Jewish identity. Jewish suffering is a mask, "the wet eyes, the loneliness..."(p.70) that Mrs Jovanich always wears and which her father, in spite of his rejection of that ethnic identity, occasionally assumes. The central question of the American Jew's relationship with traditional and mythic Judaism becomes dramatised in Elissa's consciousness.

"Dirty Ralphy" focuses on a recurrent preoccupation in Jewish-American fiction: "the secret allure of disease and disorder..."(p.78). The ambiguity of the story is that the focus of this allure, Ralphy, is revealed, paradoxically, as a Jew. Until that final revelation, however, the story conforms to a repeated pattern in Jewish-American fiction. A character is enveloped within order deriving from prescriptive community patterns of behaviour that the family, as an agent of Jewish community values, applies. He comes into contact with a figure who characterises the anarchy that he is both attracted to and repelled by. It is always made clear that this

anarchy is moral. Ralphy, for example, is "filthy as we were convinced it was a sin to be..."(p.78). The Jew's relationship to this moral anarchy is always problematic. It represents for him a possibility of liberation from Jewish community values but it is also, necessarily, a fairly anguished betrayal of these.

The theme is recurrent. In Henry Roth's Call it Sleep, Leo is seen as the morally anarchic character in relation to David Schearl: "Leo's freedom was unobtainable,"²⁸ but it was also "contagious...."²⁹ Philip Roth confronts this theme in "You Can't Tell a Man by the Song he Sings," as well as in Portnoy's Complaint: "I learned that Albie, as a youth, had done all the things I, under direction, had not...."³⁰ The most explicit statement of this Jewish attraction and repulsion to anarchy is Norman Podhoretz's article, "My Negro Problem and Ours." The Negro youth is seen as a morally anarchic figure:

What mainly counted for me about Negro kids of my own age was that they were bad boys. There were plenty of bad boys among the whites--this was, after all, a neighbourhood with a long tradition of crime as a career open to aspiring talents--but the Negroes were really bad, bad in a way that beckoned to one, and made one feel inadequate. We all went home every day for a lunch of spinach-and-potatoes; they roamed around during lunch hour, munching on candy bars. In winter we had to wear itchy woolen hats and mittens and cumbersome galoshes; they were bare-headed and loose as they pleased. We rarely played hockey, or got into serious trouble in school, for all our street corner bravado; they were defiant, forever staying out (to do what delicious things?), forever making disturbances in class and in the halls, forever being sent to the principal and returning uncowed. But most important of all, they were tough; beautifully, enviably tough, not giving a damn for anyone or anything.³¹

In "Dirty Ralphy" Fiedler sets Jewish social order against disorder but

injects ambiguity and paradox into the equation by revealing the fact that Ralphy was a Jew. The story becomes something of a confessional in which the relatively unusual use of first person narration in Fiedler's fiction becomes entirely appropriate. The narrator, before the revelation of Ralphy's Jewishness, sees the situation in much the same way as Podhoretz sees it. While moral anarchy attracts, Jewish social order remains most attractive:

I was glad really, despite my momentary betrayals of faith in order, that my father worked hard and did not drink, that my mother mended and scrubbed for us, that we ate and went to bed at regular times--and above all, that we were Jews who could never be wanton or drunk, and who even washed our hands each time after going to the toilet.(p.79)

However, the revelation of Ralphy's Jewishness overlays this version of Jewish order with the figure of Ralphy as, paradoxically, a mythic Jew--bloodied and beaten: "Once more my blow fell, once more and forever to the mocking applause of a faceless Arthur, and bleeding over his teeth, as if bowed before me, crouched the Jew, Ralphy"(p.82). The narrator, with this knowledge, is also transformed into the persecutor and his recognition of this transformation corresponds to Baro's anguished recognition of his role as persecutor in Back to China. The reader is left with the most problematic and paradoxical of conclusions. The narrator's defence of Judaism makes him a persecutor of Jews. Above all, the story re-asserts the continuity of pressure that emanates from Jewish identity.

"The Fear of Innocence" returns to the themes discussed in relation to "Nude Croquet." The narrator returns to the location of his youth, that area where political and physical innocence corresponded. In "Nude Croquet," Marvin lives into the present with the values of political innocence intact. His values thus confront the characters who have relinquished them. In "The Fear of Innocence," Hal's premature death fixes him in a permanent innocence that rebukes the narrator's maturity. In a sense, this story fixes upon the recurrent American concern with the perceptions of the adolescent which rebuke

the moral values of maturity. Hal, reminiscent of Holden Caulfield and Quentin Compson, is fixed in an eternal adolescence. The narrator is involved in a struggle with the past that is both politically innocent and, in this story, Jewish. For a Jew of that generation, Fiedler implies, the pressures from lost youth are recurrent and the attempt to escape from the pressures is both anguished and full of terror.

In growing up, the narrator relinquishes political innocence. He also struggles against the moral imperatives that derive from the Jewish community articulated by the Jewish mother who demands "a ridiculous allegiance to childhood"(p.106) in a manner that recalls the mother figures in Portnoy's Complaint and A Mother's Kisses . The recurrent preoccupation that Jewish-American writers have with adolescent experience is partly indicative of the need to come to terms with the ambiguities in their own Jewish-American pasts. Alfred Kazin's A Walker in the City and Podhoretz's Making It both make it clear that this fictional preoccupation has a solid root in real experience.

The narrator is also engaged in a struggle with language and not the least of the failures that the story records is the failure of communication. An evening spent with Hal and Carrie is recalled: "The beginning of the evening was a history of failures at communication for all of us..."(p.101). Drunkenness is again used to present a breakdown in defined positions, a "sickening sweet plunge toward absolute abdication of will"(p.103). As in "Dirty Ralph," the narrator stands in maturity in a problematic relationship with his past. At one point the reader is directly addressed to emphasise the overall sense of confession and the fact that the struggle is with language, to reveal rather than obscure meaning:

It must be clear to you by now (I did not intend to conceal it) what motivated my feeling and my speech: the need to make the record once more. For there I had been granted what death had seemed to deny, the possibility of saying what I could not leave off wanting to say; once more to explain, and this time perhaps

what had been wounded would be healed; this once at least words might eventuate in understanding.(p.92)

As a meditation upon the past the story wanders around various experiences and to a large degree is formally incoherent. The reader is meant to feel some kind of tension between the curiously poetic and elevated language of the meditation and the more mundane dialogue recalled from the past. The character of the narrator is a vital element. His dilemma is meant to be both unique and largely representative but the character is created through the language he uses and this language is self-consciously literary and mannered. There is too great a sense of his having found a static, poetically exact, language in which to discuss a past that is meant to be felt as problematic and morally challenging.

"An Expense of Spirit" and "Nobody Ever Died from It" employ the same first person narrator, Herman Brandler, although there is a marked inconsistency in the characterisation. In "An Expense of Spirit," the meticulous, reserved Brandler is engaged in a futile attempt to resist pressures from the human complexities that confront him. In "Nobody Ever Died from It," he looks back upon a situation in his youth and is engaged, like the narrator of "A Fear of Innocence" (there is a hint in that story that the narrator is Brandler), in a struggle to evoke and evaluate a character from his past. The tone of "An Expense of Spirit" is meticulous, the language formal:

I should perhaps begin by telling you that I am accustomed to live, as it were, with my left hand. It is not impossible that you have seen, through the flawed glass window of the shop where I work, my back bent toward some customer in the meaningless similitude of worship.(p.135)

"An Expense of Spirit" opens with this sense of careful qualification, the record of minute detail and an overall lack of emphasis. It is not enough, for example, for the narrator to tell the reader he is a shoe salesman; he

also records the term used by his colleagues, "a shoe-dog"(p.135). He creates a sense of two languages, the toneless, almost scholastic language he employs and that used by those around him of which he disapproves. The opening of "Nobody Ever Died From It" employs a far more vigorous vernacular: "There is no use beating about the bush"(p.155). This immediately establishes a very clear change of tone and perception. Rhetorical question and exclamation are used throughout the story while they are entirely absent from "An Expense of Spirit."

Clearly, if the stories are to be contrasted, Fiedler wants to point to a change in the character. The second story is chronologically later in Brandler's life. The reader is invited to see the experiences recorded in "An Expense of Spirit" as having had a fundamental impact on Brandler's consciousness. However, there is no sense, within that story, of Brandler's radical alteration in perception. Certainly he is, as he says, "not quite the same"(p.153). The events into which he is drawn reveal the fact that his routinisation of life cannot protect him from human reality. Nevertheless, the narrative voice that concludes the story is consistent in tone with the one that began it. The distanced stance that the language reveals has been attacked but not destroyed. Fiedler establishes no transition of tone. There is a simple, for the most part unjustified jump, from one kind of narrative voice to another and yet the reader is invited to see these narrators as the same person.

Both stories use a drunken episode to reveal human anguish. In both cases Brandler's role is that of spectator. In "An Expense of Spirit," he simply describes his actions and records his sense of disapproval. In "Nobody Ever Died from It," however, he is engaged in re-evaluating the moral attitudes he holds against an episode in his youth. Once again Fiedler presents the adult in a morally problematic relationship with his own adolescence. Seen in isolation the two stories manage, through the narrative language, to present particular perceptions of human anguish. There does, however, finally seem no real reason to recognise these perceptions as belonging to a single figure.

"Pull Down Vanity" returns to recurrent concerns in Jewish-American fiction. The feeling that success is a kind of moral failure is behind the narrator's uneasiness at his popularity during a poetry conference. The story also ranges around the tensions between Jew and gentile in a Philosemetic age. It focuses on the discontent and rage of the dispossessed gentile in a cultural situation where being a Jew and an Easterner is a passport into an exclusive society, a cultural cabal that Podhoretz has called "the family." Hank, as his name would suggest the archetypal Westerner, articulates the rage of the gentile artist who finds himself no longer at the centre of his own culture. The drunken party motif is again used to breakdown ritually held positions and to reveal the anguish beyond them. Hank and Milton retreat from Judith having been rendered impotent by her passion, "more an assault than an embrace"(p.203). They establish a drunken camaraderie, a male defence against female sexuality that is seen, as so often in Fiedler's work, as a threat; that threat becomes, in fact, a central motif in The Messengers Will Come No More.

The story is overlaid with a sense of unreality and it, thus, appropriately precedes "The Stain" which radically undercuts the distance between reality and dream/nightmare. In "Pull Down Vanity," the image of the film or play and the mask is repeatedly used to describe real actions and, thus, to present those actions as essentially artificial. Milton compares the poetry classes to "a moving picture..."(p.184). His Judaism is part of the artificiality: "this most problematic part of myself was involved in the charade"(p.185). Hank's pale face "seemed a mask or the make-up of a silent movie comedian"(p.193), and Milton ponders "the meaning of his mask..."(p.213). The fantasy that Milton creates of a large family leads to "an incredibly real nostalgia for my imaginary household"(p.193). The total effect is to render reality as problematic, to make the distance between the real and the unreal, identity and mask, ever narrower.

The distance disappears altogether in the dense quasi-allegorical story, "The Stain." The story opens with an allegory of the impact of the past upon the present. A group of people, in a post-revolutionary State,

go through the hopeless task of trying to remove a stain from the ground. Failure will result in execution. At this stage the story echoes the allegories of Kafka or Borges. The main character Ham (the black son of Noah) is one of those to be shot. However, this allegory is revealed as a dream from which Ham awakes in a tent with his soldier companions: "He looked about him feeling toward the most despicable of his tentmates love and gratitude simply for being real"(p.235). He awakes, though, to find the roles reversed. He is to be the executioner. The landscape remains allegorical. Ham has simply woken from one dream into another. The revelation that is at the root of the dramatic impact of the story is that Ham's final awakening is into a reality indistinguishable from dream. The reality in which he lives shares the atmosphere of nightmare with those locations he has dreamed. He moves from nightmare to nightmare to reality without having any sense of moving into a radically different landscape. Ham is, of course, an American Negro and Fiedler has found a dramatically appropriate form in which to examine the plight of the Negro. The stain serves to symbolise the continuing impact of the past, Ham's radical past, and his black skin. Ham dreams a cultural fact, the deep guilt that white culture has imposed upon the Negro through the creation of its archetypal American face. It is the white consciousness of the "stain" of blackness that Ham is made to share:

From childhood on, his picture books, the movies had proposed to him a mythical American face, thin nosed, smooth-haired, grayish pink, before which he must confess his own face a failure, a blemish.(p.248)

The story is, therefore, on one level at least, a fictional demonstration of Fiedler's assertion that each ethnic group is defined in the imaginations of other groups: "We were all of us each other's invention..."³² It is also, of course, a further demonstration of the invention of metaphors of ethnicity found repeatedly in the works discussed in this thesis.

The story, on another level, goes beyond the question of ethnicity and returns to Fiedler's preoccupation with the loss of political innocence. Ham,

like the characters in "Nude Croquet" and "The Fear of Innocence," is isolated from his radical past. He is also, like Brandler in "An Expense of Spirit," living between two identities. He assumes one mask to face the world and retains his private consciousness of himself. Ethnicity is seen as one aspect of Ham's isolation that imposes upon him a fixed mask, "a meaningless grimace"(p.249).

"Bad Scene at Buffalo Jump," which was discussed more fully in relation to Back to China, focuses on the interrelationship between Jewish and Indian ethnic identity. "The Girl in the Black Raincoat, Four Academic Parables" places an ambiguous feminine symbol at the centre of the story. Its procedures signal the direction toward which Fiedler moves in The Messengers Will Come No More. The feminine figure is seen to contain an element of menace. Myth, parable and reality merge and the central symbol can be seen as either representative of the feminine in American literature, a merging of innocence and corruption, or, more coherently perhaps, as an image of Fiedler's view of American literature itself: "White where visible, black where concealed..."(pp.273-274). It remains a slight piece precisely because it exists only on the level of parable. It is only in The Messengers Will Come No More that Fiedler exploits the parable in a complex and extensive manner. In this story, the symbol is simplistically ambiguous, light and dark, innocence and corruption. In "The Dancing of Reb Hershl with the Withered Hand," Fiedler moves into the mythic shtetl, to the sort of landscape one associates with Isaac Bashevis Singer's stories. He takes the Hugh of Lincoln, and Prioress' Tale, myth and presents it from a Jewish perspective. The real interest of the story, in this discussion, is that it again undercuts the distinction between what is real and what is unreal. The rabbis are confronted with a myth that in their reality actually happens: "But we have heard of this before.... It is a story which our father's have told us. It is not something which happens but which is told"(p.276).

It is clear that the kinds of tensions discussed in relation to the novels recur in this collection. Fiedler returns again and again to the problems of ethnicity, most often to the problems of Jewish ethnicity. The

continuing pressure of Jewish identity is felt even among those characters who strive most actively to slough it off. The radical values of the 1930s survive in many of these stories to rebuke contemporary success and security. Fiedler presents identity as a problem, repeatedly using the image of the mask. The recurrent motif of the drunken party, in which masks are removed, becomes by the end of this collection too obvious a fictional manoeuvre. It is, after all, a recurrent device not only in contemporary fiction but also in the theatre. Albee in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf and Mart Crowley in The Boys in the Band, for example, exploit the same device. It begins to look rather like an orthodox formula. Overlaying all the concerns in these stories is a sense that reality is problematic. Landscapes are often pointedly atmospheric or symbolic. Behaviour is often ritualised gesture, a complex, even meaningless, game.

Of course this collection does not have a single coherent idea running through it and, indeed, there is no reason why it should have. However, the reader does come away from the collection with an overall sense that it is even more fragmentary than a collection of stories necessarily is. There is a succession of half-realised characters, half-developed ambiguities. In the final analysis it may be that Fiedler's consciousness of paradox and ambiguity is best represented in the longer form of the novel where there is space and time to develop complexity rather than to simply insist upon it.

The Last Jew in America is a collection of three linked novellas. The main characters, Jacob, Vin and Ned, share a connection with a fictional Western city. They are also, Jew, WASP and Negro, isolated by their respective ethnic identities. The Jew lives in the West, consciously a stranger. The Negro, also in this West, aspires to belong and clings to a dream of a West founded by a Black ancestor. The WASP is seen in the East, surrounded by Jews, and the story recalls his return to the West where the dream of belonging fails to correspond to the reality experienced there. On one level these stories are, then, studies of ethnic dislocation. They reflect, with Wallant's Children At The Gate and The Pawnbroker and Charyn's Eisenhower, My Eisenhower, a Jewish concern with wider issues of ethnicity.

The Jewish-American authors involvement with ethnicity is not limited to Jewish identification as Charyn and Neugeboren's involvement with Negro ethnicity indicates. Fiedler's characters are marooned in a landscape in which their ethnicity is alien and they retain an image of belonging that reality repeatedly undercuts. These stories are also, in more general terms, studies in the anguish, tinged with comedy, of human loneliness. On another level the stories are about the tension in the West between myth and reality.

The title story, "The Last Jew in America," is concerned with the conflict between the essentially Jewish and the essentially American. Jacob stands in the midst of the remnants of two dead faiths, Marxism and Judaism. Louie had previously been the Jew who confronted the assimilated Jews with the European origins they wished, as Americans, to relinquish. It is this stance that Jacob, with Louie dying, assumes. He becomes the symbolic last Jew whose presence rebukes comfortable assimilation. He assumes the mantle that Eli does in "Eli, the Fanatic."

Jacob's experiences present the dilemma of the Jew in relation to America. He came to America from the shtetl in a radical flight from religious belief and the related commitment to the past. In essence he fled from a culture preoccupied with the past, to one preoccupied with the new: "I who fled the shtetl and the graves of my ancestors to be a new man in a new world."³³ He also avoided Louie on his arrival, avoided the symbolic last Jew who was the spokesman for "some unredeemable obligation to history and the dead"(p.17). Louie's stance inevitably made him an alien, a little comic, in a culture committed to the new. With Louie's fatal illness, however, Jacob assumes precisely that role: "He would become a kind of portable grandfather, a door-to-door link with the past"(p.48). Judaism here imposes, because of the Jewish past, a set of moral imperatives. Jacob's commitment to these makes him a pest, a fossilised curiosity in the eyes of the other Jews. Being ridiculous is the price he, like Clem in The Second Stone, chooses to pay. For the Jew, who is still committed to the traditional values, tragi-comic isolation is, in contemporary America, the only acceptable moral stance. The decline of Judaism is not only "a

catastrophe," but also "a joke"(p.13).

Jacob's commitment to traditional Judaism is seen as a fundamentally moral response to the past. Being "the town Jew" is equated with becoming "a professional conscience..."(p.17). Jacob is an insistent questioner, a comic figure engaged in a struggle to make moral sense in the Godless, prosperous, amoral world. He repeatedly confronts the Professors at the University with a central moral question: "What is the good life and how do you lead it?"(p.14). This insistence on moral truth is, in the context, eccentric and comic. He occupies the same moral space as the central protagonists in the novels.

Two forces are seen as having led toward the decline of traditional Judaism. In the first case the growth of American prosperity is seen as having radically altered the consciousness of American Jews:

From what vows, however, subscribed to in anguish and terror, from what compelled apostasies and desperate baptisms did this overfed and contented crew need a God to deliver them, Jacob wondered, watching his fellows in the waning daylight.(p.40)

The traditional prayer is inappropriate to the assimilated Jews. Anguish and terror belong to the mythic, European Jew (the Jew that Jacob symbolically becomes) not to the American who has relinquished, in prosperity, the burden of his Judaism. The impact of the Nazi experience is also directly felt as having led to the decline of Judaism and is felt, by Jacob, to impose a moral imperative upon him: "How many in the world after what happened to the Six Million? Let's make a minyan while we can, one more minyan. These days it's quite an accomplishment"(p.11).

The service that Jacob arranges in Louie's hospital room is a gesture made toward the past. The prayer is in the traditional form. It becomes, in a sense, a ritual re-affirmation of European Jewish origins that is without real meaning for most of those praying. It is for Jacob, however, a re-commitment to the forms of the past, an act devoid of ostensible meaning that is nevertheless a symbolic re-affirmation of Jewish identity. It is a

truly absurd act but, as has been indicated earlier, a moral one, a refusal to relinquish the final connection with the Jewish past. It is entirely appropriate that Jacob's voice should say no to the amoral prosperity of the American present, not in thunder, but in a comic, alien accent.

"The Last Jew in America" focuses on the decline of traditional Judaism in America, while "The Last WASP in the World" focuses on the rise of Philosemitism. Through these two stories Fiedler highlights paradox at the root of contemporary American Judaism. Judaism is, as previously discussed, simultaneously an anguished, if comic, symbolic stance deeply at odds with essential American myths, and a highly popular commodity in the age of "pop" Philosemitism. The second aspect is dramatised by Fiedler in "The Last WASP in the World" (and in The Second Stone) by the inversion of archetypes. Vin, the gentile, becomes the outsider while the Jews represent the "establishment." As in "Pull Down Vanity," Fiedler examines the plight of the dispossessed gentile artist who, because of "the Judaization of American culture,"³⁴ finds himself in an ambiguous relationship with a group who he sees as having usurped his place at the centre of American culture. He finds himself, in a sense, a stranger in his own land.

Both stories are concerned with the ethnic stranger who is isolated from the mythic location in which he conceives of himself as belonging. Jacob has made the journey from the European and Jewish East to the American West and there is no possibility of return because the Jewish East remains fixed in the pre-Nazi past. Vin has made the journey from that most American of settings, the West, to the East which is, for him, an alien Judaized location. No possibility of returning to belonging exists for him either. The West he imagines fails to correspond to the West he finds on his return there. The West from which he is dislocated is mythic, a forever lost dream that can be aspired to but never reached, as Fiedler has argued, "a theoretical place."³⁵ In the last story, Ned is an ethnic stranger with only a fragile fantasy, a West re-imagined, to represent the mythic area in which he, a Negro, can conceive of himself as belonging. "The Last Jew in America" is essentially about the loss of the mythic Jewish East, whereas the second

story is about the loss of the mythic American West.

"The Last WASP in the World" also focuses upon the phenomenon that Robert Alter points to in "A Fever of Ethnicity."³⁶ Ethnic identity, especially Jewish and Negro, has become a desirable commodity in "pop" culture and the WASP has become a paradoxical outsider. This is certainly behind Vin's awareness of the fact that "he made it with women without being a Negro or a Jew--"(p.62). At the Jewish wedding Vin feels his isolation in terms that emphasise this point: "It was a little like being invisible..." (p.72). Fiedler employs the simile that Ellison used to describe the plight of the Negro, now become the plight of the WASP.

The story again examines those themes that are recurrent in Fiedler's fiction. Vin is a man under siege and in terror. He is a middle-aged artist whose creative powers are fading. His relationships with women are desperate attempts to stave off loneliness but they are also comic struggles, ridiculous games of musical beds. He is separated from his innocence which was located in the West he dreamed, but which is undercut by the real West he returns to on a visit:

What he feared, of course, was that even his beginnings had abandoned him, like Susan, Arlene, and all of the others; that he had somehow lost the original innocence he had always imagined waiting for him out there, in the folds of those unimaginable mountains, the dark hollows of those virgin valleys....(p.116)

The mythic West in which Vin senses he belongs, the location of his "original innocence," is, thus, equated with the imagination. The cold light of reality reveals an actual West quite different from the West he dreams. Myth hits the solid rock of the real: "'Leave us out West,' he had yelled out of the motel window at a passing car with New York plates. 'Goddamn it, leave us our dreams'"(p.118). The story begins in comedy, goes again through drunkenness and ends appropriately in naked anguish and terror, in a desperate cry for help into a phone with nobody at the other end of the line.

The clash between the West as dream and the West as reality is also at

the root of "The First Spade in the West." Ned's dream, "the dream he loved best..."(p.135), is of his possibly real Negro ancestor who came with the original founders of Lewis and Clark City. The dream has a number of elements. In it Ned is a real Westerner not, like Jacob, an ethnic stranger. It is also a dream of sensual freedom in which Ned's ancestor enjoyed the nubile innocence of the Indian women.

In reality, the Indian woman is shabby, aged, drunken Fat Ellen. Ned's cowboy song is a ridiculous joke to the customers in his bar. The only "sensual" experience he has is with an ageing woman with whom he becomes involved after a drunken party. Her death leads to a funeral in which Ned, as one of the pall-bearers, is dressed in traditional Western clothes. It is, however, a comic parody of the mythic West. The "Cowboys" are "a beatnik from the East, a little sheeny with a shoe-clerk's moustache, a big fat queer who'd struck it rich, and a spade"(p.191).

The story revolves around the drunken party and the action disintegrates into almost pure farce. The elements of farce reverberate against the pathos of Ned's dream, his insistence on his identity as a true Westerner and his insistence on the fact of his belonging. The reader is conscious that Ned, like Jacob, is an ethnic stranger in the real West. His dream, the mythic West that he re-imagines with himself as a central figure, conflicts with the reality that Fiedler presents to the reader.

Fiedler's achievement in this collection has been to present varying perceptions of a West that is both real and permeated with mythic resonances. He has also created three distinct perceptions that are representative of particular ethnic groups while retaining individual depth. In this respect, the stories are effective as studies of human isolation and anguish. The use of the third person narrative is appropriate to these stories because they all present, in one way or another, the distance between the character's dreams and reality. Interior analysis, in the third person narration, enables Fiedler to render the interior consciousness of the character while preserving the distance that allows the reader to perceive the gap between

that inner consciousness and external reality.

In the final analysis, however, Fiedler's short fiction, especially Nude Croquet, is curiously unsatisfactory. The stories too often conform to what seems to be a narrative formula, an expected pattern. The recurring drunkenness motif, for example, becomes in the end annoyingly predictable.

The issues and themes that are approached here are nearly always more satisfactorily approached in the novels. There is a sense in which the paradoxes that are exploited creatively in the novels are, too often, baldly stated in the shorter fiction. It may be that Fiedler's awareness of the essential paradoxes at the root of the experiences he examines is best rendered in the longer form of the novel. He is a writer committed to complexity but, in the short fiction, he rarely seems to have the space to give this complexity convincing fictional shape. Too often he is reduced to simply insisting upon it.

V

In The Messengers Will Come No More, Fiedler approaches issues that are familiar in his work through procedures that are largely new to the practice of his fiction. They have, however, been the subject of his critical concern most explicitly in an essay, "Cross the Border--Close the Gap."

He employs procedures close to those defined by Robert Scholes in Structural Fabulation: An Essay on Fiction of the Future. Scholes defines structural fabulation as fiction "that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know, yet returns to confront that known world in some cognitive way."³⁷ A radical discontinuity from current reality is established in the primary and secondary narrations in The Messengers Will Come No More through the use of futuristic and retrospective locations in time. The primary narration is set in the year 2500, and the secondary narration is a scroll that presents a version of the crucifixion melded with science fiction motifs.

Scholes's polemic in the early part of his book helps to reveal the centre of Fiedler's moral intention: "We must use the future...as a probe into the truth of the present"³⁸ and, in Fiedler's work, as a probe into the metaphorical meaning of the past.

With this novel, Fiedler has moved firmly into the practice and procedures of the mainstream of Post-Modernism; he abandons mimesis in the use of future projection, accepting in Scholes's terms that "All future projection is obviously model-making, poiesis not mimesis."³⁹ The impulse toward fabulation, apparent in the stories "The Girl in the Black Raincoat" and "The Dancing of Reb Hershl with the Withered Hand," supplies the structure of this extended fiction. A denial of the technical conventions of Realism and Modernism is a recurrent assumption within the body of Post-Modernist fiction, and Fiedler moves into that area of contemporary practice.

In other ways though the novel sustains and re-examines issues treated more conventionally in the earlier fiction. Clem in The Second Stone, Marvin in "Nude Croquet" and, most clearly, Baro in Back to China are figures who

are actively involved in confrontations with the past. They assert retrospective consciousness in a world seen as futuristic. Baro's relationship with Shizu and Rod is established as an unresolved confrontation between retrospection and a denial of the past. That confrontation exists in a credible social landscape, while, in The Messengers Will Come No More, Baro's commitment to the past is translated into the future through Jacob who exists as the last expression of civilization's consciousness of itself. With that distinction, Jacob's relationship with the "Gypsy," Melissa-Melinda, parallels Baro's relationship with Shizu. In both novels the conflict between futurism and historical awareness is expressed in generational terms; the young deny the culture of the past. They express a radical discontinuity between "now" and "then."

While Back to China dramatises the decline of historical consciousness in the face of futurism, The Messengers Will Come No More projects the triumph of that future. A credible fictive present is replaced by a model of the future in which elements of Fiedler's version of the present are seen to have prevailed. The novel records, with the death of literacy, the death of historical consciousness in the dominant culture.

In the treatment of landscape, this novel also extends tendencies apparent in the earlier fiction. Fiedler's responsiveness to the mythic associations of place is apparent in the Rome of The Second Stone, a location directly out of Hawthorne's "fairy precinct." It also permeates the West in Back to China, is pervasive in The Last Jew in America, and is an intrusive factor in the gothic environment of "Nude Croquet." In all of these cases, though, Fiedler exploits the mythic association of landscape to modify geographical reality. In The Messengers Will Come No More, that kind of recognition is minimised. The cognitive signals are primarily established through the manipulation of names, Upper Columbia or Lydda-Beirut for example. Locations are literally places dreamed in the procedure of the fiction making, inventions out of the present connected with present and past by slender threads. The tendency to see place in mythical terms, as dreamed landscapes, is thus given a full realisation in this novel. Baro's

tendency to evoke mythic association, for example, is not a characteristic of a consciousness in this novel, but the principle from which the landscape of the fiction is constructed.

Fiedler also echoes and extends his version of Judaism. The story "Let Nothing You Dismay" is an expression of a child's awareness of a symbolic Jewishness. The gentile Clem in The Second Stone similarly recognises his role as a symbolic Jew which means, in Fiedler's fiction, "to live on the margins of the world in failure and terror, to be in exile."⁴⁰ Baro, in Back to China, is another such Jew for whom Jewishness is equated with marginal, tragi-comic life in the dominant culture. The most explicit treatment of this theme is in "The Last Jew in America" where the Jacob of that story chooses the role of symbolic Jew, assumes a continuity with the past in a "Present Future"⁴¹ that is in the process of sloughing off its connections with that past.

In The Messengers Will Come No More, Fiedler translates "The Last Jew in America" into the future, and this projection moves the centre of the concern to the last Jew in the Universe. This novel may be seen then as a fabulatory treatment of the central concerns expressed in the short story. In the post-religious futuristic world projected, a central characteristic of Judaism, and the last Jew, is interpreted as an awareness of the past. The Jacob of the short story and the Jacob of the novel occupy the same moral space; they record the past and are terminal figures in a civilization's awareness of itself. Both Jacobs are distinguished from their respective fictional environments by their recognition of connection with the past; they assume the burden and legacy of a consciousness that is repeatedly seen as characteristically Jewish throughout Jewish-American fiction.

Jacob's final note on Eliezar's scrolls in the novel signals this version of Judaism. Jacob perceives that the action of translation and commentary is affirming his connection with the past, and that this act of affirmation is a reflection of a fragile continuity that "in some sense" defines Jacob as a Jew:

My name, I am moved to remind my readers at this point is Jacob

son of Jacob son of Jacob...back to the beginnings of it all. But "the beginnings of it all," for the Jews at least, is the Patriarch Yaakov, whose name was changed to Israël after he had wrestled the Angel of the Lord; and whose sons are the founders of the Twelve Tribes. In some sense, then, it occurs to me as I near the completion of my task, I am also a Jew, the end of a line and the beginning of a new one, if the Jacob who is my son still lives: the inheritor of the Promise (q.v.).⁴²

Jacob's relation to Louie in the short story is parallel to Jacob's relation to Eliezar in the novel. Both Jacobs, under the pressure of these relationships, assume the burden of a sense of continuity between present and past; they adopt a tragi-comic role that isolates them within the dominant culture.

In this sense, Fiedler's version of Judaism is non-ethnic. It includes, for example, Clem of The Second Stone and Jacob of The Messengers Will Come No More, an ambiguous Jew of post-Jewish existence. It is also clearly not a conventionally religious view of Judaism. Abandoning conventional religious and ethnic definitions, Fiedler expresses two dimensions of Judaism, the condition of moral isolation, "on the margins of the world in failure and terror..."⁴³ and the role of historical awareness. Both Jacobs, Clem and Baro are in these senses Jewish figures occupying a moral space that reflects a symbolic rather than religious or ethnic condition.⁴⁴

While sustaining these correspondences with earlier work, Fiedler develops a fiction of particular complexity, and re-perceives recurrent motifs through modifications of Romance and Science Fiction structures. The inversion of archetype, exploited in the earlier novels, becomes a persistent mechanism. The future is projected as a reversion to political and social barbarism paradoxically associated with further development of technology. The novel exploits the structure of a Romance quest and links this with an attitude to time--the quest is simultaneously a pursuit of the past, and a search for a radical image of the God-idea, an examination, also, of the

metaphorical meanings within Judeo-Christian mythology. Within these social, political and spiritual issues, Fiedler exhibits a substantial concern with the fiction making process. In short, the novel is a complex combination of narrative structures and ideas. The object of the following discussion is to clarify that complexity.

Fiedler's earlier fiction is, in very general terms, an analysis of the decline of humanism. It exhibits an uneasy fear of the present, a sense that the present contains the conditions for the erosion of humanist values. These attitudes are integrated into the consciousness of Fiedler's protagonists, Clem and Baro for example, in the earlier fiction. The Messengers Will Come No More can be seen as the objective correlative of these states of consciousness, the fictional realisation of those fears of a post-humanist environment.

Politically, the fiction projects a reversion to tribalism, the decline of nations and the collapse of cities:

There were no real tears shed, therefore, though many pious speeches made, when Tel Aviv was first totally pillaged, then burned to the ground in one of those tribal wars so characteristic of our era. Some falling-out between (or among) two (or more) of the seven quasi-sovereign states which divide the tiny territory controlled in the late twentieth century by the single nation of Israel. (p.10)

Jacob records the transformation of Jerusalem into a "Fun House and Amusement Park" following a technologically induced parody of the apocalypse:

Consequently, some three hundred years ago, in accordance with a decree promulgated by the WC and ratified by two-thirds of its member states, wave after wave of remote-control Crates, filled with jellied fire, were hurled into the smoking center of the City: an appropriately obsolete end for so obsolete a survival. For three days and nights it burned, until all of its bitter past had

been fused into a heap of smoking slag, like Sodom and Gomorrah of its own legends. A hundred years after that, when the slag had become ashes, and the ashes soil from which grass began to grow, Liberated Palestine built on the site a Fun House and Dance Hall; and, if rumor be true, an underground brothel for traveling bureaucrats.(p.93)

A number of elements coincide. The city is obsolete in that it embodies a consciousness of the past. The destruction of that past, like the destruction of written language, is an expression of radical commitment to futurism. The apocalypse is ironically a technologically induced event followed not by spiritual revelation, but by absurd trivialisation of place. The destruction of Jerusalem is, in this sense, the destruction of the mythological and spiritual meanings of the Judaic past.

The ironic elements in this version of post-apocalypse are enforced through Jacob's analysis of the writing on the Temple Wall, while the existence of that wall asserts the fragile continuity that is the object of Jacob's quest. Fiedler enforces the ambiguity and irony of the situation through the incongruously scholarly tone in which Jacob comically misinterprets the graffiti on the wall:

The first was historical, reading in English, or perhaps American, "KILROY WAS HERE": a rallying cry, apparently, of the "Allied Forces" in the world's last Great War, which ended in 1945. The second, in Neo-Hebrew, was theological and from approximately the same period, though it alluded to events two millennia old: the mysterious execution of the pseudo Messiah, Jesus. "WE DID SO KILL HIM," it runs, apparently claiming the credit for the Jews. The third and fourth are political, though they verge still on the theological. "HANDS OFF THE MOON," reads the third; and the fourth, representing anti-imperialist attitudes of nearly a century later, says, "MARS SUCKS."(pp.95-96)

The destruction of the physical embodiment of religious culture is expressed through these devices as an ironic joke; Judeo-Christian mythological projections are realised only in the creation of trivial mechanisms for pleasure. The assertion made by Jacob in "The Last Jew in America" that the decline of Judaism is not only a "catastrophe," but also a "joke" is, thus, integrated into the physical condition of the fictional landscape. That awareness is objectively realised.

Fiedler combines dual conditions in this projection. The reversion to political and social barbarism, the collapse into tribalism is linked with an increase in technological expertise. Clearly, this synthesis of conditions implicitly denies the concept of moral progress as a co-existent process with scientific progress. In this sense, and conventionally enough, the novel is an anti-Utopian version of the future. The original element consists of the projection of political fragmentation in combination with localised authoritarianism. There is elsewhere in the Science Fiction genre a discernible tendency to envisage multi-national power structures, to see authoritarianism as a cosmic system. In this novel, a breakdown into tribalism co-exists with technological improvement, a flawed technology however.⁴⁵ The concepts of progress and improvement are, thus, merely the expression of mechanical expertise; they have no moral, political or social dimensions. The latter conditions are characterised by reversion.

The two narrations are terminal documents partly because they record a past that is, in futuristic terms, denied, but also because they employ written language. The activity of writing has reverted to its origin--the pastime of priests making records for themselves in a symbol system that few understand: "'Among our people,' he continued, convinced, I suppose, that I would say no more without further prompting, 'it is an activity practiced only by certain Priests'"(p.11). Fiedler clearly indicates a view of the nature of fiction-making as a terminal activity, and the analysis of language--the humanist activity of criticism--is, appropriately, the activity of the archeologist. Jacob's function as an archeologist is a metaphor for the role of humanist critic.

As Scholes indicates, structural fabulation requires the establishment

of cognitive signals that relate the fabulation to known experience. These signals are explicitly and extensively presented in the eighth section of Jacob's narration that separates the two scrolls of Eliezar. Jacob creates a microcosmic history of the contemporary environment seen from a future condition. That perspective establishes a view of Present Future possibilities. The inversion of stereotype, a mechanism that pervades the novel is identified; the transformation of male-female roles, and the "white Negro" phenomenon identified by Mailer are seen historically through Jacob's perspective. The predominance of youth culture, and the rejection of the concept of maturity, is also seen as a characteristic of the contemporary situation:

And only a common contempt for the hybridizers had kept Females from destroying Males, Blacks, Whites, and the poor, the rich. Unfortunately, the impulse to hybridize had been unilateral, coming from Males eager to feminize themselves, Whites' desiring to become "niggerish," and bourgeois yearning for downward social mobility.

So also only the old, which is to say, the Professors, sought to emulate the young, which is to say, their students; while the latter rejected "maturity" as the culmination of all they most despised. The rejection of maturity, however, meant the end of the University, which had been their breeding ground and nursery. (p.148)

In the history of university development as told by Jacob a momentum is established that leads simultaneously toward Black-Female elitism, and the elevation of illiteracy into a political ethic:

Not until the Great Book-Burning of 2069, however, did all of this come into the open. It began with the firing of the Library at the Marilyn Monroe School of Women's Studies (formerly Yale University) by an Assistant Professor of Witchcraft. (p.149)

The idea of learning, with its implication of past-consciousness, ends in

holocaust and barbarism:

According to these sources, when the last fires had burned down, the surviving students, all women it would appear, inscribed on their foreheads, with the ashes of their dead Professors, a Sign nowhere precisely described, then began a campaign of indiscriminate looting, rape and murder. Pinned off in the gutted Sports Stadiums of the last "unpacified" Universities, they turned to killing each other, and, if the record is to be believed, to eating each other's bodies.(pp.151-152)

There are clear implications for the three level fiction that comprise this novel. Eliezar's narrative, Jacob's narrative, and the whole, which is the sum and integration of those, are terminal documents, redundant gestures in the projected post-humanist environment. They are redundant through the fact of the use of language and the implicit desire to record, thus make permanent, experience. Clearly, the status of the narrations is an objective manifestation of possible developments, and Fiedler's novel is revealed as a moral enterprise in so far as it identifies the momentum of present destructive tendencies. There is an implicit didactic intention in the novel.

The parallel functions of Eliezar and Jacob act as metaphors for Fiedler's self-conscious awareness of his own function as novelist and critic, and that function is explicitly defined establishing the question of fiction as an issue within the novel itself:

As I write this, I have learned, however, that I was chosen, not as I had been deluded into believing to win the plaudits of men by freeing them from the limits of their humanity and their sense of loneliness in the Cosmos; but to compose for them, inside those limits and that loneliness, a dream of escape.(p.145)

In the literal and metaphorical "waiting for the end" that composes the function of culture in Fiedler's view, the role of critic-novelist is

precisely the creation of "a dream of escape."

A persistent mechanism employed in the novel is the completion of the process of role inversion identified in Jacob's narration as a condition of our Present Future. The feminist principle is fully realised, and the male is the subject sex, an exploited sex object with a role defined through the inverted cliché, "Man's Place in the Home." The narrative identifies the embryonic emergence of a male liberation movement, and sexual stereotypes are playfully parodied:

I would come nude into their midst--more often than not erect, since I have been conditioned to respond in that way to all women, especially Black ones over the age of forty. And Megan, who had, to begin with summoned me to her on some contrived errand, would call attention to the size and rigidity of my penis with what purported to be a snide remark about the mindless sexuality of "those men." But she was proud really, knowing--from, I can only presume, considerable extradomestic experience--how seldom the legendary bigness and hardness of White Males proved to be so in fact. Indeed, I am inclined to believe that it is not for our superior sexual endowment that our Black Mistresses prefer us to our Black Brethren, but for our greater docility.(p.54)

Black/White and Male/Female inversion is also expressed in Jacob's relations with Melissa-Melinda where he expresses bride-like emotions, and in his condition as exploited object, suffering rape, for example, in his childhood. There is, clearly, an inherent playfulness in this inversion, but that does not mask the moral seriousness of Fiedler's intention to, in Scholes' words, "use the future...as a probe into the truth of the present."

The seriousness is revealed when the same procedure is applied to the religious and spiritual issues in the novel. A central irony of Jacob's situation is the location of his exile in Israel. The diaspora is reversed, and the post-Judaic condition is signalled through the transformation of Israel into the location of exile. The concept of a Jewish nation is

abandoned, and the mythological significance of Zion is inverted.

Jacob's status as a subject male in a post-Judaic world is manifest in his concluding prayer which parallels Eliezar's prayer. Both address an ambiguous God, but Eliezar speaks from the terminal point of unchallenged patriarchal authority:

BLESSED ART THOU, O LORD, OUR G-D, KING OF THE UNIVERSE,

WHO HAS NOT MADE ME A HEATHEN

BLESSED ART THOU, O LORD, OUR G-D, KING OF THE UNIVERSE,

WHO HAST NOT MADE ME A SLAVE

BLESSED ART THOU, O LORD, OUR G-D, KING OF THE UNIVERSE,

WHO HAST NOT MADE ME A WOMAN.(p.182)

That condition is fully eroded in Jacob's prayer, and, while Jacob addresses the same deity, the form reveals a completed process of emasculation and enslavement in a post-Judaic reality:

BLESSED ART THOU, OUR LORD G-D, KING OF THE

UNIVERSE,

WHO HAS MADE ME WHAT THOU WILLST.(p.216)

Jacob and Eliezar address the same problematic God, but Jacob's stoicism is an expression of the unresolved nature of his quest. His prayer reveals the inversion of Eliezar's status in relation to that God, and, clearly, Fiedler employs the prayer to isolate elements he identifies in the momentum of the Present Future.

The technical procedure employed is clear; Fiedler identifies social dynamics in the present and presents those as completed processes in the fictional model. The body of the novel emerges out of the identification and analysis of tendencies isolated from the social conditions of the present. Jacob's condition is an attempt to objectify the implications of those tendencies, tendencies that Fiedler has examined in contemporary, social environments in the earlier fiction.

A central characteristic of the reality-model created in the novel is

the alienation from the past that is an inherent part of the social system invented. The political rejection of literacy effectively creates schism between the model world and history. In the face of this denial of historical continuity, Jacob engages in a quest for the past objectified in the scrolls of Eliezar. That past is both a metaphorical condition and a historical narrative, and Jacob's quest, the factor defining the momentum of the plot, is simultaneously a search for history and the significance of myth--man's past and the idea of God.

Jacob interprets the meaning of the quest:

Every quest, therefore, no matter what is its avowed end, is a quest for childhood: an attempt to return to the place from which one can set out for the first time. A snare and a delusion, as I have come to know.(p.96)

The protagonist, thus, self-consciously defines the ambiguities of the search, sets up a commentary on his own fictional condition. The quest, on one level, is seen as a metaphorical search for the father. The recurrent motif of father/son relationship in Jewish-American fiction is re-examined here. Jacob, the son of a line of Jacobs (the son, also, of "The Last Jew in America") seeks Eliezar, another son of Jacob. The protagonist in the matriachal society attempts to re-assert his connection with the patriach. Both narratives express a state of schism between father and son. Eliezar's describes the father in search of the son, while Jacob describes the father who, having lost his son, seeks the patriach. Jacob's discovery of the scroll is, in one sense, a unification, an act of communication, between fathers and sons--a final, fragile affirmation of the awareness of continuity. In both cases, the male acts in opposition to matriachal dominance. The communion of father and son is made in a landscape of female eminence.

There is another sense, however, in which Jacob's quest is for childhood. He not only seeks the metaphorical father, but the scroll that describes the beginning of Christianity, the childhood of that tradition and the birth of Judeo-Christian history. It is clear that Jacob seeks to

understand a stage in man's search for the idea of God, pursues the meanings of God that are shrouded in clusters of ambiguity.

The origin of the myth of the Holy Grail is described in Eliezar's narrative, and Jacob's quest is a clear metaphorical extension of that Romance. That structure supplies Fiedler with the basic narrative form--a Romance in a mythic landscape modified through the procedures and motifs of future-fiction.

A further modification of the Romance structure is the integration of the comic with the heroic. Jacob's search is, in the dominant culture, a ridiculous reversion to archaic forms and sentiments, and this fact is reflected in his response to the Messengers:

Each of the three then touched the living flesh of my right hand with the nonflesh of his: the Signalman first, then the one who had scarcely spoken, last of all their leader, who said, "It is you who should thank us, you who will be remembered until the stars burn out. As a hero. The last hero."

At the sound of that ridiculous word, I could feel my stomach heave over in revulsion. But "Thank you," I responded, like the true son of my foolish father, "thank you, thank you." Three times I repeated the polite formula, with an almost-bow in the direction of each, though they blasted off before I was quite finished.(pp.39-40)

The concept of "hero" signals the Romance structure; an ostensibly archaic form that is thoroughly re-invigorated in Post-Modernist fiction.⁴⁶ In Jacob's consciousness, however, the heroic is ambiguous, an act rendered absurd in the fictive environment. Fiedler fully exploits the comic dimensions of this quest. Jacob begins the journey, for example, following his erection; an appropriately absurd guide for the son in search of the patriach in defiance of the matriach: "Checking the stars for direction, I headed due south toward the Desert, the Scroll and the terrors Melissa-Melinda had not dared to tell me--my erection pointing the way"(p.88).

Fiedler retains, however, certain heroic dimensions of quest, most

significantly the profound pursuit of meaning that alleviates the existential isolation of humanity. Jacob's end is sustained in ambiguity--he dies protecting the scroll and his sense of isolation is modified through the prayer which stoically recognises the idea of God. Inherent in the prayer, and in the metaphorical meanings of Jacob's dilemma in the desert, is the sense that man's isolation and his freedom of choice may be modified by the concept of God and God's messengers. Fiedler's expression of God as a super alien intelligence isolated from man sustains the metaphorical importance of an idea of God as a force that limits man's choice and thus ultimately alleviates his isolation. Jacob's movements in the context of his final predicament are responses to imperative forces. The evolution of the plot, the objectification of a sense of otherness, modifies Jacob's assertion that, "we remain forever alone..."(p.214). The imposition of imperatives on Jacob by the Messengers is a further expression of a persistent burden coupled with a tenuous alleviation of isolation. The machinery for communication with those forces beyond man is buried with the scroll of Eliezar and the manuscript of Jacob, It remains, therefore, as another "grail" manifestation --to be, in the cycle of mythology, sought, discovered and re-buried. Man is, in this mythic cycle, not alone but deprived of the means by which communion is established with those forces operative beyond his world.

This alleviation of isolation is integrated into the structure of the novel. Eliezar's narration is parallel to Jacob's, the legacy of a father to a son and a communication between them across time. Through that relationship between the texts, Fiedler establishes signals that connect the symbolic meanings of past with Jacob's present, passing through the conditions of Present-Future. The parallel texts serve to undermine historical perspective and to locate the interaction of the two narratives in timelessness, in mythic or symbolic time where statements have a persistent metaphorical validity. Jacob's translation, glossary and footnotes to Eliezar's text are explicit commentary on the meaning of that narration. Fiedler clearly intends, however, that the transaction be dual, that the

reader modifies the meaning of Jacob's commentary through the content of Eliezar's scroll. The novel is the sum of these narrations, and the meanings described exist in the interaction of the parts.

The significance of the scrolls is established structurally. Sections 1 to 7 describe the arrival of the Messengers, the beginning of the quest and the achievement of the objective. The first scroll follows. Section 8, containing Jacob's extensive history, separates the first from the second scroll. Section 9, beginning with the words "So, I am done, finished..." (p.200), describes the ambiguous conclusion. Within this structure, the two scrolls are isolated: in the first part as the objective to which Jacob moves, and finally as the object that concludes the novel. The fiction ends precisely at the point where the translation and protection of the scrolls is concluded. Their meaning and preservation is, thus, given a central significance--the discovery and discussion of the scrolls is the objective of Jacob's fictional existence. The status of the scrolls is also signalled half-playfully in Fiedler's use of the name Eliezar which is commonly translated as Leslie, and this status is enforced by the dynamic function that the scrolls play in the evolution and momentum of the fiction.

The first scroll is the objectification, in myth-history terms, of Jacob's emotion in relation to the still remaining Wall of the Temple; it is the physical embodiment of the cause of that "ambiguous shudder of the past"(p.94). A number of parallels between the two narrations are established in the scroll. Both narrators are in name sons of the patriarch Jacob. The myth of Messianic delivery is common to both, seen literally as the intervention of alien intelligences but with the fundamental significance sustained in traditional terms, unfulfilled expectation coupled with a persistent longing for something beyond known experience:

How could they acknowledge what we Priests dare not every deny:
that there is no salvation from suffering and ennui except other
suffering and ennui; plus, of course, the endless waiting which is
vocation. Not prayer and sacrifice which the people demand of us;

and for which they support us in what seems to their poverty shameless plenty, but waiting for what can never come yet must be expected forever: this is our excuse for being.(p.113)

Fiedler forges a synthesis of two myths: the medling of future-fictional motifs, the intervention of an alien super-intelligence, with the Messianic myth. Judeo-Christian history becomes a fiction created out of ambiguous motives by the Elim, the Masters who, as the name suggests, are a version of the Hebrew idea of God.

The name Eliezar also signals Fiedler's intention to exploit the scroll-narrative as a mirror of the fiction that encloses it. Eliezar (Leslie) comments as follows: "all 'prophecies' of the Elim have served only to tell us that the future is no more than the present actualized, i.e., fully known"(p.115). That comment signals the nature of the procedure exploited throughout Jacob's first person narration⁴⁷, the extension of present conditions to the future--in short, as in the eighth section, "the present actualized."

In both the scrolls, Fiedler establishes Eliezar's fiction as a mirror of the whole. Jacob's footnote 23, for example, is another reflective device: "Here as elsewhere, therefore, I am tempted to believe that I am dealing if not with a hoax, with a (twentieth century, perhaps?) work of fantasy in a genre called Science Fiction"(p.132). The point is clear enough. Fiedler establishes a three level fiction. On the first level, Jacob's narration projects conditions of our present into an actualized future. The second level narration, Eliezar's, perceives our present from the perspective of the past. The third level comprises the interaction of the two narrations through Fiedler's self-conscious manipulation of the fictive propositions. Commentary is explicit and implicit, but, as in Charyn's The Tar Baby, it is an integrated issue within the novel. The narratives have separate existence, but are significantly modified in relation to each other. Past myth and future myth collide, and both alike are metaphorically inventions of Elim in their timelessness, and literally

inventions of the novelist in the creation of his myth system.

An obvious characteristic of Eliezar's scroll is the re-interpretation of Christ and biblical mythology. Fiedler establishes the Elim as alien intelligences operating outside of time-space dimensions, changing form and engaged in a perpetual cosmic war with the matriachal principle:

How I envy, in my time-bound, space-bound, reality-bound, flesh-bound condition, the freedom of the Elim and the Messengers not only to know the unreality of such distinctions, but to move back and forth across the boundaries they define. To be sure, there are risks involved in the ceaseless dissolution and reconstitution which such crossings demand: the metamorphosis of their essential selves into whatever form is viable in whatever here or there to which chance takes them. So at least the Elim tell me (self-pity echoing self-pity), whenever I cry out that I will serve them no longer in their absurd conflict with Woman-ness or Cosmic Cunthood, or whatever the Enemy is "really" called. (p.132)

Fiedler transforms the God idea while retaining the location of that image in timelessness, and the capacity of God to intervene in human affairs. The Elim are, however, like the God of the Hassidim, de-mystified and given human emotional weaknesses, "self-pity echoing self-pity." The connection with Jacob's narration is also clearly established--a cosmic version of sexual conflict that mirrors the nature of Jacob's condition. The reader's knowledge of that condition supplies the future perspective on the conflict, implicitly indicates the defeat of the Elim in the face of "Cosmic Cunthood." The transaction between the two narratives is clear. Eliezar's indicates origin, Jacob's indicates future and the cognitive connection with our present-future exists between the two positions.

The parallel nature of the two narratives is further enforced by the characterisation of the narrators, and in the predicaments they share. They are both old men given to digression; liver-spotted they share an unabated sexual appetite that they are conscious of as comically incongruous. Eliezar's

reaction to Mary, for example, is an exact parallel to Jacob's reaction to Melissa-Melinda:

I could feel her rapid breathing, the warmth of her cheek, through the coarse robe I wore; so that, old goat that I was, my flesh rose against that robe like the Sacred Rod of Aaron. Even then, I had already entered my sixth decade. It was, in such a setting, at such a juncture of time, comic, even grotesque. Yet I found myself not laughing, but worrying about whether the girl could perceive it or perhaps had deliberately provoked it. If she were to raise her head only a few inches, I could not help thinking, it would touch my incongruous hardness.(p.130)

They both record the emergence and triumph of the Mary-Matriachal (M-M) principle, the decline of the patriach, the separation of father from son, and the lonely death in the desert assaulted by a sense of the ambiguity of God:

Let me abandon metaphor for once and confess that I fear the Nameless One may always have been, may be now and forever only another "parable" of the Elim, another lie intended to enlist us in their Cosmic War against the forces of the Dark Mother. Certainly the world I have lived in for more than ninety years seems more a shambles, a battleground, the contested plaything of immoral and conflicting Powers than the creation of a single just and omnipotent G-d. The only wonder to me is that in such a world, creatures like us have been able to create the illusion, the promise, the hope of such a Being. We could not, I suspect, without the intervention of Intelligences greater than our own. And yet in a very few minutes, I shall repeat the Three Benedictions I have spoken every morning of my life since my thirteenth year-- blessing the G-d who did not make me for having created me a free man, a Jew and one who, as we say, pisses against the wall.(p.182)

Despite the explicit ambiguities, both narrations end in prayer affirming a tenuous continuity between the present and the past, a continuity that exists finally in their own fragile records and in the mythic cycle of search, discovery and burial that the novel records. For Fiedler, as for the others discussed here, an implicit element in any version of Judaism is the sense of some persistent pressure from the past.

The two narratives contain, though, a crucial distinction in the view of man's relationship to God. Eliezar's concluding action is an attempt to free man from obligations inherent in the idea of God, to give man freedom from those burdens. Fiedler projects a metaphor for the historical and philosophical process in which mankind has lost its sense of God. Eliezar breaks mechanical connection with the Elim, creates the condition of existential isolation and freedom. That action is a symbolic crystallisation of a historical and philosophical evolution in which the idea of God has been progressively diminished:

Finally, I shall turn the dials on my breastplate, the Urim and Tumin--or rather, I shall think turning those dials: right, left, left, left, right; and before the voices can respond: left, left, right. Then the connection so long and perilously maintained will be broken at last; the Elim dead to us forever, the Messengers able to come no more. Not until the end of all time. If the Elim have spoken the truth, however, we may before that end learn to go to them. But that is the concern of those not yet born, perhaps of you who will read this record when I am long dead and the very names of all gods but the Nameless forgotten. For me, it will be enough to have done what no man before me ever dared do--to choose to be free.(p.181)

At that point in the narrative, Eliezar's legacy to Jacob is revealed. The second person, "you who will read this record," has, through search, discovery and interpretation, attempted to re-establish the connection with the Elim. In short, he has attempted to rescue mankind from isolation and

to re-impose obligation, to establish a God concept in all its ambiguous dimensions. Eliezar's actions assert human freedom and enforce isolation. Jacob's actions are in response to imperatives, the absence of free choice. Thus, the process is reversed. The burden of a God concept is imposed on Jacob, while the isolation of man is alleviated. Eliezar's metaphorical action, the breaking of connection, asserts the freedom of choice and the burden of isolation. For Jacob, the burden of choice is set against the re-assumption of obligation:

Where such doubts come from, I do not know even now, though I suspect they were suggested to me by the forces that had split the earth and opened the heavens. Or perhaps this is just another form of self-deceit. I am sure of only one thing: that my doubts--whatever their origin--failed to shake me at the level where I still prayed, "Let them come, let them come, let them come, O God, let them come."

"God," I said, and I confess it freely, no more ashamed of that than the doubts themselves. Or any prouder, either. Given the choice, I who have never had any choice, I would have preferred like the Arch-Priest to will that no Messenger ever come, so that our human freedom remain forever uncurtailed. We men may not be a "Unique Accident" in the Universe, as our politics have tried to persuade us. But it is probably good for us to act as if we were: cutting ourselves off from whatever Alien Intelligences may be pursuing through us ends of their own. Why then did I call for help not even on the Masters of Space, but on their ridiculous go-betweens?(p.205)

Fiedler accumulates ambiguities around the deity concept through the consciousness of the narrators and, clearly, through the future-fiction procedures, gods as Alien Intelligences. The function of dream also serves to intensify the forms of ambiguity:

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What Eliezar had dreamed, and I redreamed for a world incredibly different from his, someone would dream for a third time. Someone not yet born, who would not even have to set out in quest of a place tilted out of time to recover what we two had saved and lost. It would be enough for him to dream us again with no help at all from the past. So, perhaps, he was already dreaming me dreaming Eliezar dreaming the El; and none of the rest of us existed outside of his unborn head. But this makes no sense at all, I told myself even then. And writing it down, I know that I must have been, for that moment at least, mad out of my head; though maybe the maddest think I have ever done is to go on writing, now that I know my last excuse for delay is gone. Even as I set down these words, I am aware that the rain has stopped: not slowly decreased, or dribbled to a halt, but stopped all at once. And outside my cavern the whole world is blazing with light.(p.212)

The "place tilted out of time" is precisely the location of Jacob's narration, and the landscape of myth where Fiedler forges his analysis of the philosophical implications of God. The location of this religious debate is not the sociologically credible world of Chaim Potok, nor is it Edward Wallant's fractured urban landscape. Fiedler's debate takes place in a dreamed desert, "out of time," somewhere between past and future--a permanent world of myth and dream.

The novel clearly raises profound religious and philosophical issues, but these are raised through a cluster of ambiguities closer to the obliqueness of Jerome Charyn rather than the rationalism of Chaim Potok. The "flight from fact" is sustained in this novel as an integral factor in Fiedler's view of myth, and as a characteristic of the fictive procedure--a structural fabulation that abandons mimesis.

The ambiguities do not, however, exist solely on the philosophical or propositional level. They are also a product of the comic tone exploited in the novel. The comedy exists in a number of ways; it is, when Jacob

follows his erection for example, a comedy of incongruous action. More pervasively, however, Fiedler exploits the linguistic joke, the literary echo and parody. Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym is parodied in the eighth section. Eliot's "A Song for Simeon" and the Ariel Poems in general are obliquely echoed in the second scroll. The desert imagery recalls the landscape of section six of "Ash Wednesday." "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is echoed in Eliezar's, "I realise that it is probability only which the Scanner computes: the probability of an instant which an instant can change"(p.180).⁴⁸

Fiedler exploits these echoes, and the issue of the credibility of Eliezar's scrolls for common enough purposes. He signals a dual intention: firstly, to make the process of fiction making a self-conscious element in the novel; secondly, explicitly to direct the reader's attention to the fictive nature of the enterprise. The sense of authorial intrusion and manipulation that this procedure evokes serves to enforce a polemical rejection of the assumptions of realism.

The comic elements, the definition of Methusaleh in Jacob's glossary and the non-existent cross-references to John the Baptist for example, are, in conjunction with the self-consciousness of the fiction and the playfulness of some of the stereotype inversions, intended to establish a tonal ambiguity consistent with the conceptual ambiguity of the novel. In this Post-Modernist environment, the idea of God is, as in the work of Charyn and Wallant, approached obliquely.

It is clear that Fiedler's formal choices are shaped, theoretically at least, by ideas expressed in his essay, "Cross the Border--Close the Gap." Self consciousness is seen as an imperative obligation in that fiction, and that self consciousness objectified in Jacob's narration, implies that the self-awareness of Post-Modernist art "must now include the perception of its own absurdity, even impossibility."⁴⁹

This novel is formed then at a point of interaction between a sense of the meanings of symbolic Judaism, and the Judeo-Christian tradition, and assumptions of Post-Modernist literary theory. Scholes does not discuss

Fiedler's work in his essay, but the propositions he makes are clearly appropriate. As so often in this discussion, though, the most explicit theoretical base for the fiction is expressed by Fiedler emphasising again that the action of critical activity upon fictional practice is a central aspect of this author's work. He discusses the "allure" of Science Fiction in relation to Burroughs, Barth et al., but his comment is particularly relevant to his own novel which is further evidence of the erosion of the distinction between critical activity and fiction making; a process that may be perceived in the fictional landscape occupied also by Charyn, Sukenick, Barth and Barthelme:

Science Fiction does not seem at first glance to have as wide and universal appeal as the Western, in book form at least, though perhaps it is too soon to judge, for it is a very young genre, indeed, having found itself (after tentative beginnings in Jules Verne, H.G.Wells etc.), its real meaning and scope, only after World War II. At that point, two things became clear: first, that the Future was upon us, that the pace of technological advance had become so swift that a distinction between Present and Future would get harder and harder to maintain; and second, that the End of Man, by annihilation or mutation, was a real, even an immediate possibility. But these are the two proper subjects of Science Fiction: the Present Future and the End of Man--not time travel or the penetration of outer space, except as the latter somehow symbolize the former.

Perhaps only in quite advanced technologies which also have a tradition of self-examination and analysis, bred by Puritanism or Marxism or whatever, can Science Fiction at its most explicit, which is to say, expressed in words on the page, really flourish. In any case, only in America, England and the Soviet Union does the Science Fiction Novel or Post-Novel seem to thrive, though Science Fiction cartoon strips and comic books, as well as Science

Fiction TV programs and especially films (where the basic imagery is blissfully wed to electronic music, and words are kept to a minimum) penetrate everywhere. In England and America, at any rate, the prestige and influence of the genre are sufficient not only to allure Burroughs (in Nova Express) but also to provide a model for William Golding (in Lord of The Flies), Anthony Burgess (in The Clockwork Orange), and John Barth (whose second major book, Giles Goatboy, abandoned the Indian in favour of the Future).⁵⁰

The Messengers Will Come No More has, with Fiedler's characteristic blend of wit and seriousness, further added to "the prestige and influence of the genre...." He has exploited the recurrent motifs of that genre to express the profound ambiguity of man's relationship with God, and the profound persistent pressure of Jewish motifs in an explicitly post-modern environment.

VI

Fiedler examines tension between Jewish and American concepts and perceptions with a very self-conscious sense of being a Post-Modernist literary intellectual preoccupied with contemporary issues of form and theme. In the work of the other novelists discussed here, those characteristics are implicit factors in the formation of the fiction. Leslie Fiedler is an appropriate figure with which to begin this discussion precisely because those issues are an explicit part of his critical stance. His awareness of himself as a Jew, an American and a contemporary man is expressed throughout his criticism, whereas those elements tend to be implicit in Potok, Wallant and Charyn.

There is a recognition that being a Jew reverberates against the basic myths of America. The Jews are, he argues, "a history-ridden people in a history-less land, they stand in a different relationship to the past and to Europe than any other American group."⁵¹ Jewish identity in America is problematic because the essential meanings of Judaism conflict with the essential meanings of America. The Jewish-American lives a paradox that the Jewish-American writer creatively exploits. The paradox is a deep and complex one. Jewish writers are no longer engaged in recording, "the high tragedy of Jewish persistence in the midst of persecution, but the comedy of dissolution in the midst of prosperity...."⁵² They remain, however, in direct tension with the Jewish past and with the image of the mythic Jew. The comedy is frequently anguished, the moral pressures insistent. The act of assimilation requires both a rejection of the past and a rejection of the traditional burden of suffering. Fiedler stresses the comedy in his criticism, but anguish at the decline of Judaism co-exists with the comedy throughout his fiction. At one point he argues that the Jewish artist's, "awareness of himself as a Jew is reaching vanishing point...."⁵³ His own fiction, and the work of his Jewish contemporaries, radically undermines that argument. Jewish consciousness, albeit problematic and paradoxical, remains at the centre of his fiction. The characters focused upon in Jewish-American fiction are, for the most part, never quite American enough to be easily assimilated,

nor are they, except in "madness," Jewish enough to revert to traditional stances. They remain, as the authors do, in problematic tension between the two forces.

The impact of prosperity has also challenged the figure of the Jew as a persecuted outsider. The success of the state of Israel adds to the feeling that this mythic figure is no longer appropriate. However, the figure remains a potent presence primarily because of the need, in the face of this strength and prosperity, to come to some kind of terms with the impact of the Nazi experience. There is a felt need to confront, in one way or another, that experience which makes the figure newly relevant, a figure that stalks through a recurrent nightmare. The Jews are, thus, in Fiedler's work, and in the work of his Jewish contemporaries, both a symbol of a particular myth and a securely prosperous group. The tension between the mythic Jew and the social reality is, for example, in a different form at the root of Fiedler's novel The Second Stone:

I have attempted to pass beyond the Philistine uses of stereotype inversion, as practised by Herman Wouk, reversing in my The Second Stone the traditional roles of accepted gentile and excluded Jew in order to raise the disturbing question: who in this time of semi-required philo-Semitism is the real Jew, the truly alienated man?⁵⁴

This is the kind of inversion we have noted in, among other stories, "Pull Down Vanity" and "The Last WASP in the World." It is possible only because the image of the mythic Jew remains potent and reverberates against a contrasting Jewish social reality in America.

Fiedler's consciousness of the problematic nature of Judaism is matched by his consciousness of the paradoxes of America. He sees the American artist, for example, as, "the recorder of the encounter of the dream of innocence and the fact of guilt...."⁵⁵

He has been involved in an attempt to define the paradoxes and

contradictions that he perceives as central to American literature. As a writer of fiction, he has allowed his consciousness of American paradox to reverberate against the contradictions inherent in contemporary Judaism.

Fiedler's technical preoccupations have led him to repeated engagements with the formal concerns of Modernist and Post-Modernist fiction. His approach to these concerns has largely been self-consciously experimental, and throughout his work there is an apparent willingness to manipulate a variety of structures. There is no single set of procedures that characterise Fiedler's style, but rather the tendency to adopt and abandon a variety of forms dependent upon the precise literary intention. In this sense, his fiction is often an extension of theoretical propositions made in the criticism.

His writing again and again examines the question of failure and isolation, often with a sense that those conditions express a valid moral stance in a world seen as amoral and, at times, absurd. He is aware of the paradox by which the contemporary writer expresses failure in a form capable of perfection and meaning. Linked with this, there is a consciousness in his work of the gap between what man is and what he dreams. His pessimism is, therefore, never simple. It co-exists with a sense of the almost heroic splendour of man's imagination: "the inevitability of man's failure does not cancel out the realization of the splendour of his vision, nor does the splendour of his vision conceal the reality and beauty of his failure...."⁵⁶

Fiedler confronts issues that as an American Jew he can hardly avoid. He confronts them with a contemporary consciousness and a developed awareness of the formal challenges that derive from that consciousness:

The vision of the truly contemporary writer is that of a world not only absurd but also chaotic and fragmentary. He tries in his work to find techniques for representing a universe in which our perceptions overlap but do not coincide, in which we share chiefly a sense of loneliness: our alienation from whatever things finally

are, as well as from other men's awareness of those things and of us. Rapid shifts in point of view; dislocations of syntax and logic; a vividness more like hallucination than photography; the use of parody and slapstick at moments of great seriousness--these experiments characterise much of the best work of recent decades

.... 57

That sense of the contemporary impulse merges with Jewish and American concerns at the centre of Fiedler's work. The absurd, chaotic and fragmentary elements are modified when "a sense of loneliness" and "alienation" is qualified through fragile moments of affirmation. Wallant extends that affirmative sense of life and, in painful love, with a greater sense of mystic possibility, he locates the mysteries by which man confronts and undermines his lonely alienation.

Notes

- 1 Richard Chase, "Leslie Fiedler and American Culture," Chicago Review, 14, No.3 (Autumn-Winter 1960), pp.8-18.
- 2 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "On Poesy or Art," in Miscellanies, ed. T Ashe (London: George Bell and Sons, 1885), p.46.
- 3 Leslie Fiedler, "Toward a Centennial," in The Collected Essays of Leslie Fiedler (New York: Stein and Day, 1972), II, p.297.
- 4 Leslie Fiedler, Being Busted (London: Secker and Warburg, 1970), p.52.
- 5 Fiedler, Being Busted, p.52.
- 6 Leslie Fiedler, An End to Innocence (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1955), p.146.
- 7 Leslie Fiedler, No! In Thunder (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1963), p.1.
- 8 Fiedler, No! In Thunder, p.1.
- 9 Fiedler, An End to Innocence, p.vii.
- 10 Fiedler, An End to Innocence, p.91.
- 11 Fiedler, An End to Innocence, p.91.
- 12 Fiedler, Collected Essays, II, p.280.
- 13 Fiedler, An End to Innocence, p.132.
- 14 Leslie Fiedler, Waiting for the End (Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1967), p.224.
- 15 Leslie Fiedler, The Second Stone (London: Heinemann, 1966), p.30. All further references to this work appear in the text.
- 16 Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Marble Faun (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1900), I, pp.xxiii-xxiv.
- 17 Hawthorne, The Marble Faun, I, p.3.
- 18 Hawthorne, The Marble Faun, I, p.27.
- 19 Hawthorne, The Marble Faun, I, p.262.

20 Hawthorne, The Marble Faun, II, p.120.

21 Hawthorne, The Marble Faun, II, p.351.

22 Hawthorne, The Marble Faun, II, p.65.

23 Fiedler, No! In Thunder, p.17.

24 William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury (Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1971), p.264.

25 Leslie Fiedler, Back to China (New York: Stein and Day, 1965), p.105.

All further references to this work appear in the text.

26 Leslie Fiedler, "Bad Scene at Buffalo Jump," in Nude Croquet: The Collected Stories of Leslie Fiedler (New York: Stein and Day, 1969), p.257.

27 Fiedler, Nude Croquet, p.39. All further references to this work appear in the text.

28 Henry Roth, Call It Sleep (New York: Avon Books, 1964), p.306.

29 Roth, Call It Sleep, p.319.

30 Philip Roth, "You Can't Tell a Man by the Song He Sings," in Goodbye Columbus and Five Short Stories (London: Corgi Books, 1964), p.169.

31 Norman Podhoretz, "My Negro Problem - And Ours," Commentary, 35, No.2 (February 1963), pp.97-98.

32 Fiedler, Being Busted, p.52.

33 Leslie Fiedler, The Last Jew in America (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p.17. All further references to this work appear in the text.

34 Fiedler, Waiting for the End, p.74.

35 Fiedler, Waiting for the End, p.224.

36 Robert Alter, "A Fever of Ethnicity," Commentary, 53, No.6 (June 1972), pp.68-74.

37 Robert Scholes, Structural Fabulation: An Essay on Fiction of the Future (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), p.29.

38 Scholes, Structural Fabulation, p.24.

39 Scholes, Structural Fabulation, p.18.

40 Fiedler, The Second Stone, p.252.

41 Fiedler employs the term in the essay "Cross the Border - Close the Gap," in Cross the Border - Close the Gap (New York: Stein and Day, 1972). The idea recognises "that the Future was upon us, that the pace of technological advance had become so swift that a distinction between Present and Future would get harder and harder to maintain..."(pp.73-74). The idea is close to that proposed by Alvin Toffler in Future Shock.

42 Leslie Fiedler, The Messengers Will Come No More (New York: Stein and Day, 1974), p.199. All further references to this work appear in the text.

43 Fiedler, The Second Stone, p.252.

44 This version of Judaism is not particular to Fiedler's work. Charlie Citrine in Bellow's Humboldt's Gift is, similarly, a terminal Jew whose search for "significant space" is finally a retrospective act. Nazerman of The Pawnbroker is a more sombre but comparable figure. The past is an imperative pressure in these versions of Jewish consciousness.

The condition of isolation is also recurrent and exploited as a comic device in, for example, the work of Bruce Jay Friedman or Stanley Elkin. The protagonist of Elkin's "The Condominium" defines his condition in a Jewish community as especially and particularly Jewish because of a sense of isolation: "I'm a stranger--that's something of what I'm driving at. My life is a little like being in a foreign country. There's displaced person in me. I feel--listen --I feel...Jewish. I mean even here, among Jews, where everyone's Jewish, I feel Jewish." Stanley Elkin, Searches and Seizures (New York: Random House, 1973), p.250.

45 Fiedler repeatedly exploits the comic potential arising out of the cliches

of the genre--projecting, for example, the existence of super technology subject to inexplicable and inconvenient systems failures.

⁴⁶ A discussion of the use of some of these structures in Post-Modernist fiction may be found in Raymond Olderman, Beyond the Waste Land: A Study of the American Novel in the Nineteen Sixties (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972).

⁴⁷ Eliezar's comment is also, of course, a close approximation to Fiedler's critical concept of the Present-Future.

⁴⁸ Fiedler clearly parodies the lines "Do I dare/Disturb the universe?/
In a minute there is time/ For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse." T.S.Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," in Collected Poems: 1909-1962 (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p.14.

⁴⁹ Fiedler, Cross the Border - Close the Gap, p.66.

⁵⁰ Fiedler, Cross the Border - Close the Gap, pp.73-74.

⁵¹ Fiedler, An End to Innocence, p.205.

⁵² Fiedler, Waiting for the End, p.78.

⁵³ Fiedler, Waiting for the End, p.73.

⁵⁴ Fiedler, Waiting for the End, p.102.

⁵⁵ Fiedler, An End to Innocence, p.128.

⁵⁶ Fiedler, An End to Innocence, pp.127-128.

⁵⁷ Fiedler, No! In Thunder, p.17.

Chapter 2: The Shapes of Love: Edward Wallant

I

In the contemporary novel, as Leslie Fiedler's argument suggests, meaning and consciousness tend to be problematic. Action or inaction tends to be seen as involuntary and irrational. The explanations that are offered for actions in the mainstream of contemporary American fiction tend to be based on the assumption that man exists in a hostile world dominated by cosmic scale institutions. This is called, for example, the Combine by Ken Kesey; it has a law called "Catch 22" for Joseph Heller; it is often just "them." There is a tendency, therefore, to emphasise the irrationality of action devoid of ostensible motivation. Causality and individual choice are diminished and, without choice, the question of morality is understandably muted. Actions are seen to have both comic and horrific dimensions, comic because they seem to occur without logical motivation and horrific because there is an implication that some mystifying institution directs action without reference to the humans who jerk spasmodically through the fictional reality imagined. The technical correlative of this view of action leads, as Fiedler and Charyn have argued in critical propositions, to an emphasis on episodic dislocation, narrative discontinuity and, particularly, a quasi-surrealism that stresses the grotesque nature of human experience.

If characters tend to act or not act as puppets they also tend to be devoid of the kind of consciousness associated, through the humanist novel, with characters in fiction. They tend to be projections from a nightmarish vision of reality with a density more normally associated with figures from comic books. The questions that could be asked about Daniel Deronda, Pierre Bezuhov or even Stephen Daedalus are often, as in Charyn's introduction to The Troubled Vision, seen to be obsolete. The protagonists in Post-Modernist fiction are often projections from the novelist's version of reality, and have a theoretical, symbolic or allegorical status. They also, however, embody a contemporary vision of consciousness. The thesis implicit in much of this fiction is that consciousness itself is undergoing a fundamental transformation. The disintegration of consciousness, and thus of what has been called "character"

in fiction, is a recurrent issue to which the novelist necessarily responds. Fiedler and Charyn examine the subject in their critical writing, although in both cases their fiction modifies the critical assertions made. Potok asserts the primacy of consciousness creating fictions that trace progressive developments toward a maturity of perspective.

Edward Wallant also straddles Post-Modern orthodoxies. He shares with the contemporary novelist a vision of the city as a landscape of ritualised misery and squalor which is fundamentally inhospitable to man. However, he integrates with this vision an essentially mystic view of the possibility of individual redemption. Two worlds co-exist in Wallant's reality. The urban reality has the same kind of texture as that imagined by his contemporaries. In tension with that, Wallant sets up a vision of the ineffable density of the human spirit. The harsh squalor of urban reality meets, at the centre of Wallant's fiction, the complex mysteries of the world of the soul.

Wallant records, like Nathanael West, the rituals of urban misery and violence. The characters in his novels are seen to go through daily rituals that engage them with squalor and pain. They are all, in different ways, reluctant versions of West's Miss Lonelyhearts. Berman cleans the blocked pipes in the sprawling tenements. There are clear symbolic reverberations set around his function. Unblocking the drains, he restores the flow of human life. Sol Nazerman is a most reluctant Miss Lonelyhearts. He feels himself to be immunised from the anguish he has to confront each day. His customers, though, see within the pawnbroker a means of achieving a kind of salvation in their own terms. For Jesus Ortiz and George Smith, for example, Sol is a vision of possibility, the possessor of a secret, an alchemist of the soul. Norman Moonbloom is the most obvious reflection of West's character. He shares, initially, the same sense of impotence in the face of urban misery. He struggles to retain emotional distance and similarly fails to do so. He transcends the cliches of his defining role and grapples with reality with inspired and frenzied desperation. In The Children at the Gate Miss Lonelyhearts appears both as Angelo, reluctantly dragging through the daily rituals of feeding

the sick, and Sammy, the mad Hassid, determined both to love and forgive and to envelop within himself all human guilt and agony.

If these parallels with West's novel appear rather artificial it is because Wallant's versions of Miss Lonelyhearts differ in one central respect. West's novel ends in the despairing vision of Lonelyheart's death. Nothing is saved. The consciousness and sensibility of West's character is a relatively simple thing. He loves but aimlessly dies prefiguring the more generalised apocalyptic endings of West's later novels. His impact upon external reality is minimal. Wallant's characters also fail to make fundamental changes in the nature of urban reality, but consciousness and sensibility is transformed. They are, like Baro in Back to China, metaphorically re-claimed from death. In essence, Wallant restores to his version of reality a dimension missing from the mainstream contemporary novel and from West's work. He sets up a vision of a mystic inner reality which, with the splendour of man's capacity to dream and love, co-exists with, and transforms, the "absurd" and despairing version of contemporary reality.

It is precisely the tension between those two forms of reality that relates Wallant's work to a tradition that can be seen to run right through Jewish fiction. Central to Hassidic literature, for example, is the concept of a dichotomy between what man appears to be in his environment and what he is actually capable of doing and dreaming. Elie Wiesel points to this in his discussion of the founder of Hassidism, the Bal Shem Tov:

The Bal Shem's call was a call to subjectivity, to passionate involvement; the tales he told and those told about him appeal to the imagination rather than to reason. They try to prove that man is more than he appears to be and that he is capable of giving more than he appears to possess.¹

Henry Roth's Call it Sleep, as Leslie Fiedler has argued, established basically the same tension: "No book insists more on the distance between the foulness man lives and the purity he dreams."² An awareness of this tension also helps to clarify the issues in Singer's Gimpel, the Fool. The reader knows that

Gimpel is a fool because he refuses to act in accordance with the reality he sees around him, but he gains moral stature by living the life he dreams and taking his assumptions from that alternative reality. It is Gimpel, not those who mock him, who stands as the moral hero of the story. Portnoy, in Philip Roth's Portnoy's Complaint, is also committed to the philosophy of "if-only." Like Gimpel, he lives in the land of "as-if," the land of dreams and possibilities that, comically in that novel, repeatedly reverberates against the rock of external reality.

This tension between two kinds of reality is at the centre of the meanings of Wallant's work and has profound implications for the way in which he sees action and character. Two kinds of action operate in the novels. On the one hand, characters go mechanically through the oppressive rituals of urban life and, in that respect, they act in accord with recurrent patterns of urban behaviour in Post-Modernist fiction. This mode of behaviour is typified in Joan Didion's Play It As It Lays where the protagonist drives endlessly up and down the highway. However, Wallant's protagonists also act upon mysterious, often quasi-mystic, inner impulses and, in that respect, they reflect a pervasive impulse in Jewish literature. The meanings and causes of this latter kind of action are not always very accessible to the reader but, clearly, the meanings derive fundamentally from human complexities not from inhuman pressures. Actions are often frenzied and irrational but they derive from an inner capacity for dream and compassion. They are not, as often in contemporary fiction, imposed upon characters, the result of pressures from some hostile, cosmic scale institution.

Clearly, then, this has direct implications for the way in which Wallant presents character. In the most simplistic terms Wallant's novels are concerned with the developing, expanding consciousness. Whereas the mainstream contemporary novel tends to focus upon the disintegration of consciousness, Wallant's pre-occupation is with the re-awakening of consciousness. Character is not just more important in Wallant's work, it is, to a large degree, the primary concern. Wallant's central thesis is that man's character has two elements: the face behind the counter of the pawnshop and the enormous

capacities behind the eyes that look out into the world.

It is clear that Wallant, while recognisably writing within the contemporary context, is nevertheless in an uneasy relationship with Post-Modernism. His relationship with the Jewish literary tradition is arguably more explicit and his fictional stance may be more easily defined within that tradition. Wallant, in various ways, confronts specifically Jewish issues. Critics, Marcus Klein for example,³ have emphasised the similarity between the four novels but this glosses over some profound differences between them.

In each of the novels Wallant re-examines aspects of Judaism. In The Human Season, Wallant examines the breakdown of the covenant between man and a personalised God, a theme that Potok relates to the holocaust in In the Beginning. Wallant also expresses a version of the Jewish European past as pastoral in that novel. In The Pawnbroker, the primary focus is on this mythic Jewish figure, and on the depth of humanity revealed beneath the myth. In both of these novels, particularly in The Pawnbroker, there is a tension established between the Jewish-European experience and the American ethos. In The Tenants of Moonbloom, and most specifically in The Children at the Gate, Wallant establishes a vision of a secularised Hassidic fervour. He re-makes this impulse into something akin to a new "romanticism" which is both comic and full of mystic significance. The most explicit form that this Hassidic theme takes is in the character of Sammy, teller of stories, exploiter of paradox, whose life is a paradox, but above all a secular priest and a dramatic embodiment of the Hassidic spirit. He acts, in a sense, as the novelist's voice within the novel and the purpose of the tales Sammy tells corresponds to the purpose at the root of Wallant's fiction, to emphasise the distance between what man appears to be and what he is actually capable of doing and imagining. The two earlier novels also confront the question of anti-Semitism. In The Human Season, it is something in the past overcome with an exuberance of spirit and, in The Pawnbroker, it is something in the past intruding into the present and re-making that present into the shape of nightmare.

Wallant's version of urban reality emphasises the inhospitable nature of the environment and he enforces that through a focus on peripheral Americans:

Blacks, Puerto Ricans and, above all, Jews. Like Fiedler, Charyn, Mailer, Podhoretz, Neugeboren and other Jewish-American writers, his concern with ethnicity extends beyond Judaism. He necessarily reacts to those issues of ethnicity that are intrusive in American culture and society. His characters' estrangement from their environment is enforced by their ethnic identity. In the context of Wallant's urban America all men are to some degree alien because his version of that environment is essentially anti-humanistic, but most of Wallant's characters are set even further adrift by their identifies as ethnically peripheral Americans.

In Wallant's fiction two kinds of visions of America are evident and the dominant one is of an American myth transformed into cliché. The process of assimilation and material improvement (the myth of "making it") is, for the most part, devalued, seen, for example, as Bertha's commitment to the soap-opera version of the ideal American family in The Pawnbroker. The same kind of sentimentalised image is at the root of Esther's dissatisfaction with her family in The Children at the Gate. Both Bertha and Esther, ethnically excluded from authentic middle-America, aspire to a dream of family cohesion shaped by an image of "The Average American Family at Home." That image is, however, presented as a devalued advertising cliché. Wallant also sees as specifically American the kind of rational good-will and optimism that motivates Marilyn Birchfield in The Pawnbroker. Marilyn, while a sympathetic character, is basically unaware of the complexity of human action. Rational optimism is seen as essentially an ineffective and simplistic response to human reality in which the irrational, both as nightmare and splendour, is a central factor. The elements that Wallant sees as specifically American are, then, either devalued clichés or superficial and misleading versions of reality that do not take into account human irrationality which is capable of concentration camps, selfless love and the splendour of dream.

Wallant repeatedly expresses the spiritual capacity of the individual over his rationalistic self. Again and again it is revealed that characters have learnt not what they aspired to, but something of mystic significance, the capacity to re-define their reality through Wallant's trinity of Love, Courage

and Dream. Jesus and Angelo come finally to the source of the secret they pursue but not by the paths they have defined for themselves. Jesus aims to learn the secrets of the trade. Angelo embarks upon a search for scientific knowledge. Berman pursues God with unrelenting hatred. Norman attempts to discover a means of retaining detachment and acting as a reasonable agent. Each of these characters defines a goal which he fails to achieve but in that failure learns essential, less comforting, truths about the nature of human experience. Wallant presents both the path toward enlightenment and the enlightenment itself as mysterious and simultaneously joyful and anguished. In each case a dislocation of personality, a fever or illness, precedes the climactic vision. The redefinition of sensibility is a process, like all birth, accompanied by pain.

In the association of breakdown with breakthrough, and the combination of comedy and pain, Wallant signalled in his later novels an important momentum in contemporary Jewish-American fiction. Charyn, Potok and Fiedler have employed the synthesis between mental or physical collapse and spiritual insight. A comic perspective on anguish has become almost a defining characteristic of a significant body of Post-Modernist literature. Wallant, with Fiedler and Charyn, employs comic procedures to enforce rather than undermine a fundamental seriousness of intention.

Wallant's contemporary view of urban reality is tempered by a belief in the spiritual capacity of mankind to transcend that reality. His emphasis on mystery derives not from a belief in the irrational absurdity of the world, but from a belief in the operative impact of the unknown. In this sense he is a religious writer for whom the presence or absence of God is not a crucial issue. It is with the mystic impulse, not with the accoutrements of worship, that Wallant defines his religious sensibilities. In that sense his fiction can be directly contrasted with Chaim Potok's where religious sensibility is basically expressed through faith and practice rationally justified. Wallant expresses an alternative, more nebulous, Jewish perspective.

The Jewish context in Wallant's work is evident in various forms. The

European experience is both Nazerman's nightmare and the pastoral source from which Berman is able to draw spiritual strength. Those twin expressions of Europe in the Jewish imagination are recurrent. They form, for example, the basis of David Lurie's perception in In the Beginning, and, of course, are expressed in Henry Roth's Call It Sleep. Overlaying these versions of the Jewish experience is Wallant's use of a Romantic, transcendent spirituality related to Hassidic elements. That concept of spirituality relates Wallant's work to a pervasive tradition in Jewish writing. These versions of the Jewish experience are set in tension with Wallant's version of the American experience. Berman's pastoral vision confronts the disorder of his everyday reality. Nazerman's consciousness of nightmare confronts Marily Birchfield's superficial, rational optimism. Moonbloom's fervour restructures and, in a sense, transforms both his own role as landlord's agent and the urban squalor he operates within. Sammy Cahan's tales and actions conflict with the values of the institutions (Church, hospital, law etc.) that he exists in relation to.

As a contemporary man, a Jew and an American, Wallant, with the other writers discussed here, was engaged in the re-invention of what those categories imply, and in the investigation of what those categories can mean in relation to each other.

II

The Human Season, more explicitly than the other novels, draws upon the pervasive preoccupation in American literature with the moral validity of childlike perception. In English and European novels of the nineteenth century moral good is repeatedly associated with innocence. Either characters learn childlike innocence, as Levin does in Anna Karenin, or the moral values of the novel are located within the innocence of the child, as in Oliver Twist. It is, of course, in Romantic poetry that this emphasis finds its fullest expression. Baldly stated, European literature (of the kind often called Romantic) tended to express initiation into moral excellence not as the accumulation of further information but as the restoration of the perceptions that are associated with childlike innocence.

This tendency, one aspect of European Romanticism, became to some extent a dominant ethic in Classic American literature. The moments of moral excellence, in Fenimore Cooper for example, are not often expressed through social sophistication but through the purity of Natty Bumppo's innocence. The particular horror of Huckleberry Finn derives not from the neo-Gothic terrors that float down the river but from the reader's realisation that Huck is doomed to grow. This simplification obscures a basic paradox in American literature which derives from the clash of values embodied in the concepts of Eden and Utopia. The frontier myth is large enough to encompass two kinds of moral hero, the settler and the innocent, Judge Temple and Natty Bumppo. The settler is engaged in diminishing the landscape of innocence, making Utopia at the expense of Eden. The settler and developer, mythically embodied in figures from Horatio Alger to Henry Ford, confront the unencumbered figure of natural man mythically embodied in the European imagination by Rousseau as the Indian, or as Natty Bumppo and Queequeg in American literature.

The tension remains potent in the twentieth century. The Arcadians still confront the Technocrats in, for example, Jay Neugeboren's Listen Ruben Fontanez. The emphasis on the moral excellence of the childlike perception does find repeated expression, often in complex and ambiguous forms, in contemporary American fiction. Norman Mailer, in Why are We in Vietnam?, fully exploits the tension between technology and innocence. He focuses on a

recurrent figure in American fiction, the adolescent, who stands at a point of transition with one foot in the adult world and one foot in the landscape of innocence. At the centre of Henry Roth's Call it Sleep David Shearl re-interprets the encompassing reality through the eyes of a child and his version is endowed with the spiritual grace deriving from innocence.⁴

Salinger's Catcher in the Rye has been seen as a critique of the contemporary social ethos. That element is a superficial aspect of the novel. Salinger is concerned with the terror of the adolescent whose childlike perceptions clash with the nature of the enveloping reality. The attempt to regain and protect the innocence of childhood ends in blackness and mental collapse.

In The Human Season Wallant works around the issue of the childlike perception in a generally less complex way. On one level the novel traces a process of spiritual redemption in which a man of middle age moves back toward the perceptions of a child and, thus, achieves an innocence of spirit that enables him to come to terms with the reality that envelops him. Two time structures co-exist in the novel. Most of the first fifteen chapters begin with descriptions of events in the novel's present. The movement of these sections is conventionally chronological. Following these, there is a description of events in the past and each of these sections progressively moves backward in time. The manipulation of twin time scales is used, as in Fiedler's Back to China, to enforce particular thematic issues. In the first fifteen chapters the novel's present is distinguished from the focus on the past by a separate date heading. By chapter fifteen the movement back in time has brought Berman to his childhood and, at that point, he has rediscovered the perceptions of the child and the figure of his father. In the concluding chapters no structural distinction is made between present and past. The implication is clear. The image of that past, Berman as a child loved by his father, now intrudes directly into the present. No structural differentiation is needed. The necessary precondition for spiritual redemption, the restoration of the childlike perception, has been achieved.

The procedure directly contrasts with that employed by Chaim Potok. Potok's protagonists move chronologically forward in time toward enlightenment.

Education and maturity bring enlightenment and, consequently, the Bildungsroman gives Potok an appropriate formal framework for the examination of consecutive, rational development. Wallant's procedures are the exact reverse. Instead of an obligation to learn, there is, in a sense, an obligation to unlearn, a need to move back to a period before mature, and often corrupted, experience. The contrast reveals two extremes of response. Potok's rational view of education as enlightenment contrasts with Wallant's view of enlightenment through re-location within the conditions of innocence. Both versions of enlightenment are created against elements of Jewish experience and the contrast also enforces a distinction between Potok's rational Judaism and Wallant's more oblique and romantic spirituality.

The process leading toward the restoration of childlike perception is complicated in Wallant's novel in that it coincides with a change of location. The movement back in the past takes Berman from America to Europe. In this version of the European experience Wallant emphasises the social cohesion of shtetl life and the quality of the pastoral landscape tempered, of course, by the ever threatening possibility of the pogrom. Two worlds are established in tension with each other. The America that Berman arrives into re-defines his objectives in terms of "making it," achieving the material security that became the essential object of the immigrant. In America, Berman, in accordance with that particular "melting pot" American Dream, for the most part achieves his objectives. However, the security realised is frail. In the first past period described Berman and Mary make plans for their future and the future of their family. Mary's death undercuts these plans. Wallant presents the objective sympathetically but the moral values of the novel are not located in the achievement of that material aspect of the American Dream. To reach the condition in which spiritual redemption is possible Berman must move backward away from American values, not only toward childhood, not only toward his father, but also toward Europe. On the one hand, Wallant traces Berman's material success in accord with his immigrant dream but, against this, he sets as an abiding source of spiritual redemption, the image of the shtetl where pastoral innocence and social and family cohesion are to be found. Wallant's

version of the European Jewish experience in this novel emphasises those values, deriving from that experience, which are lost in America.

In The Pawnbroker this version of the European experience is, for the most part, replaced by the image of the Nazi atrocities. Nevertheless, beyond that experience, Sol Nazerman, like Joe Berman, is able to recall the pastoral landscape of innocence, the shape that Wallant, and Potok, give to one aspect of the Jewish experience in Europe. A tension between the experience of Jews in America and Europe is evident. Philip Roth, in a different form, gives shape to this tension in "Eli, the Fanatic." Woodenton Jews, having made it in terms of the immigrant dream, are confronted by Tzoref and "the greenhorn" fresh from the European past they have striven to escape. Leslie Fiedler's "Last Jew" clings to the shapes of a European Jewish sensibility as a reminder to the other Jews of their origins in "The Last Jew in America." Like many of his contemporaries Wallant expresses the rich ambiguity of this tension in the Jewish-American consciousness.

The structure of The Human Season with the co-existence of two different chronological developments, one forward and one backward in time, enforces the sense of process in the novel. The sensibility of the character evolves very clearly as a continual process in time and in relation to time past. Wallant's preoccupations emerge through the changing shape of the successive chapters and it is appropriate to trace the evolution of the novel in those terms. This approach serves to emphasise the fact that Wallant's concern is with the changing shape of a particular consciousness and the evolution of a sensibility.

The opening chapters of The Human Season emphasise the fragile comfort of a life defined by ritual. Sol Nazerman, Moonbloom and Angelo all take refuge in ritualised behaviour and the repetitive familiarity of their actions serves as a defence against emotional pressure. In Berman's case, though, the domestic rituals outlined in chapter one are affirmative and comforting. Mary says what Berman has become accustomed to hearing, and his comments are "by rote...."⁵ Berman and Mary are, through these rituals, "protected by walls he had created, safe, abiding"(p.19). Wallant, as in the other novels,

emphasises the fragile nature of this kind of comfort. With Mary's death the comfortingly familiar is transformed into nightmare. The extended image that Wallant employs in the opening section is of a man drowning in a slowly rising liquid. Silence "became dark and threatening like a vessel filling with a strange liquid"(p.9). Berman is "drowning in the dimming, echoless emptiness of the house"(p.15). The evidence of his wife's femininity is no longer a source of pride but further evidence of his sense of alien grotesqueness. His reality is surrealistically transformed into a landscape of terror: "The scrubby grass seemed to roll at this feet like the rippled surface of water"(p.15).

Berman takes refuge, briefly, in the ritual of labour, an area of his life that he can, like Wallant's other characters, control for a time. With the disintegration of that possibility of emotional equilibrium, the naked consciousness must confront the enveloping sense of menace. The breakdown of Berman's capacity to maintain control of his experiences is prefigured in the ironic vision of him as the "magician"(p.15). The idea of planning for the future implies some control over that future. What Wallant reveals is that man's sense of being at the centre of his own destiny, directing and shaping it, is a delusion. When Berman switches on the light, he ironically reflects upon his own power to control things. The result, however, is a further revelation of reality transformed into nightmare.

Wallant extends the sense of the disintegration of order by focusing on Berman's relationship with technology. There is an implication that man's sense of control over machines is as much a delusion as his sense of control over events. In this respect Wallant shares with Fiedler and Charyn a mistrust of technology. There is a sense, more extensively developed in The Children at the Gate, that the machine is an element in man's alienation from his essential identity. When, in chapter fourteen, Berman again fends off Ruthie's cry for help, Wallant ironically sees Berman's relationship with the television in terms of the relationship between father and child. Having failed in his love for his son and having failed to comfort his daughter, Berman is seen, through the ironic simile, as the father of the image on the screen:

"Christ sake," he muttered, and got up to fuss lovingly with the controls until he corrected the picture. Then he went back to his chair with an added sense of proprietary pleasure, like a father who has picked up his toddling child after a little tumble and now watches him walk again on his baby legs.(p.152)

For Berman, as for Nazerman and Angelo, the comfort of the mechanistic proves false. The breakdown of the television set in chapter sixteen prefigures Berman's re-emergence into the world of human sympathies, an acceptance of the paradoxes and ambiguities of life which problematically defy control but can encompass both the splendour and joy of love and the enormous anguish of grief.

Wallant emphasises two elements in Berman's past which are undercut by Mary's death. In the past, Berman's spirit was irrepressible. He thanks God for the sense of joy that transforms him into, "A giant, immensely powerful in the midst of his laughter..."(p.65). The pain he feels after losing a finger in a fight is "overpowering evidence, irrefutable, of some towering presence"(p.92). Even the death of his son is seen as deriving from his sin, his failure fully to love his son. Anguish and accident do not diminish Berman's sense of a just God. The factor that links those events is Berman's consciousness of the presence of God at the centre of, and in control of, his experiences. Suffering, after an operation, he sees his pain as a logical consequence of his actions: "God's hand inside me, he thought, not in those words, indeed not in words at all. All right, I have done enough bad things, I need reminding. I accept, I take this with love..."(p.35). In the simplest terms, then, Berman's consciousness of God's justness has given a sense of rational order and meaning to his life. His relationship with God is, at that state, traditional, similar to that expressed, for example, by Max Lurie in Potok's In the Beginning.

The other element in the past that Wallant emphasises is Berman's love for Mary that comes to define itself in comforting domestic rituals. His aspirations are defined in relation to Mary. Berman's life is, on one level, a ritualised re-affirmation of that love, deeply felt if, for the most part,

unspoken. In essence, Mary has given to Berman's life a definable direction and a coherent meaning for his actions.

The disintegration of meaning is at the centre of Berman's loss. Mary's death transforms the familiar into nightmare and undercuts his consciousness of a God who, at the centre of human experience, mysteriously but justly controls events. For Berman, the world becomes devoid of meaning, "a monstrous joke"(p.29).

Berman is moved through three levels of consciousness that takes him from a traditional Jewish perception, through a contemporary sense of God as a kind of black-comic organiser of a cosmic conspiracy, and finally into a resolution that affirms the complex dimensions of the individual. In the first he retains a traditional Jewish sense of order based upon the idea of covenant between man and God with God at the centre of the world, imposing obligations on man but accepting responsibility. Mary's death transforms this consciousness and reveals a fundamentally absurdist view. In this Post-Modernist perspective, God is at the centre of a black cosmic comedy. Order and control exist but it is perverse and anti-humanistic. The final level of consciousness resolves those contrasting perspectives, and Berman achieves an awareness of the transcendent, spiritual capacities within man. A capacity to see through and beyond simplistic versions of human experience is revealed. There is a final affirmation of human complexity and interdependence in Berman's view of the world. Like Nazerman, Angelo and Moonbloom, he emerges with a transformed consciousness.

Early in the novel Wallant creates particular episodes that enforce a sense of disintegrating meaning. Berman begins to read The Brothers Karamazov and, significantly, the words recall a European past, the location he is, in the end, able to symbolically recreate in his consciousness. At this point, though, the words disintegrate into mere sounds. Similarly, without Mary, the images on the television become "nonsensical light..."(p.33). His reflection in the mirror is also transformed into an alien shape. Looking into his own eyes, he sees a face devoid of its familiar meaning:

They looked sly, and for a moment he had the feeling that it wasn't a mirror he gazed at but rather a window into a strange place from which some secretive stranger mimicked Berman and taunted him with the knowledge of a monstrous joke.(p.29)

At the centre of Berman's world, God is transformed into an enemy. The meaning that derived from God, in Berman's consciousness, disintegrates. Berman has what amounts to a traditional Jewish awareness of the relationship between God and man, the personal covenant that involves duties and responsibilities on both sides. Jewish mythology abounds with stories of confrontation between man and God in which man berates God for his failure to keep up his side of the bargain. The confrontation is recurrent in, for example, Joachim Neugroschel's anthology Great Works of Jewish Fantasy. An overall effect of this view of God is to emphasise the personal nature of the relationship. Not only is God personalised for each individual, but it becomes possible to speak directly to God without the intercession of priest or symbol. It also becomes possible to accuse God of indifference or silence. That relationship is expressed sentimentally in the musical version of Fiddler on the Roof, and in Elie Wiesel's history of Hassidism, Souls on Fire. Wallace Markfield in To An Early Grave and Chaim Potok in In the Beginning have used the holocaust to express a direct breakdown of the covenant between man and God, and this subject has been examined by Lawrence L.Langer in The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination.

When the meanings at the centre of Berman's life collapse, his initial response is to re-imagine God as his enemy and to engage in accusation and defiance:

Such a deal you gave me, all my life. My eyes are open, you. You watched me pray every day of my life, saw me fast all the holy days, saw me be kind, loving, honest, you saw me take all the other rotten things and still go on loving you.(p.33)

In other words, Berman has loyally fulfilled his obligation to God but God, in

return, has broken the covenant: "You," he accuses God, "figured you could do anything to me...that I was a hopeless sucker...that I thanked you for the little bits you left me. And then you do this...and this in the worst way"(p.33).

Berman, an unrepentant Job, engages upon a doomed crusade to confront God but he discovers, finally, a world without a simplistic version of God and without order. The two images of control, God at the centre of the world and Berman the electric magician, finally give way to a recognition that life's meaning resides within the multiplicity and flawed chaos of what is human: "Answers come in little glimmers to your soul, most clearly in childhood, in the sounds of certain voices and faces and things, when you feel the miracle and the wonder..."(p.192). The absence of a clear and simple faith in God does not, in Wallant's work, correspond to existential "angst" or to the recognition of an "absurd" world without meaning. Nor, as the concepts of "miracle" and "wonder" suggest, does it correspond to a world devoid of spiritual possibility. The loss of a clear sense of God's order plunges Berman into alienation and cold isolation, but within man there is the capacity to transcend that condition. Neither a traditional God nor the achievements of modern technology offer solutions to Wallant's protagonists. Berman finds the source of his peace in the values and perceptions of his childhood, and in the acceptance of those human paradoxes that make man both a victim of unbearable pain and the beneficiary of supreme joy. It is in human love and dream that the miracle and wonder is expressed.

Throughout the novel Wallant allows episodes in the past to reverberate against episodes in the present and to act as an oblique commentary on these. In chapter four, for example, the image of living death is fully developed. Sleep is linked to being buried through the simile, "coffin like"(p.38). While awake Berman is confined within a house transformed into a cage. In sleep he is buried alive and the image echoes the classic situation of Gothic terror: "From within its dark confines he railed against it, scratched desperately at it as though with his finger nails on its massive lid"(p.38).

The emphasis in the first section of the fourth chapter is on the emotions of grief and hatred for God. These emotions define, and cage, Berman's responses. This simplification of emotional response is heavily contrasted with the emotional complexity recorded in the past episode which follows. Berman makes love to Mary and exuberance is tempered by sadness. The emotional texture of the evening is richly ambiguous and essentially mysterious. Wallant repeatedly employs the word "something" to emphasise an emotional complexity which defies simple categorisation. The episode in the present records awakening into "strengthening hatred"(p.39), a simple crystallisation of Berman's obsessions. In contrast the past is vital and complex; joy and sadness are richly interwoven in Berman's consciousness.

In chapter twelve, the novel's present is contrasted with an episode from Berman's adolescence in Europe. For the first time in the novel Wallant changes the method of narration. The first section opens with a third person narrative in the past tense, the narrative technique used consistently up to this point. The description emphasises the mechanical nature of Berman's movements: "There was a sense of automation, of knowing what each movement would be, one after another, like a movie he had sat through innumerable times"(p.128). The narrative then moves into the second person, present tense, interwoven with snatches of interior monologue. Wallant creates a sense of Berman living in an eternal present in which there is a separation of body and emotion. Only actions and sounds are described. Berman's thoughts simplistically record trivial events in that present. Making tea and shuffling cards become aimless rituals. Through the emphasis on action and the linking of simple sentences with "then," Wallant creates a sense of movement without reason. Berman uses the action of the body to separate himself from his own emotions. In contrast the second section focuses on the exuberant and uncontrolled physicality of the boys which is directly linked to the density and complexity of the emotions aroused. The aged Berman seeks to divorce action and emotion. Berman, the young boy, is engaged in an attempt to link the two: "It was feeling they were after, a sense of heart and body bound together"(p.131). Wallant emphasises the rich ambiguities of the youthful emotions. A laugh is "full of excitement

and menace and pity..."(p.131). The actions are wild and instinctive. The overall impression is of a desire for experience mingled with a richly ambiguous emotional turmoil. Emotions are large enough to lead to the momentary transcendence of the limits of individual physicality:

Madly he sought to experience more than was possible, would have gone through her, consumed her. He forgot who she was, indeed who he was himself. They tossed on the ground in an agony of bewilderment and painful joy.(p.137)

Within the single chapter Wallant contrasts the mechanistic ritualisation of human behaviour with the exuberant, painful and ambiguous vitality of the instinctive.

It is, Wallant implies, through instinctive behaviour that man transcends not only his anguish, but the defined limits of his own body. In the midst of laughter, Berman becomes "A giant, immensely powerful..."(p.65). He becomes "swollen with the joy..."(p.92) of pain after losing his finger. The boys' shadows cover "areas far larger than their own bodies"(p.131). The scale of the shadow reflects the scale of emotions. Berman's past is repeatedly characterised by an instinctive zest for life, an engagement with the wide range of human emotion. In contrast, his present is characterised by obsessive hatred and careful ritualisation, an attempt to minimise emotional engagement. Wallant repeatedly employs the motif of the reflection in the mirror to point to this transformation. When Berman looks at himself, he sees a stranger. He no longer recognises the figure he was in his youth. The connection with the instinctive vitality of the past is severed, the new identity is alien. Like Fiedler in The Second Stone, Wallant points to the greater validity of instinctive response over rationalisation.

The movement back into the past reaches its climax in chapter fifteen. This is the last chapter in the novel to differentiate structurally past and present. The present recorded prefigures the growing impact of the past in Berman's consciousness: "Of late he seemed to hover just over the past..."(p.158). The memory of his father intermingles with the recalled European past. Wallant

emphasises Berman's diminishing sense of present reality and only the presence of the rabbi recalls him to his obsessive hatred of God. The focus on September, 1907 acts as the precise point of change in the novel. Before this Berman has fallen asleep cursing God. He awakens into a recognition of a world without God. Berman has sustained himself through his conviction that God is the organiser of a malicious conspiracy. With the fading of that conviction he is thrust into the confusion and anguish through which he must move toward an acceptance of his human condition. Berman has tried to defend himself from his own emotions by mechanising his behaviour. He has tried to construct an explanation for his bereavement, to focus his hatred on God. The breakdown of mechanisation and the irrelevance of his rage reflects Wallant's assertion of human responsibility and affirmative potential. It is at this point that Berman is restored to life with all its bewildering paradoxes. He lives again within the human season.

To be reborn, however, Berman must move back into the conditions of his childhood described in the section headed September, 1907. He is half asleep in the back of a wagon being driven by his father. The seven paragraphs in this section trace a movement in Berman's consciousness from childlike dependence to childlike wonder. In the first two paragraphs he is suspended between sleeping and waking with "no boundary to cross that could mark his degree of consciousness"(p.164). He awakes into an awareness of the massive beauty of the river and sees two fishermen gathering their catch. At this point, Berman gains, and by implication regains in the novel's present, a consciousness of the splendid mystery of man and nature. He recognises that beneath the surface of the river there is power "beyond his ability to measure or even guess at"(p.164). On seeing the fishermen, "Berman gasped as though transfixed by something beyond naming"(p.165). Of central importance in the episode is the silent communion between the son and the father who "noded slowly at the boy, confirming something wondrous to him, something he would have all the time in the world to find out"(p.165). Three elements interact in this episode. The image of the flow of the river intrudes into Berman's

consciousness. Father and son commune in silence and Berman's perceptions are childlike, full of wonder at the mystery of human experience. The essential preconditions for the restoration of Berman's spirit are established.

In chapter sixteen the images on the television screen are interwoven in Berman's consciousness with memories of the flow of the river which merges with the voice of the father. The breakdown of the television and an electric shock plunges Berman back toward life: "A peculiar craving came over him...not for food. He found himself trying to drink in the street, the people who strolled by, the ground, the stars"(p.172). The memories of the past, having undercut his consciousness of the present, replace Berman's obsessive rage with puzzlement. The direction of his quest changes from the pursuit of the malevolent God to the search for a resolution of his confusion. The last paragraph of chapter sixteen emphasises the degree to which Berman is separated from the sources of his spiritual renewal. He is no longer a child and has no father. The bed he sleeps in is an "American bed"(p.173). Both geographically and chronologically he is a long way away from his European past and his childhood. However, during Berman's search, each of the elements discussed in his past are symbolically recreated in the American reality he moves through. Searching for the river, he finds the sea and the rain. Searching for his father, he achieves the perception of the child and, finally, learning that human experience defies explanation, he can again become a father for Ruthie. By becoming a child he can paradoxically become a father.

Chapter seventeen focuses on Berman's quest and Wallant shapes the chapter around the myths of the Waste Land finally cleansed and renewed by rain. Berman wakes into an oppressive heat and a lifeless stillness:

Nothing moved in his view. No birds exploded from the clustered branches, no cats sneaked across the fences. The grass stood as lifeless as a well-worn rug, and two hard-white clouds were fastened in the pale blue above him.(p.175)

On the beach Berman is surrounded by the bedlam of life which is reflected in

an inner disorder, breakdown again signalling breakthrough. As the storm gathers, a central question forms in his head: "Was there emptiness? Or that black God?"(p.180). In the moments preceding the storm he sees a fight and despite his attempts to avoid involvement he is drawn into the event as a witness, a reluctant Miss Lonelyhearts. Throughout Wallant's fiction attempts to retain distance are undermined; protagonists are dragged into involvement with human affairs and emotions. This episode is an explicit metaphor of that process. Significantly enough the fight is ambiguous; it looks both like hatred and curiously like love: "The fighters peered blindly into the glare, forgetting with their bloody faces to let go of each other; they looked as if they were very dear to each other"(p.183).

The episode ends with rain and, as the storm breaks, Wallant establishes a synthesis of elements that point to Berman's spiritual re-birth. On the most explicit mythic level, the rain falls on the Waste Land bringing new life. Berman is also restored to the consciousness of a child, open to the multiplicity of experience. As the rain falls he opens his mouth "like a child's for the delicate taste"(p.186). He recognises that he is "like a crazy kid out playing in the rain"(p.187). The effect for Berman is symbolically to re-enter the flow of water established earlier in the image of the river. Berman is newly "baptised" and restored to that state of childlike consciousness outlined in chapter fifteen. He wears an "almost terrible expression of trustfulness"(p.187). Restored to this consciousness he can, paradoxically, assume the role of father comforting his child. As the rain falls he thinks, "My Ruthie should see me"(p.187). At the end of the chapter, he gives to Ruthie the comfort she has desired, the presence of her father. As in The Pawnbroker, the capacity to love, the re-awakening of emotion, overcomes the presence of death and enables the protagonist to comfort a mourner. Nazerman comforts Tessie at the end of that novel with a re-awakened emotional awareness. Exactly that condition enables Berman similarly to comfort his daughter.

Repeatedly in Wallant's novels, the movement toward that kind of enlightenment is seen as essentially mysterious and not open to simple

definition: "All he knew was that sometime between the previous night and this morning there had begun this odd momentum"(p.175). By the end of the book, Berman achieves a resolution of his anguish through a profound recognition of human potential and beauty revealed to the childlike consciousness:

Answers come in little glimmers to your soul, most clearly in childhood, in the sounds of certain voices and faces and things, when you feel the miracle and the wonder; and he knew then that the Torahs and prayer shawls and churches and saints were just the art men tried to create to express the other, deeper feeling.(p.192)

Significantly Berman finds no words for the expression of this feeling. Wallant emphasises those elements of human experience that cannot be defined, an innate spirituality symbolically recorded in the accoutrements of religion but expressed through love. Beneath the surface, in "the hidden eloquence of his brain"(p.192), Berman gives his recognition of "the miracle and the wonder" some shape, but he is only able to articulate a simple sense of resolved and calm uncertainty: "Yes, it's a think past what you can image, Yussel or Joe or Berman or whatever you call yourself. Maybe, just maybe..."(pp.191-192). The thought is never completed; it ends in "Ah, well..."(p.192). Berman's concluding words are expressive both of the peace he has achieved, and of a realisation that there are profound depths to human experience that are mysterious and defy articulation: "He had no words then for the thing he was sure of..."(p.192). The breakdown of language for Wallant, as for Fiedler, Charyn and Potok, is not an expression of failure but a recognition of the profound meaning that may defy articulation and be expressed in, or through, silence.

That belief is crucial in Wallant's fiction and it accounts for the importance given to action and perception rather than speech. The affirmative conclusions of Wallant's novels are not expressed through the articulated sentiments of the protagonists but rather through parable, symbol or image. Ambiguity, paradox and mystery and sustained as vital elements in this affirmation.

Linked to Wallant's view of human behaviour is his view of character. Unexpected depths of imagination are repeatedly revealed in the characters he creates. There is an emphasis on the extraordinary nature of the personality beneath the ostensibly ordinary, pathetic or simple figure and, through this, emerges a crucial commitment to things human. Wallant makes it clear that this is not just a truth about Berman but a generalised statement about human complexity. In this novel, the most narrowly focused of his works, he prefigures the technique that is fully developed in the later novels where the narrative ranges across a wide collection of characters. Berman's tenant, Russel Jones, serves to generalise Wallant's view of character. Beneath the frail individual, there are ineffable complexities of sensibility:

"There are times with me..."(Russel said.)

And Berman nodded in appreciation of the lovely mystery of the phrase, as though at the sight of a long, brief opening which revealed the unrecognizable treasure of the pathetic man.(p.96)

The ostensibly pathetic figure reveals, throughout Wallant's fiction, such treasures.

In the mainstream of contemporary fiction the view of character and action tends to be related to the vision of man oppressed by a cosmic conspiracy. In The Human Season, however, Wallant specifically moves from this position. Berman's opening vision is of himself as a victim of a malicious joke played by God. This confirms, in most respects, the view of the human condition current in contemporary fiction. However, Wallant reveals that vision as false. This novel moves from a landscape of despair into the richer depths of human complexity. Wallant's fiction stands out distinctly from the fiction of most of his non-Jewish contemporaries. In this first novel he established the basic source of his untypical creativity. Berman is not, in the final analysis, a victim of mysterious and malicious ahuman manipulation. Wallant invents a spiritual potential that makes Berman a participant in a different kind of mystery, the profound complexity of human experience.

III

There are some fairly obvious, but not unimportant ways, in which The Pawnbroker differs from The Human Season. In the first case there is a more clearly defined plot structure. On one level it can be seen as a crime story in which a plan for a robbery is gradually evolved, carried out but then goes dramatically wrong. The fact that this description of the novel does not, in any sense, touch upon the central themes should not obscure the fact that this plot structure creates a more coherent narrative framework than is apparent in The Human Season. The thematic climax of The Pawnbroker, Sol Nazerman's re-awakening and Jesus Ortiz's fatal enlightenment, corresponds to the climax of the plot in which the robbery takes place. The overall effect is to give a concrete shape and a definable context to the evolution of consciousness that is of central importance in the novel. The absence of a developed narrative framework in The Human Season, to some degree, deprives the novel of a context in which the momentum of evolving sensibility can be concretely realised. This leads Wallant to a reliance upon structural development based on symbolic motifs. If this can be seen as a fault, it is one remedied in The Pawnbroker and in the subsequent novels.

Another obvious difference is that the later novel has a wider range of characters. Sol Nazerman and Jesus Ortiz are the central figures and the novel is concerned with the evolution of both of their sensibilities. Wallant's range of minor characters is also wider and the overall effect is to balance the preoccupation with inner consciousness against a more concretely realised social context, particularly the urban environment. The wider range of reference enables Wallant more effectively to contrast conflicting versions of reality and to give direct fictional form to the range of human emotion that he describes in The Human Season.

Sol and Jesus, like Berman, move toward an affirmation of life values but the place that they eventually arrive at has, in each case, a different texture. Berman moves from a death-like condition to a sense of resolution in which he can cease to mourn. Nazerman moves from a state of emotional stasis, like stone, to a point where he can again begin to mourn. Ortiz quests for

enlightenment and gains fatal insight not into what he sought, but into the profounder mysteries of death and compassion. Angelo's awakening in The Children at the Gate is seen, metaphorically, as a wounding. Nazerman similarly awakes into anguish. Ortiz paradoxically "awakes," not into a metaphorical wounding, but an actual death. The conclusion of The Human Season is an essentially tidy one with the issues, to a large degree, resolved. The Pawnbroker ends in unresolved paradox. Individual redemption leads to Ortiz's death and, for Nazerman, to mourning. The squalor and misery of the urban reality is unchanged by the events of the novel. Wallant's vision encompasses paradox and ambiguity operative in human experience. The power of love in The Human Season leads to a resolution of tensions whereas in The Pawnbroker the act of love is seen as burden making it more, rather than less, difficult to live within the enveloping reality. Love is seen, throughout the fiction discussed in this thesis, to involve various degrees of pain. It is rarely an uncomplicated emotion...

The myths employed in Wallant's novels have been catalogued fairly coherently elsewhere.⁶ There is, though, a growing ambiguity and complexity in Wallant's use of myth. In The Human Season the mythic elements are fairly simply definable. The re-making of the Job story interacts with the mythically potent search of the son for the father. The theme of symbolic death and re-birth is structured, for the most part, around the symbols of waste land and water. Wallant says nothing central about the nature of those myths. He does not, as Fiedler does for example, attempt to re-interpret myth in the body of the novel. Instead, he uses mythic reference to impose an identifiable structure on the novel in the absence of clear narrative development.

There is a much more radical use of myth in the later novels. The mythic figure of the pawnbroker, an embodiment of a Jewish stereotype, is undercut by the revelation of the complex character beyond the myth. Nazerman is both a projection of a Jewish myth and a fully developed characterisation exposing the superficiality of the stereotype. Wallant also confronts the central myths of peripheral Americans, the vision of a prosperous assimilated future; "making

it" in "the melting pot" is ironically treated in this novel. Bertha's projection of an ideal middle-American family derives from cheap advertising cliches and ignores the reality of the people she actually lives with. Alternatively Ortiz's image of "making it" leads him toward fatal action. Material acquisition is a central factor in "making it" but, in Wallant's novel, it becomes a debased obsession. The central mechanism by which Wallant devalues the myth is, of course, the pawnshop itself where the dehumanised nature of material acquisitions and material acquisitiveness is repeatedly emphasised. The search of sons for fathers also reverberates around this novel. Both Ortiz and Morton see Sol as a kind of surrogate father, but Sol is a father nightmarishly deprived of children, in search of emotional stasis and detachment not in pursuit of a substitute son. The use of myth in The Pawnbroker does not serve, as it tends to in The Human Season, to clarify issues but it emphasises the unresolved, problematic nature of the paradoxes at the root of the experiences described.

The momentum of the novel derives from Wallant's manipulation of various narrative strands which interact with each other to create a sense of tension, and together define the thematic preoccupations. These narrative strands are of three kinds. The first employs conventionally progressive chronology. The robbery is gradually evolved and finally executed. The anniversary of the death of Sol's family grows nearer. Sol moves through the revelation of the source of his finance toward a confrontation with Murillo. Tessie's father gradually slips toward death. Sol's relationship with Marilyn slowly develops, and Morton's consciousness of Sol is progressively revealed to the reader. The second narrative form emphasises an absence of development through a focus on repetition. A great deal of space in the novel is occupied by descriptions of the business that takes place in the pawnshop and, for the most part, this is unchanging and ritualised. The rituals of urban misery and deprivation are rendered as essentially timeless. The third direction that the narrative moves in is shaped by Sol's memory of the past. There is no progressive movement backward in time in this novel. The first memory focuses on the journey to the concentration camp. Then various incidents in the camp are recalled and one

of the last past episodes described is an idyllic pre-war picnic. There is though a definable evolution of sensibility suggested by the interrelationship of these episodes. They indicate movement from personalised anguish to re-affirmation of human interdependence that finally enables Sol to share Tessie's burden of pain.

The evolution and execution of the robbery serves to emphasise, and carry, some of the central themes. The planning of the robbery originates with the negroes and is finally supported by Ortiz. Wallant emphasises the fact that the action develops from the corruption of dreams by materialist ethic. The half-wit, Buck White, yearns with savage intensity for the dignity that he has lost. In his befuddled brain this is translated into the possessions that will enable him to regain his wife's loyalty. The "barbaric splendour"⁷ that Buck dreams is transformed into a "gloomy invocation of legendary riches"(p.86). The concrete focus of these dreams is "a Cadillac Fleetwood, black with white sidewalls..."(p.235). Buck's path back to dignity and masculinity is defined by cheap images of material possessions. For Tangee, Buck and Robinson, yearning takes on the shape of material greed and the debased pursuit of these dreams creates the momentum that leads to the robbery.

Ortiz's involvement in the robbery also derives from the corruption of a quest for what is an indefinable spiritual mystery: "Jesus Ortiz felt a vast shapeless desire, but it was too great and beautiful to attain shape. So he thought about money and the power of business"(p.88). The object of Ortiz's quest, in its uncorrupted form, can only be defined symbolically. In that form Ortiz "did not recognise the shape of his aspiration"(p.111). The source of the enlightenment that Ortiz seeks is hidden and what it reveals is visualised as possibly both fearful and magnificent, similar to "the miracle and the wonder" perceived by Berman:

And then he imaged himself approaching a great light in the earth, filled with an immense trembling excitement, not knowing the source of the light, moving toward it and wondering whether it would be fearsome or exalting.(p.71)

The source of "the light" becomes manifest in Ortiz's consciousness in the secrets he imagines Sol to possess. The concentration camp numbers etched on Sol's arm are seen by Ortiz as an unreadable hieroglyphic connected with the mystery that he seeks to penetrate:

Details of Sol's figure obsessed him; the glasses, the secret structure of his face and body, the numbers etched on his arm, all elements of something majestic and tragic, something he had to possess.(pp.257-258)

The true object of Ortiz's quest becomes revealed as the spiritual mystery he perceives within the anguished emotional depths of the pawnbroker. The irony is that he moves towards this fatal knowledge through the corruption of his quest by Sol's assumption of the identity of a mythic Jewish Pawnbroker:

And all the while, half consciously, he got a perverse pleasure from the sense of kinship, of community with all the centuries of hand-rubbing Shylocks. Yes, he, Sol Nazerman, practised the ancient, despised profession; and he survived!(p.8)

The other negroes have their dreams corrupted into the shape of materialist obsessions by the cliches of an American Dream, Ortiz's quest is corrupted by a Jewish myth, the myth of the mercantile heritage objectified in the stereotype of the pawnbroker. The word "secret"(p.75) that Sol applies to the tricks of pawnbroking evoke in Ortiz the sense that he moving towards his revelation. The basis of the mythic pawnbroker's secret is revealed by Sol:

Next to the speed of light, which Einstein tells us is the only absolute in the universe, second only to that I would rank money. There, I have taught you the Pawnbroker's Credo, Ortiz. What else is there to know!(p.115)

Ortiz's desire to learn the mystery that he perceives in Sol thus becomes falsely defined in the image of money and it is this corruption of his yearning that leads Ortiz into the robbery. The "something he had to possess" becomes

defined in "the simple words for material things: money, a business, a name" (p.258). The last of these things hints at the greater dimension of the quest, the search for self-definition. Like other Wallant protagonists, Ortiz has no language to name those things he desires. They are elements of perception that defy articulation. Ortiz finds only a debased materialism to describe what he seeks, a perverse metaphor that expresses both the corruption of his aspiration, and the inadequacy of language.

The nature of the quest is emphasised symbolically by the image of Nazerman as Christ. In the first case Ortiz sees the image as a kind of harshly ironic joke:

He tried to imagine the Pawnbroker in a position like that, nailed up on a cross, the heavy, graceless body broken and naked, the great puffy face bent to one side...with the glasses on! He began to chuckle, harshly.(p.238)

However, as Ortiz moves towards the robbery the image recurs: "Either in the hallucinatory foyer before sleep or already in dreams, he glimpsed again, briefly, the figure of a heavy man, awkwardly transfixed on a cross, a man with blue, cryptic numbers on his arm"(p.247). The image is, of course, finally fully realised in the image of Sol "crucified" over the dying Ortiz. The "regret and accusation"(p.116) that Ortiz feels in relation to Sol, after the revelation of the "Pawnbroker's Credo," is indicative of a growing, if undefined, mystic consciousness within Ortiz. What Ortiz finally seeks is the spiritual mystery inherent in the image of Christ, realised for him in his own death but misleadingly defined by Sol. The lesson that Ortiz learns from Sol, to value money above all, ironically leads towards the fatal revelation of human compassion that causes Ortiz to protect the pawnbroker with his life.

Wallant leaves the death of Ortiz, the climax of this narrative strand, as ambiguous. Ortiz's eyes seem to Sol to be "dark openings into mystery"(p.271). The words Ortiz tries to speak are not heard but, for Sol, the essential meaning of Ortiz's death is that it leads him back to life. For Ortiz it is the conclusion and resolution of a quest for a mystery. It is on one level the

revelation of Sol's secret, the knowledge of pain and death. It is also, however, an act of selfless compassion in which finally both Sol and Ortiz are able to express silently the bewildering paradoxes of a human interdependence that looks very much like love:

And all the time he made a cover of his body over the wounded youth, kept his eyes on his assistant's eyes. There was a strange struggle between them, a silent tugging that left them both bewildered and dazed looking.(p.271)

Wallant uses the evolution of the robbery to emphasise the debasement of spiritual aspiration by materialism, manifest both in the Jewish mercantile myth and in the American myth of "Making it." There is a direct correlation of selective Jewish and American myth established. He also uses this aspect of the plot, its evolution and climax, as a narrative structure in which Ortiz's quest and Sol's reawakening can be defined.

In those elements of the narrative that move forward in a conventionally chronological manner it is particularly noticeable that most, like the robbery, move toward a climax that involves death or the threat of death. Tessie's father gradually declines. The confrontation with Murillo threatens Sol's life and the memory that increasingly oppresses Sol is the anniversary of the death of his family. As these narratives develop it becomes increasingly clear that Wallant's intention is to trace the transformation of the significance of death in the novel. The object is essentially to transform the image of death in Sol's consciousness, to invest death with a significance for the living. Through the death of Ortiz, Sol is able to reaffirm his interdependence with other humans and, thus, to share the anguish of Tessie's mourning.

The atmosphere of Tessie's apartment is permeated with memories of the European experience. The present is shaped around the attitudes to death defined in that European past. Death is a relief from the burden of the only prevailing life-value, survival. Sol's ironic attitude towards death is indicative of the absence of positive life values. Survival is a black joke and the persistence of human life only an indication of the absence or indifference of God:

Sol's body is a carefully manufactured series of balances and checks, the result of an experiment upon him by Nazi doctors. Wallant uses the body as a metaphor for Sol's consciousness. Physical or mental breakdown repeatedly precedes the resurrection of sensibility in Wallant's fiction. Chapter twenty two of The Pawnbroker focuses on Sol's degeneration into a state of mental frenzy which renders him incapable of fulfilling his commercial function. Angelo and Moonbloom suffer periods of fever. In each of these cases collapse precedes the climax of spiritual redemption. The state of the body is used metaphorically to indicate the condition of the spirit. In the opening of The Pawnbroker, Sol's movements are compared with "some kind of metal conveyance"(p.4). The description reflects the state of Sol's consciousness which aspires to a mechanistic systematization as a protection against the pressures of the human. That aspiration he shares, of course, with the protagonists of the other novels. Berman, Angelo and Moonbloom attempt to create defensive routines that will protect them from the pressures of intimacy. As Nazerman moves toward the first confrontation with Murillo, a breakdown of physical equilibrium mirrors his state of inner disorder:

For now his body seemed affected by his odd indisposition. There were a great number of insupportable positions for his body, positions he could not maintain without his hands or head or legs beginning to tremble a little.(p.151)

Breakdown leads in the direction of breakthrough. Sol's mental equilibrium, his defence against emotion, is under attack on many fronts. The accumulative pressure of the human misery that confronts him daily interacts with the persistence of a memory that brings him repeatedly into contact with anguish and terror from the past. In a sense, Sol's confrontation with Murillo serves to synthesise these elements, to bring together at a single point Sol's consciousness of the present and the past and to undercut the careful mental equilibrium he has vainly struggled to construct.

The determination to break with Murillo is a recognition of Sol's involvement with the exploitation of the surrounding urban misery. It is thus

a moral recognition of human responsibility: "Murillo's relationship with the brothel rode his consciousness with galling persistence"(p.151). In the actual confrontation, Murillo's action recalls the nightmarish past when Sol was forced to watch his wife being abused by a Nazi. Murillo's henchman pushes a gun into Sol's mouth, recreating in the present an image from Sol's nightmare and re-enforcing his consciousness of a present reality shaped by the past:

It had been so long, so long since his nightmares were as real as taste and touch, since they came to him in waking hours. He should have remembered more faithfully that this was the real taste of life, that it was not confined to dreams.(pp.163-164)

Murillo's threat to kill Sol is, however, unfulfilled precisely because Murillo recognises that, in Sol's consciousness, life has no value and death is consequently no effective threat. In the face of Sol's attitude to life Murillo is rendered impotent: ..

There is nothing you can do to me. The only punishment you are capable of inflicting is impotent. I could learn nothing from it. And the threat of it is just a trifle. You don't understand, do you? It is a pity. What will you deprive me of? Look around at my kingdom. What is it?(p.261)

Sol's past, full of death, has effectively removed from life and death all sense of meaning. He is unable to care about his own death for precisely the same reasons that make him unable to mourn with Tessie.

This attitude to death and life derives from those past experiences that intrude nightmarishly into Sol's present and, as the narrative moves towards the anniversary of his family's death, the focus on that past is more and more insistent:

Rubin was only a few feet from the fence when the dogs jumped him. For a minute his figure was obscured by their tumbling, hairy bodies. Their snarls were wetly muffled by what they were doing. Sol looked

away, a strange dead feeling spreading through his chest....(p.100)

In this horrifically detailed description Wallant emphasises the emotional deadness of Sol's response. In a later description Wallant emphasises Sol's determination to see with savage clarity the piles of dead bodies: "He continued working with the round, old-fashioned spectacles on. They made everything savagely clear, but he kept them on. That was the least he could do"(p.198). And these are the spectacles that Sol continues to wear reflecting his determination to retain this vision of death that undercuts any particular significance given to an individual death. On the day of the anniversary it is this vision that he vainly tries to cling to as a means of protecting himself from the terror and anguish of a reawakening life-consciousness:

Fifteen years ago today his heart had atrophied; like the mammoth, he had been preserved in ice. What did he fear then? If the ice finally melts, the meat of the great entombed creature merely rots. One could only die once. He had been extinct for a long time, and only the carcass remained to be disposed of.(p.249)

Sol struggles against consciousness in an effort to retain the emotional neutrality of an animal: "Like a litany, he enforced the rules of life on himself: You live, you eat, you rest, you protect yourself"(p.167). Other forces, however, drag him toward consciousness. Sol's mind is a battlefield between what he sees as reality, emotional insensibility and human isolation, and what he sees as dangerous illusion, emotional expansiveness and human interdependence. The battle is fought, as has been emphasised, on many fronts: in the pawnshop, in the relationships with Ortiz, Tessie and Murillo, in the landscape of his memory and also within his developing relationship with Marilyn Birchfield.

The climax of that relationship is the trip on the river. Sol is reminded of a distant past which, like Berman's past in The Human Season, records the pastoral beauty and vital richness of the lost Europe. Like Mendel, Sol moves into the landscape of his childhood to recapture a sense of the abundance of

life and nature: "The types you saw then! Peasants like animals, a few crazy Russians bellowing songs...It was a beautiful country, a beautiful river..." (p.209). Significantly, though, this memory is a retreat from Sol's consciousness of reality: "He took off his glasses to blind himself to the present..." (p.209). This kind of memory, and the optimistic commitment to human interdependence that Marilyn stands for, is a threat to Sol's sense of what is real and, thus, an assault on his emotional insensibility. The trip on the river represents for him a reawakening of dangerous illusion. The squalor and misery of the approaching city brings Sol back from that dangerous land of dream: "'I fear we must stop with the make-believe,' he said, gesturing toward the approaching lights. 'We are approaching the hard facts'"(p.212).

Ortiz's death serves not only to transform Sol's consciousness of death, but also to end that dichotomy between what Nazerman sees as the real world and what he considers illusion. Wallant's objective is to reveal Nazerman's view of reality as partial and corrupted. Wallant's reality is a synthesis of urban misery and brutality with the splendour of love and dream. The "illusions" that beset Sol on the river re-impose themselves painfully in his reluctant recollection of an idyllic pre-war picnic with his family. The memory thrusts him back toward an anguished consciousness of what he is separated from: love and a rich emotional life. With Ortiz's death his emotional insensibility, threatened by memory, is finally undermined. That anguished reactivation of life transforms his attitude to death and enables him to share Tessie's mourning, to reach out to Morton, and to recognise within himself the paradox of a persistent, ineffective, love for humanity in all its flawed disorder. It is a love formed precisely in the midst of urban poverty, corruption and misery.

Love is in Wallant's fiction the most paradoxical emotion. It resembles most of all a wound. At the end of the novel Sol, like Angelo in The Children at the Gate, is metaphorically bleeding:

All his anaesthetic numbness left him. He became terrified of the touch of air on the raw wounds. What was this great, agonising sensitivity and what was it for? Good God, what was all this? Love?

Could this be Love?(p.272)

In the last dream, after Ortiz's death, Sol goes with Tessie and Morton to search for their dead. On awakening he moves into the streets conscious of the mass of humans around him: "He thudded into people and felt them and took into himself their peculiar odors of sweat and breath, of dirt and hair, the smell of the great mortal decay that was living because it was dying"(p.278). Wallant points to the transformation of Sol's attitude to life and death. Previously the fact of death made life devoid of significance, and the squalid reality of life took all meaning from death. Now living and dying are seen as part of the huge and rich paradox of life which encompasses terror and squalor but also the fact of love and human interdependence. Death is no longer, "That sourly anti-climatic joke..."(p.73). The mysterious and splendid paradox of love gives meaning to human existence. Now, when Sol opens his eyes to the reality around him he sees not only squalid misery in the teeming mass of people but also a deep and secret beauty: "And when he tried to wipe his eyes, indeed, cleared them momentarily, he saw the ineffable marvel of their eyes and skins" (p.278). There is, however, little comfortable resolution at the end of this novel. Sol's question remains unanswered precisely because, in Wallant's vision of human love, pain and joy are interwoven: "So maybe I love all of them, does it do any good? Doesn't that make it worse?"(p.277). The answer that underlies Wallant's fiction is clear enough. It may make it worse, but it also makes it human. It is Sol's rediscovered capacity to love and to dream that makes him different from a machine or a stone.

Through the novel Wallant employs the image of stone to characterise Sol. The "face of grey Asian stone"(p.17) gradually cracks and then crumbles: "It was as though a crack, begun at the base of his skull in the morning, had now widened to the point where his brains could spill through at any moment"(p.178). The image of stone serves to emphasise Sol's initial emotional insensibility to the encompassing urban reality.

Against the chronologically developing narratives Wallant sets up various kinds of repetitions which emphasise bleak timelessness in Sol's reality. Sol's

version of the evolution of the Jewish merchant myth, for example, points to a miserable repetition of purchase and sale:

You repeat this process over and over for approximately twenty centuries. And then, voila--you have a merchantile heritage, you are known as a merchant, a man with secret resources, usurer, pawnbroker, witch, and what have you.(p.52)

Sol is seen to go, day after day, to the pawnshop and the business there is a never ending ritual of sale and purchase. In effect Wallant creates a microcosmic vision of an absurd reality, reality devoid of meaning. However, he repeatedly sets within this reality a conflicting image of life. The objects in the pawnshop are "dead and characterless"(p.18), but Ortiz, Marilyn and customers like George Smith and Mrs. Harmon inject life into that particular version of the wasteland. The kind of life qualities that they represent are seen both to erode the stone of Sol's face and to fundamentally contradict a version of reality as absurd and devoid of meaning. As in The Human Season, Wallant constructs a vision of reality in accordance with contemporary orthodoxies and then proceeds to undercut it through an insistent upon the ineffable splendour of the human.

The relationship between the Jewish experience and the American context is a significant tension within the novel. In The Human Season, Wallant created a version of the Jewish experience in Europe which emphasised the rich abundance of man in nature. That version only briefly appears in this novel. Mendel's dying words, Sol's dream of the picnic and his memories of the trip on the river echo Berman's vision. The version of the Jewish experience that is central to this novel however is the nightmarish vision of Nazi persecution. It is this that overlays Sol's consciousness and it is this image that Wallant sets in tension with the version of contemporary America that he constructs. The tension basically operates in three ways. Sol's memory of the concentration camp shapes the way he perceives the American reality around him. His European consciousness isolates him from the idealised version of the American family that Bertha seeks to create. Sol's consciousness is also death and nightmare

obsessed and it, thus, conflicts with Marilyn Birchfield's optimistic rationalism which Wallant also sees as typically American. Wallant's version of the European Jewish experience encompasses both positive values and nightmarish dimensions. Similarly his concept of the American ethos is wide enough to contain positive, if superficial, innocence, cheap dreams of debased material acquisitiveness and clichéd versions of family cohesion.

Wallant, like Potok in In the Beginning or Fiedler in "Let Nothing You Dismay," extends the image of the European holocaust into the American environment. Fiedler has imaginistically injected that experience into American landscapes, and Charyn evokes the oppressive institution as a motif that acts as a symbolic reverberation of the concentration camp. Sol's consciousness similarly imaginistically translates the European into the American context. The primary mode of apprehending the holocaust in contemporary American fiction is clearly through image. There are rarely, except for example in Sol's retrospection or in the work of camp survivors like Elie Wiesel, direct attempts to render the experience in depth. The procedure is to present the holocaust as a recurrent element in the consciousness, as Wallace Markfield has pointed out, an intrusive nightmare that darkens perception of the American environment. Thus, Sol repeatedly sees the urban reality in which he moves as an extension of the concentration camp. Leventhal and Murillo are just other versions of Nazi persecutors. Even the landscape is transformed through images evoking scenes from the camps: "The bright pink light of the sun looked like the reflection of some monstrous fire burning a hideous fuel"(p.225). This version of contemporary American reality is, however, undermined and denied in Sol's finally transformed consciousness.

Wallant uses Sol's European sensibility alternatively to devalue the version of assimilation that Bertha dreams. Clearly, Wallant does not come down in favour of cultural assimilation nor, indeed, does he come down in favour of cultural exclusiveness. He avoids this kind of debate, frequently expressed in Jewish-American literature, almost entirely by defining the central issues in his novels in terms of spiritual consciousness rather than social identity. The dream of assimilation into an American cultural pattern

becomes, in Bertha's consciousness, a cliché that excludes Sol and Morton: "In some ways, her son and brother were two of a kind, both sullen, unattractive creatures who dampened her 'Happy American Family' setting"(p.31). Joan similarly manufactures a mental image of the typical American family in which Sol can be comfortably assimilated. Sol defies those versions of that particular myth. At a dinner party Bertha arranges, he refuses to conform to her lie that he runs a gift shop. He insists on his function as a pawnbroker. Bertha's failure to shape the family around the cliché manifests itself in particular anger with Morton. The darkness of the Jewish experience clings to Morton upsetting Bertha's vision of her assimilated family and causing guilt and anger by consistently confronting her with the past that she aspires to be free of.

Within Wallant's version of the Jewish experience is the central confrontation with death. The consciousness of death is, in essence, what attracts both Ortiz and Morton to Sol. They recognise within him a knowledge which they do not possess and cannot define and, through their yearning for this dark secret, they remake Sol into a surrogate father. Morton's image of the pawnbroker corresponds to Ortiz's:

He looked at Sol's wide, bulky back and had no need to create a new and perfect father; he was willing, in his dream, to settle for that one sombre, harsh man, would have taken his chances on all the darkness in the Pawnbroker that would be for ever beyond his knowing.(p.96)

The Jewish experience is associated with death, and the darkness of that experience is symbolically accumulated around Sol and, by extension, Ortiz and Morton. It is this sense of bleak community that links the figures. Ortiz, like Morton, is seen in the role of son in relation to Sol. The link between the father and his sons is established through the motif of death and the threat of death. The knowledge of death is, at least in part, the secret that Sol possesses.

Wallant employs the simile of father and son to describe Ortiz's

relationship to Sol during the period of Sol's mental fever. Thus Ortiz "managed to defend the Pawnbroker from ridiculousness, to preserve his dignity by some innate sense of diplomacy as delicate and touching as that of a son who contrives a semblance of usefulness for an aged and ineffectual father"(p.216). After Ortiz's death it is entirely appropriate that Sol should reach out toward Morton as his surrogate son. In the final dream Morton, Tessie and Sol return to the concentration camps in search of their dead and, through this, Wallant hints at another aspect of his version of the Jewish experience. Morton carries within him an undefined element of darkness. The symbolic reverberations of the Nazi persecutions envelop Morton and, indeed they envelop all the persecuted and dispossessed. The face of Naomi is replaced on the hook by a succession of sufferers. Wallant generalises the Jewish experience into a vision of universal suffering, and creates a symbolic version of Judaism that emphasises the resonances of death and suffering that accumulate around the Jewish consciousness. Suffering, isolation and persecution are characteristics of Jewish experience that Wallant, Fiedler, Charyn and Potok record. While Potok is largely literal and historical in this concern, the other three extend this characteristic to encompass those who suffer and are dispossessed. The boundaries of this version of Judaism are extended to encompass other ethnic minorities, and the Jewish experience becomes a symbolic focus through which issues of wider ethnicity, and related isolation and suffering, may be examined.

Marilyn Birchfield's optimistic belief in the rational and her zest for innocence confronts Sol's darker European spirit. She, unlike all the other characters in the novel, is a representative of middle America, firmly located and at home in the American social landscape: "She had shiny sandy hair, an immaculate full face, the clear, forward blue eyes of a woman at home in her own country: an American face"(p.42). She brings to Wallant's urban environment, populated by peripheral Americans, a set of alien values belonging to another version of America, another landscape:

But the truth is I never had a night's insomnia until I came to New York and began working for the city. The way these people live!

Misery, the misery. I feel it even in my own apartment, as though it were in the air. In Springfield, my father used to have to pound on the door to wake me.(p.103)

The values that Marilyn represents are ambiguously treated in the novel. She is repeatedly described as childlike but, while this is an insult from Sol, the simile does implicitly suggest something of value. Sol says, Marilyn is "much like a silly child who has no instinct for her listener's unwillingness to talk"(p.103). Marilyn's response emphasises the ambiguity that Wallant constructs around the concept: "'You would be surprised about children,' she said quietly"(p.103). The texture of childhood recalled by Sol and Mendel looks back toward an image of pastoral beauty and richness. Marilyn's childlike innocence reactivates something deeply buried within Sol which threatens his defence of emotional insensibility: "Something dug into him just under the skin, not steadily, not even with real pain. Rather, it was like some small sliver of rusty recall..."(p.46). The image clearly prefigures the larger pain of emotional awakening that Sol is to feel. In The Human Season the moral values of the novel are more or less unambiguously related to childlike perception because there the pastoral version of the European past corresponds with Berman's childhood. Moving back to Europe leads to the positive restoration of a morally valid perception. The version of the European experience in The Pawnbroker, however, encompasses a sense of Europe as a nightmare that undercuts the pastoral version. Thus, when Nazerman's consciousness moves back toward Europe he finds not only the pastoral recalled by Berman, but the darker shapes of the holocaust. The confrontation between childlike perception and adult experience functions then as a mode of contrasting conflicting images of Europe, pastoral and nightmarish, and conflicting attitudes toward the American present expressed in the confrontation between Sol and Marilyn. The childlike remains vital and life-assertive, but it is a partial vision that is unable to encompass the kind of reality transformed into nightmare that Sol has experienced, and that is deeply related to the kind of Europe that occupies the centre of his consciousness.

Marilyn is committed to a rational social optimism: the belief that her job in the slums is "important and worth doing"(p.145). As Sol makes clear, however, her version of reality is superficial. He is conscious of an alternative irrational world where death, not life, is the central experience: "There is a world so different in scale that its emotions bear no resemblance to yours; it has emotions so different in degree that they have become a different species"(p.146).

The confrontation between Sol and Marilyn is a confrontation between versions of reality and, in a sense, it is a re-invention of the recurrent confrontation between European experience and American innocence. As a European Jew, Sol's consciousness is shaped by the awareness that the distance between reality and nightmare is very fine. Marilyn stands, in contrast, for a commitment to life and a belief in a rational nature of human experience. In the final analysis that version of reality is superficial, but it also reflects the persistence of something vital and important in the human consciousness.

The Pawnbroker is a complex and often ambiguous novel but underneath all the problematic issues raised in this novel, is the central affirmation that runs through Wallant's fiction. The human spirit, he argues, is essentially mysterious. He repeatedly uses words like "odd," "strange," and "secret" to point to ineffable capacities within man for love and dream. Against the contemporary version of an absurd and hostile reality, he constructs a vision of human reality in which spiritual re-affirmation, through love, can be achieved. At the centre of Wallant's reality is a recognition of the splendour and the anguish of human interdependence.

That splendour is formed in The Pawnbroker in miserable streets, and in the half-light of the pawnshop filled with the jetsam of the dispossessed. There is, in the gloom, a deep sense of the potential for spiritual transformation in man:

The glossy woods of old violins, the dented brasses of tuba and trumpet, the curving edge of camera, the wink of gold and silver

from a thousand castoffs made a light for the Pawnbroker and his assistant to work by, to abide in, and so to become more complex themselves; for that light was of a unique and mysterious quality. What Jesus Ortiz aspired to, he sensed in the Pawnbroker even though he did not recognise the shape of his aspiration. And what the Pawnbroker wanted had nothing to do with desire; he apparently yearned toward nothingness and in the part of him not apparent there was still darkness and terrifying growth.(p.111)

The holocaust has often defied the imagination of Jewish-American writers. In this novel, Wallant integrates consciousness of that experience with a bleak version of urban poverty and, with that unpromising clay, he moulds a vision of the ineffable and mysterious capacities within man to transcend misery and horror through love and dream.

IV

At the beginning of The Tenants of Moonbloom, Norman Moonbloom is another of Wallant's emotionally unresponsive protagonists. He differs from Berman of The Human Season, Nazerman of The Pawnbroker and Angelo of The Children at the Gate in that, unlike them, he has no firm defence against the emotional pressures from the people he comes into contact with. He has no developed and corrupted sensibility that is transformed in the body of the novel. Berman has his crusade against God; Nazerman has his function as a pawnbroker, and De Marco has his scientificism. These defences are eroded through the developments that occur in the novels. The Tenants of Moonbloom is, however, not so much about the re-definition and expansion of a sensibility but about the creation of that sensibility.

In the opening of the novel Moonbloom is metaphorically imprisoned, "lashed," "anchored," "held," and "connected."⁸ His brother's voice, devoid of meaning, drones on. His office is just below the surface of the street and only reflected light reaches it. Moonbloom then physically exists at no clearly defined level and, like the inhabitants of Plato's cave, his light is a mere reflection of the light in the real world. The physical location of Norman's office is a metaphor for the condition of his sensibility, undefined with no secure location: "He sat between daydream and nothing..."(p.4). Repeatedly, in the first chapter, Wallant emphasises the artificiality of Norman's world, the fact that Norman's reality is out of true perspective. His brother's voice is like a primitive recording, and the office is "his grotto"(p.4). He exists isolated from, and below the level of, the humanity passing outside. The sunlight is "dusty, secondhand..."(p.7). Wallant, thus, establishes a location that symbolically defines Norman's condition. He is trapped and isolated in a reality that is a shadow of its lighter possibility, a location that is separated from the wider, richer landscape beyond. The office exists as a concrete place, and as a metaphor of Norman's sensibility.

Wallant also hints at Norman's role as an initiate. He has been a student for fourteen years repeatedly changing his major. He has studied for, among

other things, the rabbinate. More specifically Wallant points to an undefined and underdeveloped capacity within Norman that threatens his equilibrium:

There had been no horrors in his life--only a slow widening of sensitivity. But he anticipated reaching the threshold of pain one of these days. It was like the fear of death; he could ignore it most of the time, although it was implacably there, to touch him with the very tip of its claw in moments of frustration, to bring dread to him during the 4:00 AM. bladder call. The claw withdrew after just a touch, leaving him with a chronic, unrecognizable din that he did not think about; he was like a man who lives beside a foaming cataract and comes to take its roar for silence.(p.8)

His role as a perpetual student suggests a striving for something unachieved that might yet "pay off in some oblique way"(p.9). The undefined tension suggests a latent complexity within him. The words "unrecognisable" and "oblique" suggest the elusive, inexpressible texture of this innate potential within Norman. The concluding image of chapter one emphasises both the fragility of the present equilibrium, and the fact that the present condition separates Norman from the enveloping pressures of the human life around him: "He walked lightly and his face showed no awareness of all the thousands of people around him because he travelled in an eggshell through which came only subdued light and muffled sound"(p.9). Wallant then presents Norman as a latent seeker troubled by something innate and indefinable whose defence against the pressures of life is extremely fragile. In other words he is, like other Wallant protagonists, at the edge of a radical alteration of consciousness. This alteration inevitably involves pain, and the image of the claw recalls Nazerman's pain that co-exists with his emotional re-awakening. It also prefigures the kind of "wound" that Angelo suffers at the end of The Children at the Gate. Another pointer to Moonbloom's status is his surname which suggests a synthesis of something illuminating the dark, and something breaking out into flower.

Wallant emphasises the scale of Norman's tasks. He manages four tenements for his brother Irwin. These tenements are decaying and the money for the

repairs is simply not available. Essentially Norman is in a situation where, by all rational standards, he is powerless to change the conditions of the prevailing reality with which he has to deal. The qualification is, of course, vital. When Norman finally engages upon his comic, frenzied campaign to repair all the damage he is acting without regard to rational limitations. His actions, like Sammy Cahan's will be in effect a radical assault on the impossible --an insane and holy crusade. This first chapter creates both the scale of Norman's task and the innate and obscure depths that will finally enable him to grapple with an oppressive reality.

In the second chapter Wallant establishes the landscape of urban ritual against which the evolution of Norman's sensibility is to be set. This is precisely the kind of device used in The Pawnbroker and The Children at the Gate. Nazerman goes daily to the pawnshop and is engaged in rituals of buying. Angelo goes through the daily processes of orders and deliveries to the hospitals. Norman collects the rents. These activities are exactly parallel in function, mechanisms for structuring time that protect the protagonist by isolating him from engagement with the emotions of others.

In the second chapter Norman visits the first of the tenements and goes through the repeated business of collecting rent from the various tenants. Wallant makes it clear that Norman is in a sense threatened by the pressure of these lives upon him. With the Jacobys, for example, the metaphors of swimming and drowning are employed: "Norman heh-heh'ed politely, his hands out in an inconspicuous breast stroke"(p.13). Arnold Jacoby presses personal information upon Norman. The armchair in which Norman sits "embraced him like quicksand"(p.13). When he retreats from the Jacobys he retreats from the demands of involvement in the human problem of his tenants. This situation prefigures his fated attempt to preserve his role as landlord vis a vis the tenants. Knowing too much about them as people is a threat to his detachment from their anguish. The Lublins, concentration camp survivors, similarly threaten Norman's fragile equilibrium. Simply, "There were things that Norman did not want to know"(p.26). A knowledge of the tenants as complex human beings will thrust him into the dangerous landscape of human interdependence.

In his office Moonbloom is below the surface of the street. In his apartment he is above it. These two physical locations are used as concrete metaphors for Norman's detachment from experience:

Buses and cars bleated, honked and roared, with subdued violence; occasionally a human voice rose almost to his window, then fell back down without quite reaching him. And all of it was like silence to him.(p.33)

This detachment is not only threatened by the possibility of anguish but also by the possibility of joy. Wallant's preoccupation with the image of the father, central to Berman in The Human Season, becomes here a more oblique reference to an exuberance of spirit shared between Norman and his father:

And then he had wakened the boys in the night and forced them out into the yard to worship the swirling wet flakes, to dance around with their hands joined, shrieking at the snow-laden branches. Later, they had gone into sleep with hearts slowly returning to bearable beatings. Great flowering things had opened and closed in Norman's head, and the resonance of the wild man's voice had squeezed a sweet, tart juice through his heart.(p.31)

The memory of the father indicates the emotional possibility of exuberant joy. The resonance of the father's voice threatens Norman's detached equilibrium, and his comforting estimate of himself as "a small man of definite limitations ..."(p.32). The memory of that experience points to a capacity for delight that goes beyond those limitations. The mood of that childhood moment is recreated, as is the snowy season, in the conclusion of the novel. Moonbloom, more obliquely than Berman, moves back toward childhood to rediscover a scale of emotions that transcends limitations. The procedure reveals again a central assertion in Wallant's vision of man, and the root of his affirmative stance. There are mysterious and splendid depths in man, a potential for dream, love and emotion, that transcend his ostensible limits.

The fifth and sixth chapters of the novel focus on Norman's relationships

with the various tenants, and on the growing disintegration of his detached equilibrium which, like Nazerman's, is to be upset signalling profound emotional growth. Norman's emotional isolation at the beginning of the novel is metaphorically a kind of death. He more fully develops the image of the drowned and buried man to characterise this condition allowing, of course, the mythic overtones, pointed to by the references to "The Waste Land," to accumulate around that figure. Norman is "Like a body under water..."(p.45). Leni Cass's voice reaches Norman in "his subterranean dwelling"(p.49) and, faced with Sugarman's intimacies, he feels that "tedium suddenly began rising up over his ankles"(p.59).

The drowned and drowning man, however, is beginning to be pulled back toward life and for Wallant this re-birth involves a re-awakening of a sensibility toward pain felt as "pressure on his heels, something forcing him to stand on his head and crash through a hoop of pain"(p.72). The pressure derives from the various demands of the tenants for repairs, involvement and sympathy. The contact Moonbloom has with them begins to demand more from him than, as an agent, he might, given that role, be expected to give. What they essentially require of him is a transformation from landlord's agent to Miss Lonelyhearts. The structural disorders in the tenements exist both on the literal level and as metaphors for the various anguishes that Norman is made aware of by the tenants. The pipes in one of the tenements become blocked but Bodien unblocks them and restores the flow. This event coincides with Norman's growing fever and operates, as much in this novel does, on both a literal and metaphorical level. As the water is restored, "Norman could feel an impulse to fall and be carried along by it"(p.76), restored, in a sense, to the life-giving flow, not drowning but floating. The fever begins to envelop Moonbloom at the end of chapter five and, as in the other novels, it is a diminishing of self-awareness preceding a re-awakening into new consciousness. The motif of fever is one of the ways in which Wallant repeatedly signals the beginning of the transformations that are the essential theme of his fiction.

From this discussion of the opening chapters the framework of the novel emerges. The tenements act as a microcosmic version of a disordered world.

The wide ranging narrative, which focuses upon the various tenants, enhances the credibility of the microcosm by pointing to the wide scale of human experience represented in the tenants' lives. In this world Moonbloom resists the pressure of involvement but this resistance is finally eroded. The fever is one point of transition, an indication of a slow and painful re-birth. During the fever Norman is able to suspend self-consciousness, symbolically to revert to the womb before his symbolic re-birth. By the end of the novel, Moonbloom has, against all odds, repaired the houses. In the symbolic terms of the novel, he has restored order to a disordered world. On a literal level, he has behaved in a caring and responsive way. On the symbolic level, however, he has rebuilt the prevailing reality and become, in a sense, a worker of miracles and a holy man. There are then two kinds of affirmation in the novel. In the novel's literal terms Norman's actions affirm human interdependence. In symbolic terms the affirmation is essentially religious. Through his actions Norman has rebuilt reality, transcending the limits of the possible. The status of that kind of transcendence clearly belongs to a mystic context.

In the novel Wallant synthesises two kinds of reality. Contemporary urban reality, in all its disorder and with its human isolation, is the literal material of the novel. In the alternative version of reality the gloom of this picture is transformed by an insistence upon the mysterious capacities of man. Wallant's realities co-exist in this novel, and in his other fiction, and while one reality is recognisably a black vision of urban disorder, the other has the texture of mystic vision. This version insists upon what man feels and is capable of feeling rather than upon what he sees. It is unverifiable, immeasurable and Wallant's affirmation of it is an indication of an essentially religious sensibility. This sensibility certainly draws upon Christian symbol but its primary points of reference are Jewish. The spirit that overtakes Moonbloom and Sammy Cahan is the spirit of Hassidic fervour, a synthesis of anguish and joy which transforms sensibility seeing joy in pain and pain in joy. By the end of chapter five the reader becomes aware of the momentum that moves Moonbloom toward his transformation into a comic contemporary holy man engaged in a lunatic crusade to remake the encompassing gloom of the contemporary

American reality.

In the description of Norman's fever, Wallant emphasises the fact that the illness is a symbolic re-birth. His memory ranges around his past and especially his childhood: the affection and security afforded by his grandmother's love, the "vivid horrors in Europe"(p.79) from which he was protected, the voice of the Rabbi, memories of girls. The re-birth is preceded by symbolic death, a decline into fever and a survey of past experience. His awakening is directly related to re-birth and the process is painful. Moonbloom wakes into a consciousness of pain that is extended even to the inanimate objects surrounding him:

He opened his eyes on the fifth afternoon to see his window shade aflame with sunshine. His beard scratched on the pillow, and his sheets were gray with sweat. Weak as a newborn, he nevertheless realised that he had no way of avoiding whatever it was that had happened to him. Timidly he got up, and found that something had been torn away from him, that all the details of the room made deep impressions on his eyes. There was a blistering of plaster at the junction of wall and ceiling, the doorframe had a painted-over cut, the window shade was like a worn skin, and he shuddered for it. He went into the bathroom and adjusted the water in the shower, solicitous of his frail, skinny body. The water drummed on him, wakening all his nerves.(pp.81-82)

The familiar is seen through a restructured vision. The Moonbloom that awakens from the fever is a new man (he has to learn to walk again) with an awakened sensitivity to pain who must confront a world suddenly unfamiliar: "God help him, he was not prepared for this. And he went out into a strange city"(p.82).

Having focused on Norman's transformed sensibility Wallant shifts to the world he now has to confront, the world of the tenants. He again employs the technique of a wide narrative sweep through episodes in the lives of the various tenants. The linking theme in chapter seven is the problematic nature of love. In each small episode a version of love is created. Eva and Minna are linked by

"their old, deformed love for each other"(p.84). Arnold Jacoby has "his own odd form of love"(p.89). Katz's memory of his father recalls love that is dangerous and wounding. His father was "a man who had loved his son but who had lived in fear of love and its vulnerability"(p.90). The link between father and son was a "tormenting bond"(p.92). Sherman's love for his young son is reflected in signs of pain and assault on his face: "'Oh yeah, my Bobby,' Sherman said, his bony face becoming pulverized by that tenderness which had no transitory state and so came out like a sudden rawness"(p.97). Leni's acts of love are a source of shame, and Sugarman's a dimension of his failure. The Spragues "habitual consolations"(p.93) lead toward the mystery of reproduction that is for Jane "too good to be true or recognizable"(p.93). Wallant creates the various shapes that love takes, mystery, wound, shame, affirmation, and obsession. He also emphasises, through the camera-like sweep of the narrative, the separateness of the characters who, each in their isolated apartments, bear the burdens or enjoy the fruits of their particular kind of love. The proximity of the two sections, Norman's fever and the various kinds of love, points to the direction in which Norman's new sensibility will lead him. His confrontation will be with the ambiguous, dangerous and wounding forms that love can take. The emphasis on the transformed nature of Norman's sensibility is enforced by the structure of the novel. Having visited the four tenements in the earliest parts of the book, he now begins to repeat the process for ostensibly the same purpose. His perceptions are, however, radically altered.

Norman's detachment is now broken down and the intimacies of the tenants, that he is no longer immune to, are seen as wounding. He suffers "the hail of words"(p.105). Involvement with the tenants is like "an unpleasant scuffle" (p.107). After seeing the Hausers, he feels as if he has been physically attacked: "Then he went out of there, punched in his vertebrae by whatever it was that abided behind him in the room with the lamp-river and the bulb-fire" (p.110). He is no longer a detached spectator but a participant, and participation involves pain: "But Norman had always been audience and was not used to these experimental dramas in which the audience was asked to participate"(p.112). The upsetting of emotional insensibility is reflected in a loss of physical

control. The body is again a metaphor of the consciousness and, like Nazerman, Moonbloom, threatened by involvement, strives to recreate his previous defences against emotion: "The hallway looked strange and filled him with uneasiness; from the way his body strained against imbalance, its floor might have been tilted"(p.107). Through these confrontations Wallant traces Moonbloom's first painful steps toward moral and spiritual growth and maturity:

For just an instant he felt a flash of horror, a sensation as visceral as that felt by a child who glimpses the great, complex gut of adults for the first time; he had a real hint of how thin and light his long childhood had been, and wondered how in the world he would support the weight he suspected.(p.108)

In the earlier part of the novel he could collect the rents, move into the reality of the tenements and leave virtually untouched. As Wallant repeats the ritual of rent collecting, Moonbloom is unable to avoid involvement. He becomes a less effective agent, he forgets to collect the rents for example, but more sensitive to human interdependence. There is a correlation, as with Nazerman, between the decline of economic effectiveness and the rise of moral status and emotional sensitivity.

On three occasions Moonbloom protests the limitations of his capacities in the face of demands upon him. To Basellecci he says, "I have limited funds, and it's a problem for me to try and figure out how to repair things. I'm only one man"(p.118). Basellecci recognises the reasonableness of this objection. To Milly Leopold Norman says, "I bet the last agent did nothing. I bet he wasn't hounded like this. What is there about me that makes you all think I'm going to be able to renovate everything from top to bottom?"(p.130). She also recognises the truth of Norman's comment. Sugarman, however, obliquely indicates the transformation of Norman's status in the novel. Norman's exasperation erupts with Sugarman:

"What do you want me to do for you?" Norman asked in bewilderment.

"All right, I'll do, I've promised to do things. What is your

complaint? Do you want wall-to-wall carpeting, a stall shower, air conditioning? Is something broken? Name it, don't be shy. No one else is. Make a demand on me. A refrigerator, a paint job, what?
(p.139)

Sugarman's reply is uncompleted but it points to a level of demand that goes beyond any claim that a tenant might make of a landlord. Norman's function is transformed: "'No, no, Moonbloom, it is not so easy. Man does not live on fringe benefits alone. What I want from you....' He stared musingly at the floor"(p.139). He sees in Moonbloom a capacity for a more radical, less literal alteration that cannot be described in material terms. The parody of biblical language hints at what Sugarman identifies in Norman. Like Berman's revelation, that identification is not easily articulated, but Sugarman obliquely expresses the transformation of Moonbloom's status into a spiritual activist. In finally doing the repairs, Moonbloom engages in an unreasonable task, with an unrealistic aim, as Basellecci and Milly Léopold would agree. He goes beyond the possible and the reasonable, transforming the literal activity of doing repairs into a metaphor of spiritual fervour. That spiritual fervour should correspond to something akin to comedy is perfectly appropriate in the contemporary reality Wallant creates. The crazy man does things that everybody knows are unreasonable. His belief in the possibility of achieving his crazy aims is comic. However, when the crazy man achieves those aims, the action, while remaining comic and crazy, begins to take on the shape and texture of miracle.

Moonbloom moves toward that crazy, holy fervour. The metaphorical wounding becomes literal. A football hits him in the mouth in Wade's apartment. He becomes both child and parent in relation to Sheryl Beeler: "I'm like a child" (p.123), he feels but immediately afterwards he behaves like "a long suffering parent"(p.123). He recognises two dimensions within Kram, the straight frail innocence and the twisted cripple. He begins to be detached from himself, moving toward a kind of frenzied schizophrenia, "observing his own frenzy with bewilderment"(p.125), "stunned by his own echoing insanity"(p.136). The growing anguish and the encompassing disintegration conspire within Moonbloom.

His anguish begins to sound like laughter. At this point in the novel the path towards Wallant's version of spiritual grace is clearly defined. It leads, as it does for Sammy Cahan, through madness and comic frenzy.

Before Norman's final commitment to action, Wallant enforces the sense of a growing momentum leading toward frenzy. Norman suffers "another wound"(p.146). He uneasily and fearfully confronts the nightmare of the Jewish past in the Lublin's apartment. Physically he bears "the marks of violence"(p.148) which symbolically reflect the growing assault of human experience upon his sensibilities. The remnants of his old personality are fast eroding and this is reflected in the erosion of the last letter of his name on the office door. In the end the last "m" chips away to reveal the open vowels which sound both like a cry of pain and an exhilarating shout of joy. Images of fire and water, mythically ambiguous carrying senses of both death and purification, interact together. Norman teeters at the edge of frenzy and "had the sensation of sitting in a rocket with the flames of propulsion already roaring beneath him" (p.146). There is, however, one outstanding question in Norman's mind and it is central to the idea of the transformed sensibility that is at the root of the novel's narrative progression: "Would the mirrors of his old house far away reflect him now?"(p.148). As in The Human Season, the motif of the reflection in the mirror is used to enforce the sense of inner change. Norman must confront that past and that self in an attempt to identify the menacing pressures threatening his sensibility; "awful yet uproarious laughter"(p.150) threatens to engulf him. Wallant devotes chapter thirteen to a description of Norman's attempts to restore his equilibrium through a reconnection with his past. The failure to restore that connection is a measure of the degree of transformation and indicates the involuntary nature of Norman's experience. Norman is thrust back into the anguish, torment and final joy of the human season: "No matter how intensely he desired to return to the peace and quiet of the way he had lived most of his life, he was irrevocably cut off"(p.155).

The return to the city and the tenants is a return to a landscape of menace and threat. The apartment houses "existed on the edge of unbearable chasms, places that overlooked great and monstrous views"(pp.162-163). Norman moves

"sideways in his pit"(p.164): "He had lived most of his life in a deep-shadowed glen and had come out into an open ravine where towers of rock rose up all around him, where things falling made great destruction"(p.166). Through the use of this imagery Wallant emphasises both the menace of the reality that now confronts Norman and the courage of his determination to grapple with it. Wallant remakes contemporary reality into something akin to a Romance landscape appropriate for heroic action. While this is on one level an ironic perspective, it also reveals the profound transformation of Moonbloom into a spiritual hero. Moonbloom is resolute in the face of Karloff and what Karloff represents:

And the thought of Karloff's approaching death suddenly filled Norman with dread: he imagined some immense thing crashing to the ground and reducing everything in sight to piteous rubble. A hundred years of knowing! Of knowing what? What an ant's life had Norman Moonbloom led! The aged presence compressed him. He hoped to be distilled there in the reeking room with the ancient monstrosity peering at him, daring him to tamper with life and death.

"Anyhow I will do it," Norman said with great courage.(pp.161-162)

That resolution leads Moonbloom toward the role of spiritual activist, a holy madman who will confront death and the impossible. He emerges as an amalgam of ambiguous personalities: a comic saint, a moral Tarzan in urban tenements ironically re-imagined as Romance landscapes.

Making love to Sheryl is the catalyst that completes Norman's transformation. A particular act of love leads to a generalised, expanded sense of love. From Sheryl, Moonbloom plunges "into the inferno of people"(p.171), and the momentum of the frenzy becomes irresistible: "he was floating in a stream of lunacy, yet unable to stop paddling"(p.171). There is no rational or possible way to complete the repairs, but Moonbloom grapples with the impossible with inspired, crazy, comic frenzy. No longer drowning he assumes the stature of Sammy Cahan in The Children at the Gate, and becomes a spiritual activist in madness and laughter:

He would do all the work himself, he decided, his face seeming to sparkle, as at the idea of a holy war. But, what was more important, he would do it with laughter for it occurred to him that joy resembled mourning and was, if anything, just as powerful and profound.(p.176)

Laughter becomes the means through which Norman, like Sammy, expresses his sense of human interdependence. Wallant's concept of laughter is not, therefore, a despairing response to contemporary disorder, as it often is in the work of Black Humourists for example, but a profound reaffirmation of concern for the human predicament in all its flawed multiplicity and disorder. Wallant, like Charyn, Fiedler and a whole body of contemporary novelists, exploits comic procedures to inject ambiguity into what is, at root, a profound seriousness.

When confronted with Del Rio's anguish Norman's concern is manifest in laughter rather than despair:

Laughter swam beneath his great expanse of pity, blurred but visible, like a huge fish seen through ice. He was being treated to some awesome privilege, he felt, and he knew better than to answer it with despair.(pp.180-181)

Laughter becomes a dimension of tragedy, a response that co-exists with pain. Laughter and anguish are not, thus, opposites; they enforce and enrich each other expressing a profound humanity in the face of what cannot be avoided. This position relates the novel simultaneously to the contemporary context where comedy is repeatedly used as an oblique expression of anguish, and to the Jewish tradition of laughter in anguish expressed most directly in Hassidic literature. Contemporary literary comedy and Jewish humour share this characteristic; pain is an integral part of the joke and laughter is an expression of a persistent human survival and affirmation in the face of despair. Moonbloom's fervour expresses a "hereditary tendency" to respond in "a dance of joy" that is an expression of prayer. Wallant clearly signals traditional Jewish sensibility, and, specifically, the Hassidic practice of joyful and frenzied dance in sorrow as a mode of prayer. Moonbloom's laughter

is, thus, expressive both of a contemporary perspective, and of continuity with a pervasive Jewish impulse:

Weeping and laughter both expressed the irresistible, and pain and joy interchanged between them. How had he chosen laughter? he wondered, shaking with it and dabbing at his eye with one knuckle while with the other hand he made a mute offering to the wrecked man, who couldn't see his hand. He could only guess at some instinct for survival, or some hereditary tendency to pray in a dance of joy.(p.181)

When the laughter ceases, it is clear that the response is not an avoidance but an expression of pain: "When he stopped laughing, the wounds of his laughter began to bleed"(p.181). Those wounds link Moonbloom with a Jewish spirituality that Wallant recreates in a contemporary context, and laughter is the primary mechanism through which the synthesis is forged. For Wallant that laughter is an irrational, mystic insistence upon individual significance in the face of a reality that ostensibly undercuts that significance.

The image of a "holy war" reflects the gathering momentum of Moonbloom's crusade. Moonbloom erupts into a frenzy of activity that is compared to madness. Irwin wonders whether Norman is becoming "deranged"(p.187). Gaylord's response reveals the manic dimensions of Norman's intentions. The question and answer are close to the exchange between Angelo and Sammy Cahan in The Children at the Gate as Sammy embarks on a similar crusade: "'What the devil you trying to do--make the world over?' 'Uh huh,' Norman said smilingly, 'for me'"(p.191). Wallant points to Moonbloom's spiritual elevation into what is essentially a combination of holiness and madness: "Maybe he was an ear of God"(p.198). He is in his crusade transformed and his status is simultaneously comic and saintly: "Oddly enough, he felt blessed"(p.202).

Norman's recognition of the mysteries of the human spirit reveals the fantastic, awesome nature of what had appeared to be commonplace reality: "And now that you've told me that, it's more real and more fantastic at the same time. You see, most of my life I thought that mystery was only in things that had nothing to do with me"(p.200). The revelation of beauty and love in the

world, the combination of the fantastic, and the real, is an immense burden: "This should have all happened to a bigger man, he thought, a monumental character. It will kill me"(p.185). In assuming the burden Moonbloom is physically assaulted but spiritually and morally elevated. Moonbloom's frenzy is Wallant's version of spiritual grace in the contemporary world where that grace is comic, insane and anguished. Norman's laughter in response to the revealed complexity of his tenants is a full recognition of his elevation toward that grace:

That child, he thought, laughing silently before the mirror, how terrible. And the Lublins and Basellecci and...His laughter was not because they were all funny; it was only slightly because of anything's funniness. Rather, as he stood there, fantastically weary, it was an expression of profound modesty and wonder and shyness.

"Oh God," he said in the ashy light, "all this for me?"(p.185)

In Wallant's fiction the achievement of spiritual grace is an ambiguous blessing. Norman's joy "wrapped him with stinging tentacles"(p.207). The process of "becoming" for Wallant's character is accompanied by agony. Again the distinction between breakdown and breakthrough is blurred.

In Wallant's fiction there is repeatedly a distinction between the physical limitations of the human body and the inner capacity for transcendence of those limitations. Moonbloom's madness is, in the final analysis, a triumphant assertion of those ineffable human depths. The tone of the last chapter of the novel enforces this sense of triumph. It is a joyous, frenzied celebration of life and death--of all things human. It is further evidence of the "hereditary tendency to pray in a dance of joy"(p.181).

Moonbloom leads Basellecci, Gaylord and Bodien into his madness. As Gaylord asserts, Moonbloom's madness is contagious. In the crucial episode where Basellecci's wall is repaired, Wallant affirms the human capacity to achieve the ostensibly impossible, and points to Moonbloom's emergence as a spiritual leader. The episode operates on literal and symbolic levels. On the symbolic level, Moonbloom emerges as an ironic and comic version of a

contemporary saint who leads men out of, and beyond, their ostensible limitations and transforms their perceptions:

"That Norman's the craziest, insanest nut," Gaylord roared, acting as a vise for Bodien as he gripped the pipe with both hands from behind the plumber, so that it appeared he was embracing him. "That Norman Moonbloom got an idea he can do something to the world. He's so crazy he makes me crazy too, makes me think I'm building the pyramids in old Pharaoh country, or maybe the friggen Yewnited Nations. You hooked us, Norman, you got us mainlinin' the same fix you been taking. Hah, Basellecci, Bodien, ain't we all drunk on the same stuff he been drinking? You lousy rat, Moonbloom this man here is dying, Bodien here is a disbarred plumber without no future who won't have another plumbing job after you go. And me, me, I'm just a poor shine with nothing to look forward to except sweeping up other people's shit till I'm too weak and old to do even that. So how come, how come I'm happy as a friggen lark? You got me drunk, Moonbloom; you got me so drunk I'll never sober up."(p.243)

Bathed in excrement from Basellecci's wall, Norman is baptised, re-born into an intimacy and involvement with humanity in both its splendour and filth. Near to death, Basellecci finds himself "in the presence of madness..."(p.236) and is "appalled by the resurrection of a part of himself he had already buried" (p.237), the capacity to dream. The elements of Sugarman's Trinity, Love, Courage, and Dream, coincide in the actions of the four men and they all transcend the ostensible boundaries of their limitations. Inspired by Norman's holy madness the others stand transformed with their sensibilities radically altered. Basellecci moves back toward a consciousness of life. By morning he is no longer "just decaying flesh"(p.237). He has gone beyond that definition of himself and has had the dignity of his dream restored. Bodien and Gaylord can expect only a wretched future, but their sense of wonder and joy expresses the spiritual regeneration and revelation they have been led to by Norman. Moonbloom, waiting for Irwin's arrival, sees that the last letter of his name

has finally chipped away leaving an "infinite note of ache and joy"(p.245). The reality defined by his own body and by the urban squalor in which he lives is transformed: "Small, dusty man indeed! Why, he was huge, united with all of them! His eyes, his brain, his ears, all swallowed the universe"(p.244). Basellecci's wall stands miraculously straight and gleaming. It is an objectification of the spiritual transformation that has occurred.

The snow that covers the city at the end of the novel serves two functions: it evokes the image of childhood exuberance expressed in the episode with Norman's father, and it enforces the sense of a world made anew. It is a visual manifestation of the prevailing sense of wonder that concludes the novel: "The sun shone on the snow and made everything too brilliant to see"(p.245).

The novel is a triumphant expression of the idea of human interdependence and emotional depth. It is also a celebration of the mysteries of the spirit. It challenges a despairing vision of an absurd reality without meaning by insisting upon the splendour and significance of each spirit however humble or pathetic. Despite anguish, adversity or pain, and without denying those conditions, the density of the soul is affirmed. The novel also creates a contemporary version of a saint, a comic, deranged activist who, like Sammy Cahan, defies the possible. Through this figure, Wallant expresses a religious sensibility welded to a contemporary perception.

The affirmation of life in The Human Season and The Pawnbroker is taken a step further in Wallant's last novels into a religious context established obliquely through metaphor and symbol. The ambiguous re-invention of spiritual possibility as comic insanity is extended in The Children at the Gate, and the figure of the contemporary saint is again crucial. The function of Norman Moonbloom is focused in the paradoxical form of Sammy Cahan.

Wallant prefaced The Children at the Gate with a quotation from Eliot's Ash Wednesday which describes these "Who will not go away and cannot pray." In rigid stasis and caught between conflicting tensions, these exist at the edge of mystic experience. This quotation appropriately introduces Wallant's most explicitly mystic novel in which the process of re-awakening goes well beyond secular definition. At the beginning of the novel Angelo is in a state of suspended sensitivity creating defences of mechanistic rationality against the imposition of human pressures. He exists in a solitude that is "unassailable."⁹ He shares with Jesus Ortiz a desire to acquire insight into human "secrets" but, like Ortiz, his definition of the path toward this insight is corrupted. He equates understanding human behaviour with the accumulation of scientific facts about man. It is the function of the character Sammy Cahan to oppose this concept with an essentially mystic one. At the beginning of the novel Angelo speaks for a rational, scientific belief in the possibility of understanding. Sammy Cahan stands for a recognition of the mystery of human behaviour, the ineffable depths of man's emotional complexities. Angelo aspires to "clinical and functional detachment..."(p.88). Sammy seeks a full integration of himself with all human anguish, joy and guilt.

The sort of dialectic that these positions suggest does run through Wallant's earlier novels.¹⁰ Mechanistic ritual is undercut for both Berman and Nazerman by the pressure of human complexity. In this novel, however, Wallant forms the dialectic in a much clearer way embodying the two positions in separate characters, thus enabling him to shape the novel around a structure that more explicitly draws upon religious myth. The archetypal relationship of disciple to master is at the root of the final evolution of Angelo's position in relation to the memory of Sammy's actions. Sammy berates Angelo for his failure "to listen to things that don't make a sound"(p.128). At the end of the novel Angelo has evolved into the disciple fully enough to adopt Sammy's exhortation into a statement of intent: "he never again wanted to miss hearing what happened in silence"(p.183). The importance of silence and its significance as a medium of meaning is again exploited in this novel.

Wallant restructures the master-disciple archetype through a contemporary sensibility which renders the roles problematic and ambiguous. The master, Sammy, teaches through stories and actions. The disciple is reluctant to learn, resists the pressure of a kind of knowledge that undermines his defences and betrays the master before finally accepting the lesson that he has taught. On one level the myth evoked is clearly that of Christ. Sammy's death is upon a symbolic cross, pierced by a spike. However, the predominant tone of the relationship between Sammy and Angelo is that of Hassid to pupil or, finally, Tzaddik¹¹ to Hassid.

Sammy's stories are not clearly defined parables. They are rather accumulative assaults on Angelo's rational experience, attempts to undermine an assurance about the nature of the real. In the first extended discussion Angelo attempts to fix his consciousness on what he conceives of as the certain nature of the familiar: "Angelo fixed hard on what was, and stared at the beacon light on the new building, seeing faintly its immense, pale shape against the dark sky"(p.55). This focus on the new hospital reflects Angelo's faith in his secure sense of reality, and in the value of material progress indicated in the new hospital. At that point, he suffers Sammy's irony: "You know, you shoulda been a scientist, Angelo. I got to admire how clear-cut you see things. Yeah, a regular scientist..."(p.55). Sammy fictions are in direct contrast to Angelo's realism, and they attack a "clear-cut" view of things. The central stories that are told that evening are about love and the shapes that love takes. The butcher dismembers his wife and then kisses her all over, an insane passion. A man rescues children from a burning orphanage until he is destroyed, a noble act of self-sacrifice. A young man leads around a blind dwarf despite being disgusted with him, a recognition of human interdependence. The other stories emphasise both the beautiful and grotesque: a horse rapes a woman, a stream flows uphill, a thin man holds five men on his chest and a bitch nurses a kitten. These stories have one central factor in common. They all undercut any rational explanation, are fantasies rather than allegories. Sammy, however, insists on their literal truth undermining Angelo's sense of an ordered, rational world. Sammy implies that these stories

reflect the fantastic nature of reality, and people are capable of actions and emotions beyond all explanation. Angelo is appalled and in a rage but when he leaves he walks into a landscape already taking on an unknown shape, the familiar and the fantastic or dream-like begin to merge. He begins to move toward the kind of recognition Moonbloom achieves in relation to Betty Jacoby's story, a recognition that something might be "more real and more fantastic at the same time."¹² Angelo walks into "a night that seemed like a dream"(p.58). The transformation of familiar landscape signals, as in the other novels, a transformation of consciousness.

The nature of the stories Sammy tells relates him more precisely to a Hassidic context than a Christian one. The stories are not parables of good and evil but rather paradoxical fantasies in which the distinctions between good and evil become blurred. They are less concerned with the revelation of moral truth than with the revelation of mystery and the impossibility of explanation. They illustrate the ineffable capacity of humans to love beyond rationality. The stories recommend a state of consciousness in which the mind is receptive to the unknowable, and the emotions open and wide enough to love humans in all their paradoxical complexity. Martin Buber's comment on Hassidism is appropriate in this context:

Without lessening the strong obligation imposed by the Torah, the movement suffused all the traditional commandments with joy-bringing significance, and even set aside the walls separating the sacred and the profane, by teaching that every profane act can be rendered sacred by the manner in which it is performed.¹³

The elements recurrent in Hassidic tales are a sense of joy, an emphasis on the human capacity to transcend the boundaries of the ostensibly real and an emphasis on paradox and, these are precisely the elements most recurrent in Sammy's stories. Sammy's characters often act in ways that might be said to reveal sacred depths behind their profane condition.

If Sammy is a Hassid, however, he is re-made through a contemporary perspective. His stories can be seen as something akin to the kind of fabulation

described by Robert Alter. They relate simultaneously to Hassidic literature, and to the kind of ethical fable, exhibiting a free sense of fictive invention and discarding conventions of realism, associated with Post-Modernist fiction. He is, on another level, a grotesquely paradoxical and comic character, a doomed buffoon engaged in the pursuit of the impossible. A joke is Sammy's method of manifesting his love of flawed humanity. His final fervour is akin to madness:

Always there's been something making me like crazy. I get like a huge, huge...thing, a thing I can't catch hold of. It makes me cry inside. I feel like making some stupendous joke because I can't think of any other way.(p.128)

Sammy's final madness parallels the madness of Miss Lonelyhearts, Eli Peck and Norman Moonbloom. It is close to a holy frenzy based on a refusal to accept defined conditions of existence. As the discussion of The Tenants of Moonbloom indicates, a contemporary perspective renders spiritual grace as a kind of madness and mystic commitment and action as a kind of comedy. Spiritual grace and mystic action are rendered fundamentally inappropriate in a contemporary situation and, thus, mad and comic, but no less holy for being so. Moral action necessitates irrational behaviour because being rational, in contemporary terms, involves an acceptance of the prevailing consciousness, devoid of spiritual grace, blind to the splendour of human mystery, and miserable in its rituals of deprivation and pain.

The mystic in the contemporary world is, like Sammy and Moonbloom, a profoundly unrealistic figure who insists upon the possibility of changing the world against all the reasonable evidence of his powerlessness. Angelo assumes Gaylord's function. He is the outraged realist confronting the mystic. Sammy is determined to make people forgive Lebedov: "'Whatta you want to do?' he cried. 'Make the whole fucken world over?'"(p.128). Sammy's answer reveals both spiritual grace and madness, and is an illustration of the decline of the distinction between the two that reveals the shape of mystic determination in

the contemporary environment: "'Yeah. Yeah, boychik, that's what I had in mind,' Sammy said with menacing softness"(p.129). The response is also a clear extension of Moonbloom's response: "'Uh huh,' Norman said smilingly, 'for me.'"14 While Moonbloom personalises his intention, Sammy explicitly extends his objective. Sammy's ambition is no less than to change the world through love, an ambition that is both futile and spiritually splendid.

The framework drawn for what is essentially a contemporary vision of spiritual grace is the most explicitly religious in Wallant's fiction. The master teaches the disciple the mysteries of that grace through story and action. The religious framework does not, however, derive from traditional, institutional forms, as it might in the fiction of Chaim Potok. It is established through symbolic parallels that transform and extend the figures of Sammy and Angelo. Religious institutions, the Catholic Church as it appears in this novel for example, offer only the external shapes of religious belief, not the mystic insights that Sammy has and that Angelo learns. The spiritual centre of the novel is expressed through Sammy's stories.

These stories have a deep function in the overall context of the novel. They act as parallel fictions to the wider fiction evolved by Wallant. The essential meaning of Sammy's stories reflects the meaning of his life as constructed by Wallant. Sammy finally becomes a character in another of the fictions he creates exhibiting, like the pimp and the pervert, a capacity for love that goes beyond any rational expectation. There is no fundamental distinction drawn between Sammy's fictions and the novel's reality. Sammy lives and dies, it seems, so as to illustrate the themes implied in his stories. His actions may be grotesque and sometimes comic but they are an affirmation of the unfathomable depths of the human spirit. In a sense, Sammy is a version of the authorial voice, creating fictions in microcosm that reflect the essence of the themes expressed in the main body of Wallant's fiction.

In the opening chapter Wallant introduces Angelo in the context of the family and at work emphasising in each location his character's sense of detachment and isolation. The family swelter in the urban heat "like penned animals"(p.3), moving aimlessly. Angelo, in contrast, moves with purpose and

exhibits a cool disdain for the Catholic trappings around the house. Wallant again places his characters in an urban environment where they face "the specter of a treadmill day"(p.7). The idea of ritualised living, on the treadmill, is, however, no "specter" for Angelo. He has basically two identities, that which goes mechanically through the repetitious activity of work immune to the pain of the patients, and that which pursues knowledge with single-minded determination. The two identities are complimentary in that Angelo sees scientific knowledge as a means of protecting himself from the emotional demands of human anguish:

His already corrupted sense of smell deteriorated further among the odors of ether and feces and sweat. And if he was brutalized by their constant assault, and if no pity was elicited in him, it was partly because he was in and out of there so often that the births and extinctions had no history. Besides, he knew the structure of the human body from his study; he held the vascular, skeletal, muscular drawings against his brain like a talisman against pain.(p.23)

For Angelo understanding is equated with describing the factual make up of an organism and, with this kind of understanding, the consciousness of emotional complexity is minimised.

Wallant repeatedly hints, however, at those aspects of Angelo's character that finally make him an initiate. He has an almost manic desire to obtain insight, a "constant, merciless curiosity..."(p.11). That desire to understand is re-directed away from the purely scientific. Most crucially, he resists with only limited success his innate capacity to respond to something indefinable within Theresa. There is something within her, and within her silence, that he is emotionally responsive to. This element cannot be explained or defined scientifically: "Why did she get under his skin sometimes, he wondered? Why did her silence, her brainless little motions, somehow undermine him?"(p.27). Angelo's failure to categorise his relationship with Theresa is a vital failure, a small but significant chink in his commitment to the idea that all things may be factually defined. In particular it is important in the context of the

recognition of the mysterious possibilities in silence. Wallant prefigures Angelo's final determination never "to miss hearing what happened in silence" (p.183), In the opening of the novel the relationship with Theresa represents an area of Angelo's life that he is unable to categorise rationally. His enlightenment will involve the growing expansion of those mysterious, indefinable areas of experience until the mystic essence of the novel is finally apparent, a mystery at the root of human behaviour that cannot be categorised or rationalised.

The re-awakening of Berman and Nazerman has implications in their actions. Both of the earlier novels end with the respective characters realigning themselves with other people, recognising human interdependence. Angelo's awakening, however, is manifest not so much in terms of action but in terms of consciousness. The climax is the assumption by Angelo of the burden of mystic over scientific awareness. He forgoes certain knowledge for a profounder sense of human mystery. The earlier novels end in a re-affirmation of human interdependence. This novel begins and ends with Angelo's isolation; what has been transformed is the quality of his consciousness.

The figure of Sammy is, in a sense, unique in Wallant's fiction. Berman, Nazerman, Angelo and Moonbloom are all relatively defined characters belonging to particular ethnic and economic groups. They are also, in one sense, realistic in that they have individual identities and sensibilities that are complex and evolving within the novels. The consciousness of those characters undergoes change that the reader follows through the development of the novel. The figure of Sammy differs in that he is not essentially meant to be a firmly located personality with a defined identity and a consciousness accessible to the reader. He stands rather as a projection of a spiritual teacher into a contemporary context, a metaphor of a kind of spiritual grace that in the contemporary world is an ambiguous mixture of mania, grotesqueness and comedy. He has, in this sense, a function similar to that associated with Charyn's Imberman.

Sammy first appears in the third chapter startling Angelo by his sudden appearance which has something of the texture of a materialisation. His features in the dimness of the children's ward are indistinct, and the room is given an unreal, mystic atmosphere:

Here and there a child whimpered; one girl, her voice almost all whisper, called for her mother. Somehow the darkness seemed to exaggerate their pain, and the room was phantasmagoric in the dimness of the night lights. The movement of a small limb or the flap of a blind or the rustle of a nun's garments set the gloom eddying in widening ripples.

In that enlargement of the miniscule, an orderly Angelo had never seen before moved out from between two beds, turned, and smiled, his face long and pearly in the dimness. Startled by the tall, narrow, white shape, Angelo realized he was gaping at the man.(p.29)

Sammy assumes the role of guide through the dimly lit children's ward. The first confrontation establishes a symbol for the evolution of the relationship. Sammy illuminates the children's faces with his lamp and, thus, enables Angelo to see clearly the nature of their pain. This is the first signal of the revelation that he is to suffer. In the conversation that follows Sammy outlines his role as an irritant who forces people in their anger to expose their essential personalities and, thus, by implication to learn to know themselves:

See, when they're a little sore and curious, I can find out more about them. People have to get...well...Like you rub your skin against something rough--you know, scrape yourself. Your skin gets tender, you feel every little thing--a breeze, a little brushing against it.(p.37)

He attempts to make people responsive to experience and emotion, and to the pain that that responsiveness involves. Sammy's imagery prefigures Angelo's final state of painful emotional sensitivity.

Through this procedure Wallant signals the evolution of the relationship, and Sammy's function within it. He operates as a catalytic function rather than a complex characterisation. As the novel develops the reader gains no deep insights into Sammy's psychology but instead the areas of paradox and the inexplicable expand around him.

The evolving consciousness in the novel is Angelo's but his path is not toward certainty from confusion but in precisely the reverse direction. Like Berman, and in direct contrast to Potok's protagonists, he has, in a sense, to unlearn, to divest himself of a certain but corrupted vision of reality. He moves from the certainty of scientific belief to the richer confusion Sammy creates. In the beginning of the novel he is secure in the knowledge that experience can be defined systematically:

He knew he was fortunate in having the intelligence to see his situation for what it was. He read avidly, at any hour, in any place, muttering triumphant oaths when a sentence or a word opened up a myth to the reality of bone and blood cell. When others had murmured piously that his father had gone to heaven, he had punctured the image by learning about the electric impulses of the brain and the nature of organic decomposition.(p.11)

Clinical detachment insulates him from emotion, and reveals a secure sense of reality. In contrast, Angelo's last recorded emotional response is of puzzlement and surprise. His final recognition is a paradox, a wound that is both life and death:

And a blade twitched into his heart, beginning that slow, massive bleeding he would never be able to stop, no matter what else he might accomplish. He was surprised and puzzled as he walked with that mortal wound in him, for it occurred to him that, although the wound would be the death of him, it would be the life of him too.(p.184)

He moves from corrupted certainty to affirmative confusion.

The path of Angelo's initiation, this progressive movement toward a recognition of the inexplicable, is set against the continuing ritual of Angelo's daily life. As in the other novels Wallant establishes a tension between an evolving consciousness and a static urban ritual emphasising, through this tension, a distinction between the mundane repetitions of daily activity and the contrasting splendour of emotional possibility.

The distinction between what man appears to be and his inner depths, the preoccupation of all of Wallant's novels, takes various shapes in this novel. Sammy is a hospital orderly going through the functions that orderlies perform but he also has the status of a kind of holy man, committed to a radical assault on his world's consciousness. With the character of Lebedov, Wallant makes the distinction between outer and inner man most forcibly. On the one level, Lebedov is a brutal, ignorant man, beastly in his ignorance. Wallant, however, exposes Lebedov's complex, perverse and ultimately destructive grasping for beauty and innocence that leads to the child's death:

See, I grab pretty thing, I want so bad I not care for nothing. But gets all squash. Aghh, what I should do? What for I need that crazy guy? Why he's not leave me alone, leave me get old, leave me die, leave me forget whole goddam thing? Pretty things...what, not real? Just is dream? Grab pretty little thing--get all lousy ugly. Is animal? So then why I hurt like this?(pp.105-106)

The plea to be left alone to die and to forget dream is precisely the plea made by Gaylord on Basellecci's behalf in The Tenants of Moonbloom. It reveals Sammy's function as a spiritual activist who drives the characters back toward both the anguish and the beauty of life. It also points to a parallel between Sammy and Moonbloom. Sammy is an extended version, the function fully realised. As in the other novels, the reader is made to recognise ambiguity and complexity in an ostensibly simple or pathetic character. What Sammy re-activates within Lebedov is the capacity to respond to beauty but the nature of that response is finally destructive and fatal to one of the children. What begins in something like comic incongruity, ends in Lebedov's anguish, and in death. Lebedov carries the anguish of his dreams and, as Sammy insists, "it's all a dream, with neutrons"(p.159). At the root of Wallant's fiction is a recognition of the duality of human life, a fundamental distinction between the outer man (neutrons) and his inner depths. The holy madmen of the later novels, Sammy Cahan and Norman Moonbloom, attempt to give external shape to their inner capacities and to remake the world through these capacities.

The plot of The Children at the Gate moves toward two revelations, Lebedov's guilt and Sammy's use of the drugs. The evolution of those elements in the narrative acts as a framework for the other, more profound, processes that are taking place: Angelo's movement toward the breakdown that will precede his spiritual redemption, and Sammy's movement toward fatal spiritual grace and final madness. Sammy moves toward a grotesque and problematically comic martyrdom. Sammy joins in Angelo's laughter at his death agony.

The literal sense and logical meaning of Sammy's actions and statements decline as he moves in the direction of the climax. The logical links between Sammy's stories are, even in the beginning, tenuous. Two disconnected stories are linked by "Because"(p.65), for example, and the utterances end in a crescendo of discontinuity. He becomes, like Moonbloom, "the madness in the centre of the room"(p.160) precisely at the moment when the spiritual significance of his actions, the momentum of his martyrdom, reaches its climax. Wallant points to a direct correlation between the decline of the logical sense of Sammy's language and the transformation of his status for Angelo. Through language devoid of logical continuity and through action devoid of rational control, Sammy finally transforms Angelo's consciousness. Sammy does not communicate through conventional explanation. He speaks, in a sense, in tongues and his message is conveyed in a way that again reveals a pervasive sense, sustained in Potok, Fiedler and Charyn, that meaning exists beyond and beneath the spoken word.

Wallant again points to a distinction that is central to his art and recurrent in the tradition of Jewish literature. There is a distinction between what man lives, his rational life or what is called the realistic boundaries of his experiences, and what he is actually capable of dreaming of and acting upon. Appropriately enough Nathanael West quotes an epigram that fully expresses this distinction: "The semites...are like to a man sitting in a cloaca to the eyes, and whose brows touch heaven."¹⁵ In Wallant's world man may wallow in the cloaca of a sordid reality but in inspired fervour he can also reach out of it, and back toward it, in a radical attempt to remake it.

The novel ends in a prevailing sense of paradox. As Sammy moves toward his martyrdom, Angelo becomes aware of a diminishing sense of everyday reality:

Perspective was altered by the unusual clarity of the morning air. Mica in the cement glittered from the pavement and from the mortared lines between the old bricks of the buildings. The sky was a hard, unreal blue; the trees might have been carved jade.(p.169)

The transformation of this reality prepares the reader for the final acts of transformation, Sammy into martyr and Angelo into disciple. The action evolves with "the pomposity of a pageant"(p.170) but it occurs against the musical accompaniment of a "saccharin organ theme to a soap opera"(p.170). Sammy's final entrance heightens the theatrical overtones:

The radio was shut off suddenly. The piece of paper stopped, and settled. ..

For an instant nothing moved.

Here he comes.

Sammy.(p.170)

The sky, the trees, the music and the dramatically appropriate entrance into a moment of silence and stillness conspire to heighten a sense of paradoxical theatricality and unreality entirely appropriate to the unreality of Sammy's demands. He asks the bereaved parents to forgive the murderer of their child. The atmosphere in which Sammy's actions occur is shaped by a mixture of cheap theatre and a sense of the evolution of a profound ritual, a martyrdom. In the secular, contemporary environment, martyrdom takes on the shape of cheap theatre. This sense of paradox is highlighted in Angelo's question: "What is he selling, hell or the other?"(p.172). The "other" is not defined as simply heaven. The "other" is to be the heightened emotional sensitivity to pain that Angelo is to carry with him on earth.

Angelo's laughter is, as in Moonbloom's response to Del Rio's pain, an expression of anguish and emotional sympathy, a shared agony. It also recognises the paradox of Sammy's death both in its grotesque theatricality, and in its

spiritual profundity. Through the synthesis of anguish and laughter Angelo finally communicates with and realises the inner meanings of Sammy's actions. At the point of Sammy's death the laughter of the contemporary disciple joins with the laughter of the contemporary Christ and they share a common agony through their laughter: "Angelo began to strangle as Sammy tried to laugh with him, and the sweat was rung out of him like thin, dark oil on his skin. He was convulsed. Tears streamed down his face"(p.173). At this moment Sister Louise shares Angelo's insight and suffers the knowledge that will both, paradoxically, metaphorically wound Angelo to death and enable him to live: "And then she saw, and was instantly destroyed in a way that would insist upon her living"(p.173).

It is within these paradoxes that the novel ends. Angelo had "laughed his agony and cried his relief..."(p.183). The bleeding that ends the novel will be both the death and the life of him. Living in the world fully and with love is, in Wallant's world, an anguished business but it is a human business. Machines, after all, do not bleed or cry but equally they are unable to love or laugh. The Angelo that walks out of The Children at the Gate is transformed by this consciousness:

And a blade twitched into his heart, beginning that slow massive bleeding he would never be able to stop, no matter what else he might accomplish. He was surprised and puzzled as he walked with that mortal wound in him, for it occurred to him that, although the wound would be the death of him, it would be the life of him too.(p.184)

This last novel gave some indication of what might have been the direction of Wallant's work had he not died at a tragically young age. The elements of parable and fable, the exploitation of symbolic structure, and the use of a protagonist who is primarily function suggest a movement toward the kinds of Post-Modernist procedures apparent in Jerome Charyn's work. The more explicit examination of spiritual issues in the last two novels, and the creation of a contemporary saint in full comic ambiguity suggests that those procedures would have been melded with a developing concern with the issues of spiritual and religious possibility in the secular world. Such a combination might, in

maturity, have led to a major body of particularly profound and beautiful fiction.

VI

As the preceding discussions indicate there is a shift of tone and emphasis from the earlier to the later novels. The high seriousness of The Human Season and The Pawnbroker gives way to a more ambiguous tone in which comedy and profundity co-exist, and this corresponds to a shift in emphasis. In the later novels Wallant moves toward a greater concern with the mystic transformation of personality. There is a growing preoccupation in Wallant's fiction with the shape that mystic experience can take in contemporary reality. It looks like madness and comedy but is no less profound because of that. What emerges from a reading of Wallant's fiction is a synthesis of a contemporary perspective with a mystic and religious sensibility.

Wallant's preoccupation in all of the novels is with the shapes that love falls into. His vision encompasses a rich ambiguity in which love is a source of both joy and anguish. His protagonists suffer love and are wounded by it, but the path to redemption and emotional regeneration is through love.

Wallant creates a synthesis of visions. There is the harsh squalor and deprivation of urban reality with massive emotional density. The world of his novels is often populated by the grotesques of a crippled humanity and he affirms the splendour of the inner capacities of that humanity. His sensibility is dark enough to encompass the nightmarish cruelties that mankind can commit, and it is also touched by a vision of man's ineffable goodness and innocence.

Edward Wallant's early death was a tragic loss. The fiction he has left raises issues that are found, in different forms, throughout Jewish-American fiction. His work combines an oblique Jewish sensibility with an unsentimental and precise perspective on an often hostile and bleak contemporary American reality.

His romantic and mystic version of religious issues offers a contrast with Chaim Potok's literal and dramatic treatment. Between Wallant and Potok, a spectrum of possibility emerges. They interpret Jewish issues in different ways and with radically different assumptions, and, thus, illustrate the fact that Judaism is not a static concept but a malleable element in the fictive

enterprise. Wallant treats religious sensibility largely through symbol, while Potok examines sensibility as manifest in a particular sociologically identifiable group. Potok is concerned with the drama of religious conflict in the Orthodox Jewish community. Wallant is concerned with spiritual potential in an impoverished urban landscape. The clear difference between the novelists does not obscure the fact that at root they respond, as Fiedler and Charyn do, to the shapes that are formed at the convergence of Jewish, contemporary and American experiences.

Notes

- ¹ Elie Wiesel, Souls on Fire: Portraits and Legends of Hasidic Masters (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), p.7.
- ² Leslie Fiedler, "Henry Roth's Neglected Masterpiece," Commentary, 30, No.2 (August 1960), p.105.
- ³ Marcus Klein, "Further Notes on the Dereliction of Culture: Edward Lewis Wallant and Bruce Jay Friedman," in Contemporary American-Jewish Literature, ed. Irving Malin (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1973), pp.229-247.
- ⁴ The Human Season, in many respects, draws upon Roth's novel. The transcendent possibilities of water, and the image of the electric shock as a symbol of God's power are, for example, similarly developed. Both novels trace a search for God and both end in a recognition of, and a resolution with, a world without God. The climactic sections of the two novels are remarkably similar in texture. Berman's concluding "Ah well" is parallel to David's sleep. Both indicate a final acceptance of human multiplicity. They are also wordless responses to the conclusion of a quest which has ended in the discovery of something outside of what was sought--something that defies the character's ability to articulate it.
- David and Berman are also engaged, on one level, in a quest for the father. They move toward enlightenment with, in one case, the perception of a child and, in the other, with the restoration of a childlike perception. At the end David is able to discover his father as something other than an ogre and Berman is able to recreate the image of himself as the son in relation to the father. Both novels thus draw upon the pervasive concern with father-son relationships in Jewish-American literature.
- ⁵ Edward Lewis Wallant, The Human Season (London: Victor Gollancz, 1965),

p.19. First publication, 1960. All further references to this work appear in the text.

⁶ Most coherently by William Virgil Davis, "Sleep Like the Living: A Study of the Novels of Edward Lewis Wallant," Ph.D Thesis Ohio University, 1967.

⁷ Edward Lewis Wallant, The Pawnbroker (London: Victor Gallancz, 1962), p.85. First publication, 1961. All further references to this work appear in the text.

⁸ Edward Lewis Wallant, The Tenants of Moonbloom (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964), p.3. First publication, 1963. All further references to this work appear in the text.

⁹ Edward Lewis Wallant, The Children at the Gate (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964), p.12. First publication, 1964. All further references to this work appear in the text.

¹⁰ For further, if strained, discussion of the idea of dialectic in Wallant's fiction see Joyce Ruddel, "The Agony of Choice: Dialectic in the Novels of Edward Lewis Wallant," Ph.D Thesis University of Wisconsin, 1971.

¹¹ Leo Rosten describes the Tzaddik as "A most righteous man. A holy man; a man of surpassing virtue and possibly supernatural powers." The Joys of Yiddish (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p.425.

¹² Wallant, The Tenants of Moonbloom, p.200.

¹³ Martin Buber, Tales of the Hasidim (New York: Schocken Books, 1947), I, p.3.

¹⁴ Wallant, The Tenants of Moonbloom, p.191.

¹⁵ Nathanael West, "The Dream Life of Balso Snell," in The Complete Works of Nathanael West (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), p.8.

Chapter 3: Terribly Torn and Lonely Boys: Chaim Potok

I

In reading contemporary Jewish-American fiction one becomes aware of the unresolved nature of the issues raised. The tendency in this fiction is to conclude in ambiguity and to imply the unresolvable nature of the interaction between Jewish, American and contemporary cultural atmospheres. Characters tend to exist, sometimes in anguish or in comic confusion, at a point where pressures converge. They look simultaneously in different directions and suffer from their inability to move purposefully and fully into either the American or the Jewish world. They are, like Fiedler's protagonists, neither American nor Jewish enough to become unproblematically Jewish or American.

Chaim Potok is rare among contemporary Jewish-American writers in that he attempts to resolve this recurrent dilemma through a synthesis of Jewish traditional Orthodoxy and the contemporary American cultural ethos. When the synthesis is made elsewhere, in Wallant's work for example, a more common procedure is to create an oblique or radical version of Judaism and to integrate that with American environment. This inevitably involves the manipulation of models of Judaism that do not correspond with the religious institutions or with traditional Jewish forms. Potok's is, though, a more selective version of Jewish America. In this limited world, Orthodox Jews create environments and institutions which enable them to sustain religious life in contemporary America. His characters go through the anguish of being afflicted by what seem to be contradictory pressures but in the final revelations these pressures are reconciled.

In The Chosen, Danny Saunders suffers an upbringing through silence. His father, Reb Saunders, does not communicate with him except in Talmudic discussions. He seeks to inject into Danny a consciousness of anguish, to balance intellect against emotion. In The Promise, Potok has Danny re-invent this use of silence, to merge it with psychoanalytic theory, and then to

the contemporary context of the mental hospital. The values of the old world are made relevant and effective in the new. Similarly Reuven, at the end of The Promise, is able to convince Rav Kalman to agree to his ordination even though he uses secular critical methods to study the Torah. What Kalman finally reluctantly recognises is that this contemporary method can be reconciled with traditional Yiddishkeit.¹ The gulf between contemporary methodology and traditional faith is narrowed. In My Name is Asher Lev, the reconciliation between the world of art and the world of Orthodox Judaism is more problematic. However, in attempting to paint "the anguish of all the world,"² Asher is seen finally to be acting in accord with assumptions about the wishes of "the Master of the Universe." Although his paintings drive a wedge between him and his father, he is nevertheless engaged in an attempt to restore "balance to the universe"³ which, in the context of the novel, reconciles the objectives of Orthodox Judaism with the objectives of the artist, Asher Lev. In In the Beginning, David Lurie seeks to create a sense of continuity with the Jewish past through modern scholarship. While his methodology deviates from Orthodoxy, the spirit that motivates him affirms a persistent energy and a pervasive continuity that links the Jews of the present to those of the past. As Reuven does in The Promise, David Lurie uses the tools of modernity to re-affirm a faith in the religious past. Potok attempts to reconcile the ambiguities of the Jewish experience in a contemporary America by emphasising the relevance of traditional Judaism to a contemporary context. Elements of the Jewish tradition can be remade into effective art or effective psychological theory and can help the characters in Potok's novels to lead morally valid and useful lives.

In the work of his Jewish contemporaries, the modern world tends to exert pressures that erode traditional structures. This is particularly clear in Fiedler's "The Last Jew in America" or Charyn's Once Upon a Droschky where contemporary urban life undermines Jewish community cohesion. The events of modern history similarly undermine faith in Wallant's The

rather than real. Potok's version of the contemporary world is selective enough to minimise the pressures of secularisation, and to stress the validity of contemporary ideas when linked with religious commitment. His selective version of the contemporary world stresses the qualities of rational goodwill and tolerance. The darker shapes of urban deprivation and the quasi-surrealistic nightmares of recent history, found in Edward Wallant or Charyn, are expressed only partially in Potok's work. Historical event, the holocaust particularly, is a felt pressure in the lives of the protagonists, but they operate in a contemporary America largely seen in terms of progressive ideas. The clash between traditional Judaism and the contemporary world is often in Potok a clash between intellectual positions expressed through the medium of ideas. The behaviour of those in conflict is not always rational, although it usually is. The environment in which they function, however, is fundamentally a rational place hospitable to intellectual enquiry. The dense impenetrability of an absurd urban environment is not represented in Potok's fictional system.

Potok is able to make an optimistic reconciliation of Jewish and contemporary American pressures because he avoids the literary assumptions of many of his contemporaries. He does not, for example, present a version of the human experience in which man is essentially ineffective. Potok's characters make moral choices which lead in a rational causal chain to predictable outcomes. Asher's father is able to aid Jews persecuted in Russia. Danny Saunders is able to help Michael. David Malter brings Danny and Reuven together and his efforts to build up support for Zionism in America are effective. David Lurie moves toward greater insight and knowledge. People in Potok's world can make choices and take actions which lead to rational and predictable outcomes. This may be contrasted with, for example, Bruce Jay Friedman's Stern, Roth's Portnoy's Complaint, Charyn's Going to Jerusalem, Markfield's Teitelbaum's Window or even Bellow's Herzog and Malamud's The Assistant. In each of those novels, the examples could easily be multiplied, the central characters have, to a greater or lesser degree, objectives that hit the rock of a reality that is perplexing,

irrational and unpredictable. They also make moral choices and take action but the outcome of the action is not what was intended nor what could be predicted. Those characters exist in a version of reality that undercuts the rational continuity of a causal chain, choice then action then predictable outcome. That kind of reality pervades the contemporary American novel and makes resolution an unlikely conclusion to events unless, like Wallant or, at times, Charyn, the author re-creates a quasi-mystical potential for transcendence. In those cases, the model of reality remains bleak and irrational, but those conditions are partly overcome. Sammy Cahan in The Children At the Gate or the Rabbi in On the Darkening Green are effective moral agents in so far as they are non-realists. The realities created are not amenable to moral action and, thus, an active moral stance involves often doomed non, or anti, realistic defiance.

In contrast, moral action in Potok's fiction involves understanding and acting within the reality system created, options denied to the moral actors in Wallant or Charyn's fictive system. Potok is able to resolve the pressures he creates because his version of reality deviates from contemporary literary orthodoxy. His world may be difficult to understand for his characters but it does not finally defy their attempts to comprehend it. It is still a rational world.

Potok's reality is certainly often hostile and crisis ridden but it is finally only superficially contemporary in the texture of the experiences that his characters undergo. His novels abound with references to political events in the periods described: the death of Stalin, the holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel, the Kennedy assassination. The historical contexts of his novels are created in great detail. His contemporary world, though, is seen through a perspective more rational, more comprehending, maybe more naive than the perspectives of most of his contemporaries.

The subject matter of Potok's novels also differs from the material most often used in contemporary Jewish-American fiction. His Jews are not Fiedler's peripheral Jews wondering how to relate the fragments of their

Orthodox Jews wondering how to shape their Orthodoxy to their present experience and, in the main, finally reaching solutions. Danny, Reuven, Asher and David are educated in Yeshivas. A good part of their lives is lived within one of the two kinds of orthodox communities, with Hassidim or Mishnagedim. They seem finally unbruised by the pressures of gentile America, its myths and its values. The worlds that Potok presents as threats to the Jewishness of his characters are the world of psychology for Danny, the world of art for Asher and the world of secular scholarship for Reuven and David. In those worlds Jewishness is seen valuably to enhance the contributions of the characters but, of course, those are creative worlds in which effective contributions can be made. The complex, perplexing, threatening worlds of gentile America (in which Stern suffers, for example) simply do not exist in Potok's fiction. Potok's gentile world is basically genteel.

While Potok's world may be hostile (to Russian Jews for example), it can nevertheless be changed and understood. It is not surprising then that the characteristic process in his fiction is of growing experience and growing understanding. The search for identity ends in success not in the kind of alienated despair (poor Portnoy howling on the couch) that has come to be recognisable as a contemporary fictional characteristic. The four novels are close to traditional Bildungsroman in which the characters expand the range of their knowledge and come through various spiritual crises to a sense of their own place in the world.⁴ The prevailing process in most contemporary Jewish-American fiction is of a pursuit of understanding which ends sometimes in mystification, or in the realisation that identity cannot be defined in relation to an external context but only in terms of ethical introspection, or in an act or acts that transcend the ostensible boundaries of the possible. For the most part, the relationship between the individual and society raises elements of mystification rather than insight. When there is affirmation, as in The Human Season, it tends to be expressed in terms of individual consciousness. Alternatively affirmation may be

expressed in a quasi-magical transcendence of the prevailing social environment as in The Tenants of Moonbloom or Charyn's Once Upon a Droszky. Society itself remains dense and impenetrable. The protagonists of Fiedler's, Wallant's or Charyn's fiction rarely find themselves at home in, and with, the world. Potok's characters however, learn to define themselves in relation to the world as a Rabbi, a psychologist, a teacher or an artist. They are finally placed and literally located with secure identities in the world.

The climaxes of Potok's novels are, as this argument emphasises, basically optimistic. There is a prevailing sense of a balance restored, a resolution reached in the end. However, the processes described in the fiction, and the dramatic tension created, derive from conflict not resolution. Potok's "terribly torn and lonely boys"⁵ struggle against various kinds of pressures and suffer great burdens of spirit. These conflicts are manifest in various ways but predominantly take that most recurrent shape of conflict in Jewish fiction, the collision of the son with the father. In every case the tension between father and son also serves to dramatise issues other than the domestic. In The Chosen, the clash between Reb Saunders and Danny operates on various levels. In one sense it reflects a dialectic between faith and scientific scepticism. This is also inevitably a clash between traditional and contemporary values, between Hassidic social patterns (the hereditary continuity of the tzaddikate for example) and American social mobility, between social cohesion and social change. In The Promise, with the tensions in The Chosen resolved, the separation of the son from the father, Michael from Abraham Gordon, serves to illustrate the damaging effect of unyielding fanaticism. Michael suffers for his father, the victim of the unflagging ire of the Orthodox, and finds that suffering too great a burden; it leads to hatred. In My Name is Asher Lev, the son's values are aesthetic and universal, the father's values practical and Jewish. In each of these cases the conflict between generations corresponds to a conflict of "worlds." In In the Beginning, the conflict between father and son dramatises two versions of Jewish moral action, the activist and the scholarly. For the most part though, the values of the sons are not too far from the values

of fathers and they are finally, to Potok's satisfaction, reconcilable. Even at the end of My Name is Asher Lev the reader is meant to realise that, in an oblique way, Asher fulfils the continuity of tradition despite the fact that his father is unable to achieve that realisation.

In The Chosen and in My Name is Asher Lev sons ostensibly break the continuity of generations by not assuming the roles of their fathers and grandfathers. Danny does not become the tzaddik and Asher does not travel for the Ladover Hassidic interest as generations of Levs have done. However, there is an oblique continuation of the spirit that binds the generations. Danny and Asher revolt only in the institutional sense. They do not become what their fathers have been but they sustain the emotional and ethical direction of their fathers' lives.

Other sets of values are set in tension with each other. The conflict of Hassidim and Mishnagedim runs through The Chosen. Orthodoxy and Reform battle over sacred texts in The Promise and In the Beginning. The authority of the Rebbe is a source of tension in My Name is Asher Lev. Issues make divisions within the Jewish communities. The kinds of dialectic arising from these tensions end, however, in synthesis and reconciliation and this basically defines Potok's method of narrative progression. He raises issues which lead to conflict, the tension heightens and the conflict is resolved in the climax. Danny and Reuven clash in the context of a baseball game which is invested with significance (hassidim versus apikorsim) and has an uncertain outcome. The climax is the injury to Reuven and the friendship of the boys. Michael's illness initially erupts, then festers and finally reaches climax. The uneasy relationship between Reuven and Rev Kalman simmers until the publication of David Malter's book. The climax and resolution occur while Reuven takes the ordination examination. Asher's talent is dormant but finally reactivated. He paints the crucifixion and the reader is aware that when his parents see it there will be turmoil. Historical events, the situation of Jews in pre-war Europe, the Depression, the Holocaust are progressively revealed to David Lurie. Revelation, and tensions arising out

of the impact of these revelations, is the major factor through which the novel is structured. There are then in Potok's fiction very defined narrative structures, recurrent patterns of conflict, tension, climax and resolution.

This serves to create a prevailing sense of pattern and, on occasions, leads to a transparent sense of the fiction as artifact. This may, as in the end of The Promise, lead to the feeling that there is something intrusively artificial about such neat plot resolutions. Almost simultaneously, and it is that which basically sounds an inauthentic note, Michael's silence is broken down and Reuven gets his ordination. The first response is a justified scepticism. However, that criticism overlooks the underlying purpose of these, sometimes transparent, structures in Potok's fiction. In Potok's world there is a sense of balance and pattern and his plots evolve through these structures to enforce the sense of direction and purpose in human experience. Patterns of narrative progression move inexorably, particularly in the first two novels, to climax and resolution and Potok's characters move inexorably through these climaxes toward the destinies they have chosen for themselves. In this sense, Potok uses plot as a mechanism to enforce moral and thematic purpose. The plot is at the same time realistic in intention and, in part, exhibits elements of ethical fable or allegory. Asher moves toward his moment of moral choice, to be true to his vision and cause anguish or to settle for something less than completeness. He chooses to be true to the destiny he defines in his aspiration toward artistic excellence. The inevitability of conflict (for Danny in relation to Reb Saunders and Reuven in relation to Rav Kalman) gives narrative shape to the first two novels but also emphasises the defined nature of the path down which the characters move. This sense of a path defined is less intrusive in In the Beginning where more irrational forces of history are seen to distort the avenues toward enlightenment defined by Max and David. There is, however, a progressive process of learning that takes David toward intellectual insight and emotional awareness. The absence of an intrusive ethical pattern signals a greater sophistication in this novel. Essentially

however, Potok's novels are clearly structured because life is clearly structured. Moral choice in the novels leads to consequences that have inevitably to be faced. Human experience in Potok's world has for the most part, pattern, structure and meaning. This is not the world that his contemporaries tend to recognise, as Philip Roth indicates:

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 own meager imagination.⁶

The responses attributed to the American writer by Philip Roth are not apparent in Chaim Potok's work.

A central issue in Potok's fiction is the question of moral choice. In The Promise, David Malter's response to Reuven's plea for advice fully suggests the importance of moral choice in these novels: "What do you do? I do not know what to tell you. You must make your own choice. You are a man, not a child, and a man must make his own choice."⁷ Each of the protagonists is faced by a moment in which he has to decide and the consequences of these decisions are seen to have far reaching implications for the direction of the characters' lives. Being able to make these choices is also a measure of the moral maturity that the characters have achieved. The decisions are made at moments when experience and perception has led towards self awareness. The choices test the degree to which moral education is successful. Reuven, like David Lurie, decides to use analytic method in biblical studies. Danny chooses psychology over the tzaddikate and Asher paints the crucifixion and then decides to put it in the exhibition. The reader is aware that each of these vital decisions is ethically valid. In each case the character chooses difficulty and anguish because that choice is morally superior to the easier alternatives. In that respect, Potok's position corresponds with the position maintained in Fiedler, Wallant and Charyn. There is a moral obligation to reject easy or comfortable options.

Although this rejection is expressed in various ways, the four writers reveal a recurrent concept in contemporary fiction; moral action involves a certain amount of isolation and pain. The choice of difficulty places Potok's characters upon what the novels make clear is the appropriate path. The fact that the various characters choose well is a vindication of the quality of their moral education which is, in each case, an Orthodox Jewish education. Even Asher, the most estranged from Jewish values, has learnt the lesson inherent in the example of his mother's behaviour; things must not be left uncompleted. Through this emphasis on moral choice, Potok asserts the validity of the Jewish educations (even the silence) within the contemporary American world. Yiddishkeit, with its attendant values, continues to offer valid moral precepts in that world. Traditional Judaism still can teach man how to live a good life. Potok is, in this respect, a long way from the versions of Judaism current in the writing of many of his contemporaries. Potok's Jewish world is a narrowly defined one. Its occupants are all committed to the religion.⁸ The existence of Judaism as a serious religion is not an issue but rather the shape of the seriousness is at stake. There are no Herzogs or Portnoys in these novels, none of the rootless, peripheral, disaffected Jews that we have come to recognise as embodiments of the condition of Judaism in a recurrent contemporary version of the Jewish-American environment.

There is a strong sense of place, time and social context. Potok carefully details the customs and beliefs of the groups he writes about. Particular political and historical events are felt through their impact on these groups. A lot of space is given over to descriptions of the locations in which events occur. Potok creates a sense of sociological and historical context in which his narratives evolve. The streets of Brooklyn are transformed in the post-Holocaust period by the influx of Hassidic Jews. The focus upon the structure of Hassidic society emphasises its social cohesiveness and hierachial nature. Stanley Reynolds sees Potok's primary value in his "ability to grasp village life and breathe into it the troubles of the world...."⁹ Potok basically recreates in great detail a small community of

religious Jews whose preoccupations cannot be considered as symptomatic of the concerns of American Jewry in general. They are defenders of the faith and Reynold's image of "the village" perceptively indicates the degree to which Potok's communities of Hassidim aspire to recreate the religious cohesion of European Judaism in the American context, aspire to recreate the religious conditions of a European village in the midst of New York City. The European social structures are clearly being eroded in Potok's fiction. Reb Saunders and Rav Kalman are strangers in a strange land but finally a transformed essence of what they represent prevails while the more fanatic accoutrements are clearly shown to be anachronistic. At the root of Potok's fiction there is, therefore, a religiously optimistic assertion appropriate to the lone Rabbi among Jewish-American writers. It is this assertion, enforced in the evolution of the narratives, that extends the importance of the novels and gives them a status beyond that of sociological documents. Judah Stampfer¹⁰ and Kay Dick¹¹ have argued that the novels are either fine sociological documents (Stampfer) or mere sociological documents (Dick). They are both, at best, only half right. Underlying Potok's undoubted ability to record the texture of a particular group at a particular time are more generalised moral and religious assumptions. His version of Judaism stresses its relevance to the contemporary world. His version of the contemporary world is guardedly hopeful. It is still a place that man can make better. It can be reformed, finally understood. Potok presents the reader with the phenomenon of a contemporary world seen through a naive, socially optimistic, rational, perspective. The label naive is not used here to dismiss the value of this work, but rather to suggest those characteristics that distinguish Potok's stance from the darker, less rational stances of his contemporaries.

Nevertheless, there are major faults in Potok's fiction. The narrative structures sometimes undercut the illusion of reality that the social and political detail tries to enforce. On the one hand, the fiction tries to insist upon the reality of the world it presents. (These streets exist, the bricks looked like this. This event happened, here are the dates. This

group of people is real, this is the way they wear their hair). On the other hand, the sometimes mechanical evolutions of plot intrude into the reader's consciousness particularly in The Promise and make him aware, repeatedly, of the novelist's presence, shaping and making events. The objectives of creating a world that is real and events that are, at least on one level, morally didactic sit uneasily together. There are other failures. The dialogue is too often ponderously intelligent. Characters, under minimal provocation, deliver learned lectures to each other. There is some justice in Eliot Fremont-Smith's remark that, "They don't have ideas so much as they represent ideas."¹² There is also a sometimes exasperating sense of universal good-will. Certainly people are sometimes misguided and sometimes angry with each other, but they never exhibit maliciousness or cruelty in their motives. It may be argued that Potok does not really give his optimism an authentic test. In an America so full of creativity and good-will who could fail, finally, to be optimistic.

The weaknesses in Potok's fiction should not, however, be allowed to characterise his work. The faults do not obscure the value of Potok's contribution to contemporary Jewish-American fiction. He challenges, as Edward Wallant does, the orthodox pessimism of current versions of Judaism and the present experience. He believes, and this distinguishes his stance from Wallant's essentially mystic vision, in man's rational good-will, man's capacity to control his own fortunes, and he optimistically creates situations in which traditional values enhance and are enhanced by contemporary insights. The voice of this novelist may be out of tune with the chorus but he sings, after all, a different song.

II

The Chosen can be seen, on one level at least, as a sociological document describing, and analysing, the phenomenon of Jewish Orthodoxy in contemporary America. Throughout the novel Potok carefully builds a detailed picture of the beliefs, customs and structures of the Hassidic community of Williamsburg. There is an attempt to represent this largely inaccessible community and, in this respect, the novel can be compared to Solomon Poll's The Hassidic Community of Williamsburg: A Study in the Sociology of Religion. Poll's stance is liberal, critical but finally sympathetic and, in one section of his study, he describes the difficulties of breaking into this self-sufficient, defensively isolated community. In The Chosen, the narrator Reuven Malter has a similar sociologist's orientation toward factual descriptions. He is always concerned to create a sense of the reality of place and social group:

Danny's block was heavily populated by the followers of his father, Russian Hasidic Jews in somber garb, whose habits and frames of reference were born on the soil of the land they had abandoned. They drank tea from samovars, sipping it slowly through cubes of sugar held between their teeth; they ate the foods of their homeland, talked loudly, occasionally in Russian, most often in Russian Yiddish, and were fierce in their loyalty to Danny's father.¹³

In this description Reuven's position vis a vis the Hassidic community is indistinguishable from Poll's. He simply accumulates sociological facts concerning the drinking and eating habits, the dress, language and structure of the community. Potok's novel differs from Poll's study in many respects of course and, in particular, in that the perception of the narrator in the novel is seen to be evolving in relation to the accumulation of experience. The narrator in the sociological study is, of course, a descriptive device, a fixed perception that the reader is invited to share. The novel presents a portrait of a community in tension and a fiction of evolving perceptions

within the social contexts created. The dramatic evolution of the plot in the novel also operates through these two elements. The problems and tensions between the Hassidic and Mishnagedic communities are counterpointed by the evolving sensibilities of, and relationship between, the Hassidic youth, Danny Saunders and the Mishnagedic narrator, Reuven Malter.

In the descriptive style Potok is repeatedly concerned to develop the breadth of the narrator's seeing-eye. Reuven is a perceptive, intelligent youth not only because the reader is repeatedly told this but because he encompasses such a wide ranging sense of context in his descriptions. The Spanish in Williamsburg are, for example, not simply noted but historically explained: "...Spanish Civil War refugee families that had fled the new Franco regime before the onset of the Second World War"(p.12). When Reuven describes Williamsburg he depicts not only the condition of the sidewalks at the time of telling but also what they will look like as the seasons change: "The sidewalks of Williamsburg were cracked squares of cement, the streets paved with asphalt that softened in the stifling summers and broke apart into potholes in the bitter winters"(pp.11-12). Basically Reuven knows the reason for the things he sees and can describe the changes that will take place in the nature of things. He has a high degree of confidence in relation to reality, that what he sees can be described and understood, that which he does not understand he can learn about. Danny Saunders shares Reuven's consciousness in this respect: "Whenever I do or see something I don't understand, I like to think about it until I understand it"(p.71).

These rational intellects and perceptive sensibilities reveal not only the nature of the boys as characters but also the nature of the fictional reality in which they live. They live, in direct contrast to Charyn's characters, in a rational world amenable to human intelligence in which experience and information lead to insight. This is clearly a world in which the possibility of enlightenment exists and the central concern in the novel is with precisely this process of growing understanding. Reuven, the young initiate, gains insights into the Hassidic community, into Danny and into Reb Saunders. Danny, another initiate, learns to balance between the

Hassidic world and the contemporary. He also learns the essential secret of Reb Saunders' silence and, in so doing, is able to be a tzaddik in spirit, conscious of the world's anguish, and a psychologist in body--effectively to synthesise intelligence and faith, the head and the heart. His movement toward understanding also reconciles the religious world of father with the world of the son. David Malter and Reb Saunders are the guides toward this enlightenment. The conflict between them and their conflicting versions of Jewish faith, which gives the novel what dramatic tension it has, is the context in which these processes occur.

The orthodox worlds represented by Malter and Saunders are not only in tension with each other but inevitably in tension with the American context. Reuven describes the duality of pressure upon the Orthodox Jewish-American student:

Jewish education was compulsory for the Orthodox, and because this was America and not Europe, English education was compulsory as well--so each student carried a double burden: Hebrew studies in the mornings and English studies in the afternoons.(p.12)

In Potok's fiction though the Mishnagedim are for the most part American rather than European in orientation. They have effected the separation of religious belief and social structure and, unlike the Hassidim, see no essential conflict between religious Orthodoxy and American life-styles. For the Hassidim however, the social structures, derived from the European pattern, are inexorably intermingled with religious beliefs so that they are engaged in a defense of a religious orthodoxy inseparable from European life-styles, the perpetuation of the hierachial social structure for example. In Reuven's mind this corresponds to the retention of a "fenced-off ghetto mentality..."(p.12). The image of the jail or the trap is used throughout to represent Danny's dilemma, the Hassidic Jew who lives both within an ancient European ethos and a contemporary world. Danny is "a little trapped..."(p.87). As David Malter says: "it was really in Poland, or, more accurately, in the Slavic countries of Eastern Europe, that Danny's soul

had been born"(p.105). At the climax of the novel Danny's decision to become a psychologist is seen as release from imprisonment into a less structured, contemporary world: "Danny is now like a person waiting to be let out of jail. He has only one desire. To leave the jail. Despite what may be waiting for him outside"(p.265).

Danny suffers then at the intersection of various pressures, European and American, religious and secular. This conflict of worlds is further complicated by the fact that Danny's retreat from the European structures is also a retreat from the world of his father:

And Reb Saunders' son does not live in Poland. America is free. There are no walls here to hold back the Jews. Is it so strange, then, that he is breaking his father's rules and reading forbidden books?(p.113)

The process of escape is overlaid, then, with that recurrent conflict of values in Jewish fiction. The tension between fathers and sons, so often a source of comedy (in Markfield or Philip Roth for example), is here a source of the deepest anguish: "Reb Saunders' son is a terribly torn and lonely boy"(p.113). The forces he is torn between serve to illustrate the tensions between Hassidism and the American world.

In this novel the Jewish world corresponds to the world of Jewish Orthodoxy. None of the characters go through problems of faith. The conflicts described are about the particular shapes of belief not about belief itself. In a sense Potok is not strictly a religious writer but a writer about religious affairs. None of the characters go through crises of belief nor is much made of the grounds for their belief. The basic areas of conflict in the novel focus on the antagonism between the two versions of Orthodoxy over specific issues. The baseball game presents a microcosm of these disputes and serves to indicate the depths of feeling aroused and the destructive nature of these emotions: "'I told my team we're going to kill you apikorsim this afternoon.' He said it flatly, without a trace of expression in his voice"(p.26). The context of this dispute is the wider

conflict between American-Jewish Orthodoxy, which synthesises religious belief and the American life-style, and European Hassidic Orthodoxy:

I was an apikoros to Danny Saunders, despite my belief in God and Torah, because I did not have side curls and was attending a parochial school where too many English subjects were offered and where Jewish subjects were taught in Hebrew instead of Yiddish, both unheard-of sins, the former because it took time away from the study of Torah, the latter because Hebrew was the Holy Tongue and to use it in ordinary classroom discourse was a desecration of God's Name. (pp.30-31)

Potok widens the range of this dispute over the issue of the birth of the State of Israel. The holocaust is central in the minds of Potok's post war Jews and the dispute between David Malter and Reb Saunders serves to illustrate the two modes of response to that experience in relation to Zionism. David Malter is a mouthpiece for the activist consciousness, the belief that Jewish defence can no longer be left to a God who failed to defend the Jewish people during the war:

We cannot wait for God! We must make our own Messiah! We must rebuild American Jewry! And Palestine must become a Jewish homeland! We have suffered enough! How long must we wait for the Messiah?(p.197)

Against this view Reb Saunders defends the purity of the religious vision of Eretz Yisroel, a land to be built in the Messianic age. For him Malter's activism is a direct denial of a central article of faith which he sees as a sustaining force in Jewish life, the belief that the Messiah will come and end the anguish of the Chosen People:

Ben Gurion and his goyim will build Eretz Yisroel? They will build for us a Jewish land? They will bring Torah into this land? Goyishkeit they will bring into the land, not Torah! God will

build the land, not Ben Gurion and his goyim! When the Messiah comes, we will have Eretz Yisroel, a Holy Land, not a land contaminated by Jewish goyim!(p.198)

Beneath the surface of this dispute there is, then, a depth of religious anguish that goes beyond the political and legalistic issues. Both of the religious groups face the anguished and perplexing issue of God's silence during the years of Nazi persecution. They also have to face the problem of the nature of Jewish identity now that the Jewish world, formerly ordered and secure in its beliefs and structures in Europe, has been depleted and transformed. Potok is finally able to create an optimistic synthesis of values. Jewish religious identity survives its collision with American culture and through Danny, the two cultures are shown in The Promise, to complement each other.

The bitter dispute over Zion interrupts the friendship of Danny and Reuven. Tolerance and understanding on the private level is torn apart by the passions of the public dispute. Potok again allows the relationship between the boys to act as an oblique commentary upon the relationship between the two kinds of Orthodoxy. The boys are victims of Reb Saunders' commitment to an abstract vision of the religious state which does not take into account the human anguish that that commitment causes. Potok's ethical position sets personal understanding and experience against religious abstraction and he implies that the conflicts deriving from ethical and religious abstractions cannot survive the intimate interaction of personalities which leads to tolerance and sympathy. The early dispute between Reuven and Danny disappears once they are able to make genuine human contact. The bitterness of the dispute over Zion fades, in the Yeshiva for example, when an ex-student is reported killed. The loss of human life softens the unbending hostility of the Hassidic community with regard to Israel. This is revealed most clearly in Reb Saunders' explanation of his attitude to Reuven. The tone of unyielding anger gives way to one of regret mixed with a sense of confusion and uncertainty expressed through the broken sentence

structures which clearly contrast with the assertive rhetoric previously employed by Saunders over this issue. Essentially Reb Saunders has not changed his view but has come to realise that the human anguish caused by his virulent defence of that view may have been too great a price to pay:

Reuven I--I ask you to forgive me...my anger...at your father's Zionism. I read his speech...I--I found my own meaning for my...brother's death...for the death of the six million. I found it in God's will...which I did not presume to understand. I did not--I did not find it in a Jewish state that does not follow God and His Torah. My brother...the others...they could not--they could not have died for such a state. Forgive me... your father...it was too much...too much....(p.281)

The moral purpose corresponds here with the religious question raised. Potok stresses the importance of human inter-relationships over abstract issues. Commitment to the purity of ideas can lead to a kind of moral blindness in which a son may try to injure a baseball opponent or a father may inflict suffering upon others. Significantly enough Reb Saunders has finally achieved the consciousness that he attempted to inject into Danny-- a sense of, and thus a sympathy for, the suffering of others. The impetus behind Saunders' action is precisely the force that drives David Malter's actions, the anguished attempt to create meaning out of the experience of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis and, correspondingly, the need to make religious sense out of God's inactivity during that period. For David Malter, the birth of Israel is the means by which a sense of order is finally made out of that terrible chaos:

The death of the six million Jews had finally been given meaning, he kept saying over and over again. It had happened. After two thousand years, it had finally happened. We were a people again, with our own land. We were a blessed generation. We had been given the opportunity to see the creation of the Jewish state.

"Thank God!" he said. "Thank God! Thank God!"(p.239)

Malter's sense of triumph is what prevails in the novel but it is nevertheless balanced against the pathos of Reb Saunders' confusion. The assumptions of his world cannot finally or wholly survive intact in the world of America which gives his son access to all kinds of alien influences. Nor can they survive in a contemporary world where political and social forces erode the purity of the religious vision previously protected by the cohesion of the European Jewish community structure. Like Yidel Pankower in Henry Roth's Call It Sleep or Tzoref in Philip Roth's "Eli, the Fanatic," Reb Saunders is committed to the forms of faith that isolate him from the cultural environment he has been transported to. Yidel Pankower is a faintly comic shabby presence; Tzoref is essentially symbolic of a cultural past, and Saunders is ambiguously realised as a bigot in pathetic isolation while still having a valid moral presence. Predominantly though he stands for a moral voice who leads his son toward an understanding of, and sympathy for, the anguish of the human condition.

Throughout the novel Potok sets up an ethical equation, knowledge leads to understanding and understanding to tolerance. As characters grow in experience and knowledge they become progressively more tolerant and wiser. Potok exhibits a most optimistic faith in the value of moral education that reveals incidentally a belief in the essential wholesomeness of the contemporary world. The fact that harmony in Potok's world results from moral education rather than innocence is enforced in the conclusion of the novel. In Reuven's mind Reb Saunders is linked with the motif of silence which Reuven sees as oppressive and destructive: "Silence was ugly, it was black, it leered, it was cancerous, it was death. I hated it, and I hated Reb Saunders for forcing it upon me and his son"(pp.233-234). When David Malter returns from the hospital after his illness Reuven sees his return as the alleviation of silence: "But it was wonderful to have him there, to know he was back in his room again and out of hospital, and to know that the dark silence was finally gone from the apartment"(p.252). In these cases then

silence indicates the absence of something desired in Reuven's life and this sense of deprivation is seen to derive either directly or obliquely from Reb Saunders.

By the end of the novel, however, Reuven has, like Angelo in The Children at the Gate, gained insight into the mystic quality of silence and, through this increase of understanding, he overcomes his antagonism toward Reb Saunders. Silence is both a means of moral education and a mystic dimension in itself and has, therefore, both utilitarian function (it prepares Danny for the Tzaddikate by awakening his sense of human suffering) and mystic relevance:

You can listen to silence, Reuven. I've begun to realize that you can listen to silence and learn from it. It has a quality and a dimension all its own. It talks to me sometimes. I feel myself alive in it. It talks. And I can hear it.(p.262)

The silence between father and son, previously incomprehensible to Reuven, is explained by Reb Saunders: "In the silence between us, he began to hear the world crying"(p.280). Danny's soul has been enriched through a recognition of that anguish. The final sense of reconciliation basically derives from the insight that Reuven and Danny gain into the morally valid motives of Reb Saunders' actions. Potok again equates education through experience with greater understanding and tolerance and, through the uses of silence made in the novel, he expands the religious and mystic dimensions of the fiction. He uses silence to go beneath the surface details of Hassidic religiosity, to point toward the mystic roots of Hassidic belief. Reuven's confrontation with the forms of silence serves both to illustrate the progress of Reuven's moral education, and to reveal a mystic dimension in Hassidic belief.

As this argument suggests, a central characteristic of the novel is the focus on the process of learning, moral and intellectual, and on the expansion of experience and perception. Both Danny and Reuven are engaged in a quest for self-knowledge, for knowledge of the world as it is and for

knowledge of themselves in relation to that world. At the beginning of the novel Danny and the Hassidic community are a mystery to Reuven: "I had never really had any personal contact with this kind of Jew before"(p.31). Through his developing curiosity and through his evolving affection for Danny, Reuven begins to gain insight. Danny in a similar way seeks to understand his own motivation in attempting to injure Reuven and painstakingly works through Freud. He shares with Reuven an orientation toward education and thus an implicit belief that experience can be understood if only one knows more about it.

In Potok's version of the contemporary world mystification is not the inevitable result of confronting reality. Mystification is merely the absence of information which may be obtained. It is this above all that gives this novel a slightly archaic feel. It is essentially a novel of education and the process of education ends in enlightenment not in madness or despair. Education, as this rational process of acquisition, is rarely seen as an available option in the contemporary novel. Initiation tends more readily to be expressed as the revelation of an absurdist reality, as in Heller's Catch 22 or Markfield's Teitelbaum's Window. Alternatively, "education" in Wallant's novels generally involves retrospective re-connection with emotional potential found prior to maturity. The concept of progressive accumulation of wisdom through education is largely alien in mainstream contemporary American fiction, and Potok's exploitation of the idea expresses a perception that distinguishes his work. He identifies a contemporary American environment amenable to understanding and hospitable to analysis and creative contribution.

This discussion would seem to lead toward paradox. On the one hand, Potok presents a world open to rational understanding, yet he also develops the mystic dimension of silence. The paradox is more apparent than real. Silence serves as an educational device that, in The Promise, is finally vindicated. Danny's treatment of Michael is a triumphant synthesis of modern scientific method and Hassidic mysticism. Silence is not simply an

element in Hassidic Orthodoxy, but a primary medium of Hassidic education, the means by which Reb Saunders teaches Danny a sympathy with human suffering. In that respect, silence is a utilitarian device. The balance between rational and mystic dimensions of Hassidism is uneasily established in The Chosen. Reuven early recognises a dichotomy within young Danny: "'The way he acts and talks doesn't seem to fit what he wears and the way he looks,' I said. 'It's like two different people'"(p.80). Danny is torn at this stage between Poland and America, Hassidism and secular knowledge. These two pressures grow as Danny's involvement with the secular world develops: "I began to wonder how it was possible for the ideas of the Talmud and the thinking of Freud to live side by side within one person"(p.196). By the end of the novel Reb Saunders points toward the synthesis of these forces within Danny, the synthesis that Potok forges in The Promise. Reb Saunders in effect answers Reuven's puzzlement. "The ideas of the Talmud" and "the thinking of Freud" are complimentary not alien and exclusive opposites:

Let my Daniel become a psychologist. I know he wishes to become a psychologist. I do not see his books? I did not see the letters from the universities? I do not see his eyes? I do not hear his soul crying? Of course I know. For a long time I have known. Let my Daniel become a psychologist. I have no more fear now. All his life he will be a tzaddik. He will be a tzaddik for the world. And the world needs a tzaddik.(p.280)

The two different worlds, irreconcilable in most Jewish-American fiction, are brought together because Potok's version of these two worlds is optimistic and selective enough to encompass such a synthesis. Danny is, after all, a rather special young man putting one foot out of Orthodoxy into a world dedicated to creating order out of chaos. He does not step into the turbulent, bewildering disorder of the contemporary America imagined by Bellow, Malamud, Philip Roth, Jerome Charyn, Bruce Jay Friedman or Jay Neugeboren.

American worlds that enable him to emphasise the continuation and relevance of the Jewish religious tradition. He can do this because in the final analysis his worlds are wholesome, hospitable to men of good will and open to rational understanding. In his version of America, Jews are able to escape from the mental ghetto of European Orthodoxy. In his version of the contemporary world the Jews are able, through their own efforts, to build an Israel which can give a meaning to the slaughter of Jews in Europe.

David Malter articulates the root of Potok's fictional stance:

"So it may be asked what value is there 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?" He paused again, his eyes misty now, then went on. "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. Do you understand what I am saying? A man must fill his life with meaning, meaning is not automatically given to life."(p.217)

Potok's versions of the human experience ensure that his characters are able to finally achieve that meaning.

III

The Promise is not simply a sequel to The Chosen but rather an extension of the themes established in the earlier novel. The novel contains two basic narrative elements, the development of Michael's illness and Reuven's progress toward the Rabbinate, and both of these serve to emphasise the contemporary relevance of restructured Jewish Orthodoxy and to dramatise a reconciliation between American values and Jewish traditionalism. Danny synthesises a Hassidic consciousness with the practice of psychiatry, and by uniting two kinds of wisdom finally succeeds in helping Michael. Rav Kalman gives Reuven smicha (Rabbinic ordination) because he finally recognises that, behind Reuven's textual analysis, the love of Torah is sustained. Both Reuven and Danny in effect fulfil promises to sustain Yiddishkeit and they do this in conjunction with the values they gain from the contemporary world. The rigid division between contemporary values and Jewish traditionalism is undermined.

Potok emphasises this in two centrally important episodes. After placing Michael in silence as a form of therapy, Danny sits in his office with the Gordons:

As if suddenly taking on a life of its own, Danny's right hand rose slowly to the side of his face, and with his thumb and forefinger he began to caress an imaginary earlock. His eyes were closed and he sat behind his desk, swaying faintly back and forth, and the thumb and forefinger moved against each other and then the forefinger lifted and made small circular motions in the air and then lowered and met the thumb again, moving across it, caressing the invisible hairs, softly, gently. Ruth Gordon stopped crying. The five of them sat there, staring as if hypnotized at the slow movements of Danny's fingers. Then Danny opened his eyes and became aware of his hand alongside his face and drew his fingers away and let his hand fall slowly to the pile of monographs on top of his desk.¹⁴

These actions point symbolically to the sources of the impetus behind Danny's treatment of Michael. His hand moves from the earlock, a symbol of Jewish Orthodoxy, to the monograph, a symbol of modern scientificism. In the treatment of Michael it is precisely a synthesis of these ostensibly irreconcilable worlds that Potok tries to suggest. Danny's stance vis a vis Michael is indeed an echo of Reb Saunders' stance in relation to Danny. As Reuven recognises, the roles of tzaddik and psychologist have merged: "You want to get through to his spark of a soul? You sound like your father"(p.188).

The second episode occurs when Rav Kalman finally agrees to Reuven's smicha despite his objection to the use of textual analysis in studying the Torah:

"My sons have conquered me," he said softly, quoting in Hebrew. Then he said, "Do you know why it is different when one hears it?" He did not intend for me to answer. He went on himself. "Your father's method is ice when one sees it on the printed page. It is impossible to print one's love for Torah. But one can hear it in a voice."(p.331)

Kalman's opening comment is particularly important in the context of both The Chosen and The Promise. The collision between fathers and sons is a collision of two worlds, the world of Europe and the world of contemporary America. In Reb Saunders' mind in The Chosen and Rav Kalman's mind, the world of America threatens the Jewish values of that European world. By the end of The Chosen Reb Saunders is able to reconcile his world with Danny's aspirations and, at this point, Rav Kalman recognises that Reuven's method does not undercut the essence of orthodox values. In effect, Kalman comes to recognise that Reuven's love for the Torah is unimpaired. In Europe there were students "who spoke with such love about Torah that I would hear the Song of Songs in their voices"(p.331). Kalman accepts that in Reuven, as in David Lurie, that European commitment to religious belief is married to a contemporary intellect.

These two episodes reveal the momentum behind the novel. The two

elements of the plot, Danny's treatment of Michael's illness and Reuven's clashes with Kalman, serve to emphasise the continuity of Jewish Orthodoxy in its essence rather than in the details of its form. Danny may ostensibly have broken with tradition in abandoning the tzaddikate but as a psychiatrist he employs the wisdom of a Hassid. Reuven ostensibly deviates from traditional Orthodoxy in his study of Torah yet he takes his place within the tradition by perpetuating a love for the essence of Judaism, a love of Torah shaped in contemporary America by a contemporary intelligence:

I read the Yiddish signs on the storefronts and listened as three elderly Hasidim passed by talking in awed tones about their rebbe. I did not understand them and they did not understand me, and our quarrels would continue. But I was part of the chain of the tradition now, as much a guardian of the sacred Promise as Rav Kalman and the Hasidim were....(pp.333-334)

Potok's view of Judaism in contemporary America is quite clear. The belief that Judaism is inexorably bound to European social and religious patterns is erroneous. Judaism, in Potok's view, is not only able to survive in contemporary America but can be enriched by that contact while it can in turn enrich the culture of America. The two worlds, can strengthen and enforce each other.

Nevertheless the conflict between Hassidism and other forms of Orthodoxy still rages in this novel and the landscape of religious dispute is widened through the figure of Abraham Gordon. Gordon is a reformist Jewish theologian who, according to David Malter, "has achieved something that is remarkable. To develop a theology for those who can no longer believe literally in God and the revelation and who still wish to remain observant and not abandon the tradition--that is a remarkable achievement" (p.88). Potok's treatment of the religious disputes in this novel is basically similar to his approach in The Chosen. The virulence of the European Orthodox attacks on Abraham Gordon and on David Malter are seen as deeply damaging, especially to Michael Gordon, and destructive to the

relationships between the attacked fathers and their suffering sons..

(Although Rav Kalman shares most of the Hassidic attitudes, he is not a member of the sect). Michael Gordon's love-hate feelings for his father developed through the suffering he inevitably shared in while his father was under Orthodox attack. Reuven feels, and safely identifies, a growing resentment of his father for activating Rav Kalman's rage which Reuven is forced to suffer directly.

The terms of these religious disputes derive, as in The Chosen, from the cultural gap between the forms of European Judaism and the forms of American Judaism. The essence of Hassidic fervour, the love of God and Torah, is seen to have a continuing relevance while the social structures and more virulent orthodoxies of Hassidism are presented as archaic in the American context. The influx of European Hassidim in the post-holocaust period not only injects new tensions into the yeshivoth, but even changes the physical appearance of Williamsburg. The Hassidic neglect of the environment signals their exclusive orientation toward those religious values that they see as inexorably intermingled with the European life-styles:

The row houses on the street were all three-story brownstones, with small grassy back yards and neatly kept areaways in front where hydrangeas flowered and shone in the sunlight like huge snowballs. Then the newcomers moved into the street. They lived in a dimension of reality that made trees and grass and flowers irrelevant to their needs.(pp.3-4)

Into contemporary America these European Jews bring something of the European experience both in terms of ghetto-like cohesion and in terms of their experience of suffering. Reuven's, and the reader's, response is always ambiguous in this respect. These Jews are a force for intellectual restriction and survivors of great suffering, worthy, therefore, of both a certain contempt and sympathy and respect. This becomes most apparent through the figure of Rav Kalman:

On clear days the sun streamed through those windows--but it made little difference, for the room was always pervaded by the peculiar darkness that Rav Kalman brought with him whenever he came through the door. He seemed to radiate darkness.(p.104)

The image of "darkness" carries a sense of the oppresiveness of Kalman's intellectual regime with a sense of the terrible experiences he has undergone and the fate of a European Jewry that he serves to symbolise. Kalman's attacks on David Malter are, therefore, not just damaging and vicious; they are also indicative of Kalman's doomed attempt to preserve the purity of the kind of life he once lived in Europe which is now lost to him in America. The reader tends, therefore, to be both critical and sympathetic, to finally acquiesce in, as the reader is often led to do, David Malter's judgement: "They are remarkable people. There is so much about them that is distasteful to me. But they are remarkable people" (p.304). This judgement is, however, always balanced by Reuven's objections to narrow Orthodoxy: "We become like dead branches and last year's leaves and what the hell good are we for ourselves and the world in a mental ghetto"(p.139). They are, in this respect, opponents of the progress that Potok has a good deal of faith in.

Potok emphasises Kalman's failure to comprehend the reality of America by reference to the Rosenberg case. Kalman's response to this event is fear. He expects the outcome of the Rosenberg convictions to be pogroms and his response to Reuven's reassurances emphasises the sense of bewilderment he feels as a European Jew transported to America, a stranger in a strange land:

"A strange land," he murmured again. "How does one learn to live in such a land?...It is difficult to know what to like and what to dislike...A strange land...." He shook his head in bewilderment. (p.296)

This exchange reveals the basis of the religious disputes that run

through the novel. The Orthodoxy of Eastern Europe fails to comprehend the prevailing conditions of American culture and this failure leads to an excessive defence of their version of Yiddishkeit, the defence of something that is not, in the final analysis, threatened in its essence. Gordon, David Malter and Reuven are, Potok suggests, fundamentally involved in defending the vital elements of Jewish religious belief. Even Gordon's work is geared to the re-vitalisation of Judaism. He is a defender of the faith even if the nature of that defence is obnoxious to the more rigidly Orthodox: "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"(p.273).

The Promise differs from The Chosen in a more fundamental way than any yet suggested. In The Chosen Danny and Reuven are largely subject to external pressures and it is through these pressures that events evolve in the novel. In this novel, however, the protagonists are now in early manhood and they begin to shape events themselves through the decisions they make. In simplistic terms The Chosen traces the development of Reuven and Danny to the point at which they are in a position to take risks, to make significant choices. The Promise is, at least on one level, about the consequences of the choices they make. The protagonists move out of adolescence into the landscape of adult responsibility.

This process raises the issue of moral choice in the novel into a central position. Reuven is caught between two pressures, one emanating from his father and the other from Rav Kalman. He risks his ordination by finally choosing to follow his father's method of textual analysis. Both Rav Kalman and David Malter, in different ways, raise the question of moral decision. Kalman rages at a student: "When a man has a choice to make he chooses what is important to him and that choice tells the world what kind of man he is"(p.145). David Malter's comment places the issue of moral choice before Reuven in similar terms: "What do you do? I do not know what to tell you. You must make your own choice. You are a man, not a child, and a man must make his own choice"(p.178). Both comments carry the sense

that an adult's responsibility is to choose his own path and by that choice he asserts and defines his own maturity.

Choice in this novel involves elements of risk and the motif of the gamble is recurrent. Danny's choice of treatment for Michael is a gamble based upon his own experience. Abraham Gordon supports Danny with the assertion that "Almost everything of importance that a person does is a gamble, isn't it? Every crucial decision is a gamble"(p.227). A gambling episode opens the book. Michael, Rachel and Reuven are cheated at a carnival stall and it is this event that serves to trigger Michael's mental disorder. However, as the novel progresses, there is a significant change in the nature of the gambles undertaken. At the carnival stall the gamble is mechanical and controlled. For Reuven, Danny, Abraham Gordon and David Malter the gambles they later make are indicators of moral strength, assertions of mature integrity and intelligence. In the gambling game the momentum of the event is controlled by the stall holder. Reuven in his smicha examination and Danny in his treatment of Michael are able, finally, to create the events themselves--in effect to re-define the momentum of events.

The shift from adolescent dependence in The Chosen to mature determination in The Promise is reflected in a change in the evolving patterns of the fictions. In The Chosen Danny and Reuven come together through accident, are separated by external conditions and brought together again once these conditions change. There is a sense in The Chosen of an almost inevitable interaction between the boys' lives. The Promise opens with a similar sense of pattern but by the end of Book One a significant shift has occurred: "But the strange conjunction of events that had begun with the carnival appeared disentangled now..."(p.97). The decline of Reuven's sense of an established pattern to life signals his emergence into a maturity where both he and Danny have responsibility for their own destinies:

All during those last weeks of August it had seemed as if the

separate lines of our lives were being manipulated somehow, purposefully and carefully brought together by some master weaver. Now it seemed the weaver had wearied of his game. The lines hung free.(p.101)

The decline in the sense of interwoven pattern serves two purposes in the novel. Not only does it signal the emergence of the protagonists into manhood by directly raising the issue of moral choice but it also enables Potok to separate the two elements of the narrative. The central focus of the novel remains on Reuven and his life at the yeshiva. The reader is given only relatively brief glimpses of the progress of Michael's illness. An oblique parallel is drawn between Reuven's suffering at Rav Kalman's hands and Michael's mental disorder deriving from the hatred of the Orthodox for his father. However, by allowing only glimpses of Michael's illness, Potok heightens the tension and thus emphasises the dramatic nature of the revelation at the climax when Michael finally breaks through the silence and reveals the nature of his love and hatred for his father. The two elements of the narrative move toward separate climax and Potok engages the reader through shifts in focus between the yeshiva and the treatment centre. Michael's situation is repeatedly left suspended while the narrative shifts to Reuven's situation at the yeshiva. Through the first person narrative the reader is only able to know what Reuven knows at any given point and is, therefore, drawn into Reuven's sense of uncertainty over Michael's fate. Potok is able, in the end, to manipulate the two separate elements of the narrative so as to bring them both through various points of tension into separate but more or less simultaneous fruition. This serves to create in the novel moments of dramatic climax that give a direction and a momentum to the evolving fiction.

Both elements of the narrative illustrate, as has been suggested, the synthesis of Jewish Orthodoxy and contemporary intelligence, the marriage of two worlds. The celebratory conclusion of the novel translates the metaphor of marriage between the worlds into a literal marriage between Rachel and

Danny and, clearly, the marriage serves as an optimistic indicator of the potential for interaction between the cultures. Both cultures are enriched through contact with each other: "'I would wager,' Abraham Gordon said quietly, 'that Rachel is attracted to Daniel's God, and Daniel is attracted to Rachel's twentieth century'"(p.308).

That marriage serves as a fitting conclusion to the two novels. It emphasises the point that Potok develops at great length through the books. He argues for a possibility unique to his fiction. In contemporary Jewish-American writing there is a tendency to see a fundamental irreconcilability between traditional Jewish culture and the contemporary American ethos. Chaim Potok, however, creates fictions in which these cultures are not only reconcilable but mutually beneficial.

IV

The perception of the artist is at the centre of My Name Is Asher Lev. Reuven Malter, the narrator of the earlier novels, gives a rational, almost sociological perspective to the events and environments he records. Asher Lev, however, perceives things idiosyncratically in that objects and emotions are repeatedly translated into colours and textures. The perception of the narrator, more explicitly than the matter of what he perceives, becomes of central importance:

I could feel lines and points and planes. I could feel texture and colors. I saw the Shabbos candles on the table glowing gold and red. I saw my mother small and warm and silken in a lovely Shabbos dress of pale blue and white. I saw my hands white and bony, my fingers long and thin, my face in the mirror above the buffet pale with black eyes and wild red hair. I felt myself flooded with the shapes and textures of the world around me.¹⁵

Without discarding a strong sense of social context Potok redirects the reader's attention away from objects and experiences to the mode of perception through which those objects and experiences are transformed into visual art. "Shapes" and "textures" rather than explicit and detailed information become crucial. Asher, thus, translates Yudel Krinsky's Siberian experience into colours. He translates the tensions within his family into what is, in the context, a shocking visual form, the crucifixion.

The central conflict in the novel is between two modes of perceiving experience and this corresponds to a conflict between the son and the father, the world of art and the world of unyielding Jewish Orthodoxy. In Aryeh Lev's world man is rational and has free-will: "Every man is responsible for what he does, because he has a will and by that will he direct his life. There is no such thing as a man who can't help it. Only a sick man can't help it"(p.176). Aryeh Lev is another, like Max Lurie, of Potok's sternly responsible fathers. Against this view of individual responsibility Potok sets up the image of the artist as subject to an inexorable force which

overrides will, rationality and even moral considerations. A painting can, thus, in the artist's view, be both "evil and excellent"(p.242). The actions of a rational man with free-will could hardly in Aryeh Lev's view be both. The basic conflict is between Asher's aesthetic perspective and his father's activist moral stance, and this remains an unresolved tension in the novel.

The clash of these perceptions also serves to develop the dimensions of the conflict between the world of art and the world of Jewish Orthodoxy. Early in the novel Asher's artistic inclinations lead him to defile automatically a prayer book by drawing on it. The dictates of art overcome his will and lead him to defile a holy book and this episode clearly signals the wedge between the two worlds. Art is something that undercuts Asher's position at "the apex, as it were, of a triangle seminal with Jewish potentiality and freighted with Jewish responsibility"(p.5). It is art that brings Asher into an alien, threatening world devoid of the moral order of Jewish Orthodoxy. As Jacob Kahn says, there is a fundamental irreconcilability between artistic values and Jewish traditionalism which is focused in this novel in the clash between the son and the father:

Asher Lev, it is a tradition of goyim and pagans. Its values are goyisch and pagan. Its concepts are goyisch and pagan. Its way of life is goyisch and pagan. In the entire history of European art, there has not been a single religious Jew who was a great painter.(p.213)

Potok, however, does distinguish between the antagonism of Asher's father and the wisdom of the Rebbe who acts as a mediator between father and son. The essence of a moral life, the Rebbe argues, can be lived by the artist as well as by the Rabbi:

A life should be lived for the sake of heaven. One man is not better than another because he is a doctor while the other is a shoemaker. One man is not better than another because he is a lawyer while the other is a painter. A life is measured by how it

is lived for the sake of heaven.(p.192)

The Rebbe's mediation does not finally lead to any ostensible reconciliation between father and son. It does however point to the more oblique and subtle reconciliation that underlies the conclusion of the novel.

There is, in the end, a sense in which Asher maintains the continuity of the ethical essence of Jewish Orthodoxy through his art. There is finally a suggestion that Asher's function as an artist does accord with God's will, with some deep moral purpose in traditional Judaism:

Master of the Universe, will I live this way all the rest of my life? Yes, came the whisper from the branches of the trees. Now journey with me, my Asher. Paint the anguish of all the world. Let people see the pain. But create your own molds and your own play of forms for the pain. We must give a balance to the universe.(pp.367-368)

While on the surface the novel ends in conflict between father and son, there is an implication of a continuity of meaning between the life of the father and the life of the son. Asher is, in the end as fully as Danny Saunders in The Promise, a figure who sustains the essential momentum of the father's life while he abandons the formal shape of that life.

The novel is overlaid with a sense of defined purpose in the character's lives. Underlying the family estrangements, Rivkeh, Aryeh and Asher share a fundamental momentum that leads them toward essentially similar purposes if along distinctly dissimilar paths. In simple terms they attempt to fulfil what they each see as God's will through creating order and balance, giving meaning to human experience by not leaving things unfinished or, in Asher's case, half-made. Aryeh continues the attempt to bring to fruition the vision that motivated the Ladover Hassidim through the generations: "The Rebbe's father felt something had been left unfinished in the world. Plans had been made and had been left unfinished"(p.117). Rivkeh similarly suffers a sense of a task unfinished after her brother's death: "Aryeh, it's wrong

for my brother's work to remain unfinished. I want to complete his work" (p.46). That pursuit of meaning through completion is melded in Asher's consciousness with imperative pressures deriving from his sense of artistic integrity. The outcome is the picture of the crucifixion which, while alienating his father, is nevertheless a concrete realisation of twin pressures. It represents a synthesis of ethical Jewish purpose, as represented in activities of Rivkeh and Aryeh, and artistic imperative. Through that form Asher is finally able to represent his mother's anguish, sustain his father's determination to complete the given task, and bring to fruition his artistic vision. Obliquely, then, through painting the crucifixion Asher achieves the sense of moral order in completion that underlies the commitment of his parents. The pursuit of balance and order links father and son although, and it is this that leads to the concluding domestic anguish, the paths along which they pursue this goal are irreconcilable.

Asher's paintings are, then, paradoxically evidence of a continuity of purpose between the generations. This continuity is also reflected in the image of the ancestor that repeatedly recurs in Asher's dreams. The repetition of the dream points to Asher's continued engagement with the Jewish experience and it also serves to give a mythological shape to the history of Jewish persecution in Europe. The ancestor embodies Asher's fear of what Europe has traditionally meant for the Jews. Asher's relationship with this figure evolves through the novel enforcing the sense that in his art Asher obliquely continues the tradition of generations. For most of the novel the dream reflects the ancestor's rage and anger. The figure of the ancestor represents Jewish tradition, the European experience, and an endless commitment to pursue order and balance. The recurrence of the figure is a source of fear and menace for Asher:

He came to me that night out of the woods, my mythic ancestor, huge, mountainous, dressed in his dark caftan and fur-trimmed cap, pounding his way through the trees on his Russian master's estate,

the earth shaking, the mountains quivering, thunder in his voice.

(p.98)

After the crucifixion is painted the ancestor returns in Asher's dreams not as accusing thunder but rather as a figure with whom there is a continuity of purpose: "I saw my mythic ancestor. Come with me, my precious Asher. You and I will walk together now through the centuries, each of us for our separate deeds that unbalanced the world"(p.347). Potok, then, sees the ancestor, Asher's parents and Asher as engaged upon a perpetual act of atonement for deeds that have led to an imbalance, an upsetting of moral order. A permanent sense of striving in exile toward some projection of completion links the figures. Potok uses Asher's dream to enforce the implicit sense of reconciliation between the world of art and the world of Jewish Orthodoxy. The synthesis between two cultures, forged rather crudely in the earlier novels, is implicit rather than explicit here. The source of reconciliation is also less concretely realised. It exists as an underlying continuity of purpose not a condition that is recognised or manifest on the level of personal relations between father and son. There is no parallel to the resolution of conflict expressed in The Chosen. Asher sustains the ethical thrust of Aryeh's life in a way that is apparent to the reader but not to the father.

This novel is more subtly but nevertheless unmistakably overlaid with the sense of affirmation that runs through The Chosen and The Promise and In the Beginning. There is the same commitment to the idea of the meaning and moral purpose behind experience. There is a similar sense that the values of Jewish Orthodoxy can enrich the character's capacity to live within the world he has chosen even when that world would seem to be in conflict with Jewish values. Asher uses alien forms to give aesthetic shape to a vision that combines a sense of God with an awareness of anguish. The painting is created for specific purposes that link father, mother and son. It is, in Asher's consciousness, a manifestation of emotional sensitivity and religious sensibility:

I painted swiftly in a strange nerveless frenzy of energy. For all the pain you suffered, my mama. For all the torment of your past and future years, my mama. For all the anguish this picture of pain will cause you. For the unspeakable mystery that brings good fathers and sons into the world and lets a mother watch them tear at each other's throats.. For the Master of the Universe, whose suffering world I do not comprehend. For dreams of horror, for nights of waiting, for memories of death, for the love I have for you, for all the things I remember, and for all the things I should remember but have forgotten, for all these I created this painting--an observant Jew working on a crucifixion because there was no aesthetic mold in his own religious tradition into which he could pour a painting of ultimate anguish and torment.(pp.329-330)

The artist's integrity and talent interacts with Jewish spirituality and is enriched by it. Potok again affirms the relevance of that spirituality in a relatively unproblematic way.

Despite this affirmation and oblique reconciliation the anguish of the conflict between father and son is still central in the novel. As Jacob Kahn realises the conflict derives from a distinction between two ways of perceiving the world, the Orthodox and the aesthetic: "Why should your father understand painting? From a yeshiva education you expect a man to understand painting? From a yeshiva education you get a case of aesthetic blindness" (p.296). It is this conflict that gives the novel its dramatic tension, that recurrent tension in Jewish fiction between father and son which reflects the tension between two sets of irreconcilable values. The painting of the crucifixion reflects, on one level at least, the anguish of the estrangement between father and son: "For the unspeakable mystery that brings good fathers and sons into the world and lets a mother watch them tear at each other's throats"(p.329).

The conflict between father and son also serves to express the tension between Europe and America in the novel. In Asher's consciousness the Jews

in Europe are visualised as being in darkness, symbolising the experiences they have undergone, and he is threatened and made to feel guilty by the pressure of that identity. In contrast Asher's American environment is comforting, familiar and the source of his early creativity. Aryeh's sense of purpose inevitably associates him with the European experience: "He seemed more connected to the Jews of Russia than to the Jews of our own street"(p.55). When Asher resists his father's attempts to take the family to Vienna he, in effect, resists intimacy with the European experience of suffering and alienness: "Vienna. The name conjured up distorted horrors: dark foreign streets, evil shadows, incomprehensible words, menacing laughter at my sidecurls and skullcap"(p.93). His refusal to go leads to the separation of the family and is a direct cause of his mother's anguish. Asher's response to Europe is, thus, both fearful and guilty, and is manifest in the dream of the ancestor and the images of ice and darkness. For Aryeh, Europe is the landscape in which he can fulfil his moral purpose, an area in which he, as a moral activist, can operate. The conflict between father and son is realised by Potok then as, on one level at least, the recurrent tension between American comfort and security and European persecution and deprivation. The conflict also solidifies around differing versions of Europe. For Aryeh, Europe is an area of possibility in which changes, through an activist moral position, may be wrought. For Asher this Jewish Europe is a "landscape of nightmare."

European Judaism in this novel is undergoing the traumas of late and post-Stalinist Soviet policy. That experience, enforced by memories of the Nazi persecution, permeates the novel. Refugees, like Yudel Krinsky, have recent dark memories which are vividly embodied in Asher's consciousness. Aryeh's journeys have a deep dislocating impact on the domestic life of the Lev family. Events in Russia are seen to influence directly the actions and attitudes of the characters. The crisis of European Jewry has a major and dynamic effect within the evolution of events recorded in the novel. Basically Potok's sense of the historical context is more pervasively felt, rather than told, in this novel. Menace and fear are associated with the

European experience in Asher's consciousness and this serves to heighten both the contrast with the American context and to enforce the sense of high, and heroic, moral purpose in the activities of Asher's parents. Yudel Krinsky's role in the novel is, on one level, to represent the effectiveness of the commitment of Asher's parent and his reactions are also used to emphasise the distinction between the European and American experiences: "There we went through the seven gates of hell for matzos. Here I stand in matzos over my head. So how should a Jew feel?"(p.37).

In the context of Europe, Aryeh's activist role again conflicts with Asher's aesthetic stance. Aryeh's sense of moral purpose is reflected in action to relieve the misery of European Jews. Asher's sense of moral purpose is reflected in the use of his artistic integrity to represent aesthetically that experience and the suffering it causes. Aryeh evaluates actions from specifically Jewish viewpoint, whereas Asher's values synthesise the wider, secular aesthetic perception with a Jewish sensibility. That sensibility is less and less manifest in religious form. It becomes a commitment to a symbolic, mythic Judaism. Thus, between Aryeh and Asher, Potok creates two version of Jewish sensibility. The religious, moral and activist stance of Aryeh is a version of Judaism set in contrast to an oblique Judaism that is more symbolic than traditionally religious.

One of Asher's declared intentions is, as he repeatedly emphasises, to draw his memory, his own immediate past and the cultural past to which he belongs. He is engaged in painting both the past he lived and the past he dreams, that European past mythically embodied in the ancestor, the European past that intrudes nightmarishly into the novel's present through the focus on Yudel Krinsky and the refugees. Basically Asher engages with this experience imagistically and aesthetically:

Now there was ice and darkness inside me. I could feel the cold darkness moving slowly inside me. I could feel our darkness. It seemed to me then that we were brothers, he and I, that we both knew lands of ice and darkness.(p.41)

Asher engages explicitly with events in Europe, his artistic impulses are re-activated by the news of Stalin's death, and with the texture of that experience through these images of ice and darkness. This Europe, both myth and history, is expressed in his paintings and is indicative of the way in which his art and thinking is dynamically shaped by the Jewish experience. His painting is not a denial of that experience but a means of engaging with it.

As Asher's experience expands so the complexity of his visual perceptions increases. In many ways the novel is a very traditional Kunstlerroman. He learns his craft through Kahn and his visit to Europe represents another stage in the evolution of his artistic consciousness. Asher joins these other Americans, fictional and real, who suffer and enjoy the expatriate experience. The Europe that Asher finally visits is the world of High Art and there he fully engages with the conventions of classical European art. In the end it is those conventions that Asher employs to represent his vision of Jewish Europe and his experience of his mother's anguish. His paintings, then, are an embodiment of two versions of Europe. They synthesise the conventions of high European art with the Europe in which the Jews have undergone their torments. These paintings are a material image of Potok's belief in the possibility of synthesis between art and Judaism.

Asher's artistic perception is reflected through the fusion of emotions with colour, shape and texture. Colour is translated into emotion: "I felt the colors and the lines. I felt the forms. I felt light and shade and color and shape. I felt the picture move inside myself, slowly in a gentle spin"(p.179). Alternatively an emotion is rendered in terms of shape:

The torment, the tearing anguish I felt in her, I put into her mouth, into the twisting curve of her head, the arching of her slight body, the clenching of her small fists, the taut downward pointing of her thin legs.(p.329)

As Asher's art evolves there is a fusion of technique and emotion reflecting

a final realisation of artistic integrity.

The climax of his growth as an artist leads paradoxically to both the estrangement of father and son and to an implicit sense of common purpose between father and son. They share a commitment to pursue a sense of balance and order. The evolved aesthetic perception and the moral activist stance are, in this respect, in accord.

On the explicit level, the estrangement of father and son does not result from any choice Asher consciously makes. As Potok makes clear, the gift of talent happens to Asher in a more or less mysterious way. Artistic talent is an inexorable pressure rather than a craft pursued through choice: "Something has happened to my eyes and my head. I looked at my eyes and head in the mirror over the bathroom sink. They looked the same as always, eyes dark and hair red and wild. But something had happened inside them"(p.115).

As this talent evolves it sets up a series of conflicting pressures within Asher. His Orthodox faith and love for his parents clashes with the imperatives that seem to derive from his artistic perception. In this respect he is, like Potok's other young men, a "terribly torn and lonely boy." Subject to irreconcilable pressures he suffers a deep sense of isolation and anguish, as Jacob Kahn realises:

"As an artist you are responsible to Jews?" He seemed angry.

"Listen to me, Asher Lev. As an artist you are responsible to no one and to nothing, except to yourself and to truth as you see it. Do you understand? An artist is responsible to his art. Anything else is propaganda. Anything else is what the Communists in Russia call art. I will teach you responsibility to art. Let your Ladover Hassidim teach you responsibility to Jews. Do you understand? Yes, I think you understand. You did not do what you did to your family without understanding that. It is not weakness to feel guilty at having done it. But the guilt should not interfere with your art. Use the guilt to make better art."(p.218)

The pressures from family and religion clash with the pressures from art and, at the centre of the clash, Asher Lev suffers his agonies.

Art makes early inroads into Asher's Orthodoxy. He inadvertently violates the Sabbath and defiles a bible. He steals from Yudel Krinsky and causes pain to his parents. Art is seen to undercut his religious and filial sense. A talent that has these results might, as Aryeh suspects, come from "the other side" rather than from God, and this fear in Asher's consciousness is another source of vexation for his spirit. The pressures on Asher derive, then, from the clash between expectations of him as the son of Aryeh Lev and his artistic integrity, between his commitment to an aesthetic vision and his faith in God and love for his family. The fact that his artistic integrity is finally paramount does not diminish the pain he feels at the centre of these pressures, nor does it undercut the pervasive sense of unresolved anguish in the novel. The somewhat intrusive sense of happy endings in the earlier novels is avoided here. Potok is finally truer to the implications of the situations he establishes. The "fairy tale" reconciliation in The Promise gives way to a subtler sense of common purpose underlying the estrangement of father and son.

The mystery of God's motives is felt on two levels in this novel. Aryeh and Rivkeh repeatedly express their bewilderment at God's motives both with regard to the situation of European Jewry and in relation to their specific situation. Aryeh Lev's question, similar to that asked by Max Lure in In The Beginning, permeates the novel: "He sighed softly and was silent a moment. Then he shook his head. Master of the Universe, he said in Yiddish. What are you doing?"(pp.32-33). Rivkeh, however, expresses the sustaining faith in God's unknowable but just actions that underpins the structure of the lives of the characters: "Do we understand the ways of everything in this world? We have to have faith that the Ribbono Shel Olom is good and knows what He is doing"(p.159). God's existence is not an issue but rather a moral fact in the lives of these characters and, similarly, Hell is a concrete location visualised through the Jewish experience in Stalin's Russia: "Siberia is the home of the Angel of Death"(p.69).

It is faith in God's goodness that motivates Aryeh and Rivkeh and the power of this faith is reflected in the successes that they achieve. Underlying the bleakness of the events that Potok focuses on is a social optimism manifest in the assertion that Aryeh's actions can alleviate the suffering of Russian Jews. The death of Stalin enforces the feeling that change for the better is taking place. There is an ultimate sense of God at the centre of a cosmic scheme in which man has a moral responsibility to pursue order. Aryeh and Rivkeh as social and religious activists fulfil the Rebbe's injunction: "A life should be lived for the sake of heaven"(p.192). Within that crucial perspective of moral purpose there is a place even for Asher's work. The Rebbe's perspective is wider than that of Aryeh's and expansive enough to encompass the radically diverse contributions of father and son within the same productive moral framework:

Jacob Kahn tells me you have greatness. He tells me you will soon be ready to show yourself to the world. His words are for me a glimpse, a light. I say to myself Asher Lev will be a great artist. He will travel about the world in search of ideas and people. Great artists make the entire world their home. You have already begun to travel. And I say to myself there are great museums in Europe. There are great museums in Russia. You know of the Hermitage in Leningrad and the museums in Moscow. Russia is a land rich in art and you will one day wish to travel there. That is for me a glimpse, my Asher. I am trying to open my eyes wide and to see. I will tell you what my father, may he rest in peace, once told me. Seeds must be sown everywhere. Only some will bear fruit. But there would not be the fruit from the few had the many not been sown.(p.285)

In the Rebbe's view, man has an obligation to God and to the world. While Aryeh and Rivkeh fulfil their obligation in ways that clearly benefit the Jewish community, Asher fulfils his obligation in a more oblique way: "One man is not better than another because he is a lawyer while the other is a

painter. A life is measured by how it is lived for the sake of heaven"(p.192). Fundamentally the version of God expressed by the Rebbe, a liberal, socially optimistic version, gives a definable purpose to the experiences described. God is a cosmic force for moral order and balance. Human pursuit of that balance, whether by the artist or the Hassid, has meaning precisely because it is expressive of a faith in God's moral order which may, at any given moment, be incomprehensible to the human mind. Asher's painting is an act of completion which expresses a sense of moral purpose akin to that which motivates Aryeh and Rivkeh. While there can be no explicit reconciliation of the positions of parents and child, they occupy places within the cosmic perspective defined by the Rebbe. Asher is not outside that version of God's order, but he is outside of the social and religious forms through which that order is interpreted by his parents. The characters act within a spiritual framework where the impact of God is a felt pressure. Aryeh cannot recognise Asher's place in the framework, but, through the Rebbe and through the revelation of the motives behind Asher's art, Potok reveals that the framework is more inclusive than the father understands.

My Name is Asher Lev does have a lot of elements in common with the other novels. The primary family structures in The Chosen, The Promise and In the Beginning are traditional in that authority rests with the father. There is, however, a fuller development of that domestic structure in the later novels. The gentle mother and the authoritative father are at the centre of Asher's consciousness and, on one level, this novel can be seen as another variation on the Jewish novel of domestic tension. The structure of the family is inverted in Philip Roth, Markfield or Friedman who create dominant mothers and impotent fathers. Henry Roth's Call it Sleep exploits, like Potok's work, the more traditional family structure. All of these novels share, however, an assumption about the central importance of the family in the Jewish consciousness. Indeed Asher's consciousness is a battlefield between his sense of himself as an artist and his sense of himself as a Jewish son.

The other structure that Asher is in tension with is the Hassidic

community. Potok again focuses on the hierachial nature of this community with the virtually unchallenged authority of the Rebbe at its apex. The reader is made conscious not only of the cohesion of the Hassidic community but the fact that this cohesion depends on essentially European orientations. Asher, as he grows, realises the alienness of his appearance as a Hassid in the world of art and in the world of contemporary New York City. As in the earlier novels, the Hassidic community is set apart from the wider contexts of contemporary American experience.

Potok sees the artist as subject to inexorable forces and it is precisely that inexorability that makes sense of Asher's anguish. His refusal to compromise his artistic integrity is not so much a moral strength as a submission to an imperative. Consequently the theme of moral choice, central to The Promise, is greatly diminished. When Asher paints the crucifixion, Potok sees artistic inspiration as an inexorable force overriding the will: "The dread was gone. I had no strength left for fighting. I would have to let it lead me now or there would be deeper and deeper layers of the wearying darkness"(p.317). There is no element of free choice left for Asher. He is the artist as victim unable to remove the conditions of his anguish, capable only of representing them:

And it was then that it came, though I think it had been coming for a long time and I had been choking it and hoping it would die. But it does not die. It kills you first. I knew there would be no other way to do it. No one says you have to paint ultimate anguish and torment. But if you are driven to paint it, you have no other way.(p.326)

The crucifixion represents Asher's final submission to the imperatives deriving from his talent. It is, also, the acceptance of his role as artist -victim suffering the anguish and isolation that that involves. Artistic talent is essentially a "mystery"(p.3), "a unique and disquieting gift"(p.4), and a source of "wonder and awe"(p.4). The artist bears a responsibility to represent the world's pain and to be an agent for God through the pursuit

of cosmic scale moral completion. Artistic integrity and spiritual imperative are synthesised in Asher's position.

Potok's view of the artist as victim, burdened by the imperatives deriving from his own talent, overlays Asher's experiences with a sense of inexorable momentum. Asher is not in control of the events he narrates. They are "crucial elements in a causal chain"(p.3). Asher is subject to a force which can change lives, mould experience and is greater than the will. It is this force, Potok's version of art, that leads to the final anguished confrontation of father and son.

Potok places this view of the artist at the centre of his novel and, to some degree, the effectiveness of the novel depends on the extent to which the reader can find this view convincing. Potok's artist is perhaps rather too close to popular romanticised cliché to be entirely engaging. The "long session in demythology"(p.3) that the novel claims to be is too often dependent on this finally rather simplistic myth of the artist as victim. Potok expresses the felt impact of historical event and religious faith more dynamically, as an integral factor in the action and motivations of characters, in this novel than in the earlier novels. He also avoids the near banality of the earlier happy endings. However, the impact of the novel is, to some degree, undercut by the crude myth of the artist upon which the narrator's consciousness is built.

The contemporary world in this novel is full of menace and disorder. The events recorded include the plight of Soviet Jews and the assassination of John Kennedy. However, it remains a world in which change for the better can be made and in which an individual can achieve a sense of purpose in life: "A balance had to be given the world; the demonic had to be reshaped into meaning"(p.323).

This novel represents continuing affirmation in Potok's work, a sense that life can be given meaning despite the ostensible disorder of the contemporary world. Through Jewish Orthodoxy, Rivkeh and Aryeh are able to achieve security for others and moral purpose for themselves. Asher, through a synthesis of artistic sensibility and Jewish spirituality, is able to

create moral balance and order in his art. The characters are finally able to live spiritual lives in the contemporary world and, through their spirituality, manifest as action or art, to enrich that world. In different ways they pursue a single goal, elevated into the novel's central ethic, to give balance to the world and meaning to experience. The pursuit of that goal involves anguish. Living a good life is not, in this perspective, a comfortable thing to do.

V

Potok's title, In the Beginning, signals a posture that is largely consistent with the earlier novels. He adopts a conventional narrative movement and proposes a rationally consecutive development through education toward enlightenment. The opening sentence, "All beginnings are hard," establishes the basic assumption of Potok's fictional system. The novel is to move from early difficulties to later enlightenment and that movement supplies structure and theme. The dimensions of a conventional Bildungsroman are established. Out of the complex problems that beset David Lurie, another "terribly torn and lonely boy," Potok evolves a moral pattern of Jewish growth and development in the face of the terrors and irrationalities of contemporary history.

The central character's progress is, as in The Promise, from biblical student to biblical teacher, and that function is crucial. The teacher's object is to repeat the lesson he learnt as a student and, thus, to maintain fundamental moral continuity: "You want to understand everything immediately? my father said. 'Just like that? You only began to study this commentary last week. All beginnings are hard....'"¹⁶ At the beginning of the novel, therefore, David repeats the lesson that came from the father. By the end, he has assumed two complimentary roles. He has become the teacher who confronts the irrational complexity of reality with the power of reason, and in so doing he speaks in continuity with his father:

Teaching the way I do is particularly hard, for I touch the raw nerves of faith, the beginnings of things. Often students are shaken. I say to them what was said to me: "Be patient. You are learning a new way of understanding the Bible. All beginnings are hard."(p.3)

The son sustains the stance of the father, in its profounder ethical implications, throughout the fiction of Chaim Potok. The overt conflict between father and son is superficial, a product of the times and of contemporary American mores often in conflict with older, European assumptions.

A fundamental continuity links Potok's lonely boys with their authoritative fathers and, thus, links the essence of European Judaism with the heart of its American form. The alienation of son from father is a recurrent issue in Jewish-American fiction, in, for example, Isaac Rosenfeld's Passage From Home. Potok, however, more implicitly than explicitly in My Name is Asher Lev, reconciles the two and, thus, forges a continuum between past and present, Europe and America, Orthodoxy and the contemporary world.

The environment of In the Beginning is, in many respects, the same world as that recalled in Henry Roth's Call it Sleep: the European Jewish immigrant world in New York City. Unlike Roth, Potok's concern is primarily with the sociological and historical situation of the community as it passes from the pre-war to the post-war world. Inevitably, the impact of the holocaust occupies a central role in the fiction--as a fact that the community in general, and David in particular, seeks to comprehend. The issue of understanding, and the process of understanding, is crucial. In the early part of the novel the young David ponders the meaning of a photograph. Experience reveals the significance to him. In microcosm that motif parallels the wider search for meaning that occupies the community as a whole. As in The Promise, David seeks to understand the Bible through textual analysis. The mysteries of God, history and reality, precisely the mysteries sustained by Henry Roth, are confronted and often comprehended by reason. Thus, while superficial connections can be made with Call it Sleep, there is a fundamental distinction between the two novels. Roth's novel is an exploration of spiritual growth, a search conducted through the intensity of special epiphanous moments. Potok's is a rationalistic approach, a largely conventional Bildungsroman which finally locates its moral core in a belief in logic and reason.

Those qualities counter the elements of the irrational that are presented in the novel. Throughout his childhood, David is subject to a chain of accidents, inexplicable blows that he suffers and, in the end, learns from. The fact of suffering is, thus, seen as in Danny's experience in the first two novels, to have a positive effect on the sensibility of the

child. That condition is used, at least partly, as a microcosmic version of the historical experience of the Jewish community. David's development, from a victim of irrational suffering to a wise and rational teacher, is a personalised metaphor for the experience of the community as a whole. Potok's character serves a functional purpose--to reflect the substance of the Jewish-American experience before, during and after the European holocaust. Inevitably, then, the particular characterisation is of less critical importance than the consistent development of the metaphorical function. Roth's David Schearl is a unique seeker after God. It is in the nature of Potok's fiction that his David should have characteristics that are a heightened and intensified version of community characteristics.

That is not to say that the central character is only metaphor or merely function. The first person narrative recalls the perception of the child confronted by bewildering accumulations of images drawn frequently from the European context. Early in the novel, this perception reveals two persistent elements in the presentation of Europe, also to be found, for example, in Edward Wallant's The Pawnbroker. David, like Sol Nazerman, is confronted by images of Europe that move between violent menace and pastoral. In the photograph, David sees an image of Jewish resistance that evokes a dark and threatening world:

No one in the photograph was smiling. Most of the men held in their bare hands either a revolver or a knife; some held both. The hands and the knives seemed starkly white against the blackness of their coats.(pp.6-7)

The alternative image is drawn significantly from the stories of the mother. Like David Schearl, Potok's character is subject simultaneously to masculine images of violence and threat and to a magical, pastoral version of Jewish Europe that derives from the mother:

In her stories birds would have sweet human voices, dogs would be loyal to their masters, lead children out of deep forests, and

never paw holes in the earth or dirty the paths used by people, and the wind would be the bodies of angels moving invisibly within our world.(p.9)

This duality reveals both the ambiguities of the European past, its status as simultaneous dream and nightmare, and the twin tensions within the traditional view of the Jewish family structure. The father's world is populated by dark shapes of menace against which the mother is a source of bright pastoral memory. The duality perceived in the European experience is, thus, mirrored in the family structure. That feminine-masculine tension is particularly felt in the episode where David suffers from fever after seeing the photograph and hearing the story of the patriarch Abraham smashing the idols:

My mother gave me medicine. I lay in my bed and cried with the pain and fever. "Sha, sha, darling," my mother kept saying. Her voice sounded dim and her face looked hazy, as if I were seeing it through mist. "Mama will tell you a story about the farm in Bobrek." She told of a new calf and the way she had helped feed it and keep it warm one winter during a two-day snowstorm. The pain in my head and face was excruciating and she put her cold hand on my brow. "You'll be all right soon, darling. Mama is right here next to you."

But when I woke in the night sobbing with pain and fever she was gone. I saw my uncle standing next to my bed with a revolver in his hand and wearing a heavy coat and a Russian-style fur hat.

"Sometimes you have to smash," he said in his gentle voice.(pp.20-21)

The distinction between masculine and feminine functions operates on a variety of levels. It characterises aspects of the family structure: the mother as protective and lovingly passive while the father, a moral activist, grapples with an inhospitable reality. That aspect of the masculine image is given a biblical dimension through the reference to Abraham smashing the idols, confronting a Godless world. Thus the patriarchs are linked and an oblique

continuity between the present and the biblical past is established. Potok's standpoint is that of a Jewish traditionalist evoking connections between the old world and the new, the Jewish past and the Jewish present. Further, the masculine-feminine duality reveals the dimensions of the image of Europe in Jewish-American fiction. It is simultaneously pastoral, feminine dream and violent masculine nightmare, a duality precisely realised by David at the picnic: "I did not understand why my mother told me only good memories of her childhood when all my father seemed able to talk about regarding his European past was hate, enemies and pogroms"(p.71). Between the two dimensions David Lurie moves. His situation reveals Potok's view of the spirit of continuity that links the American present with the Jewish past, its traditions and experiences. The paradoxes of that past inform David's American present.

David's mother and father are also divided by diverse concepts of what constitutes effective action in the world. The division reveals two aspects of Jewish consciousness. Ruth has an active belief in the role of magic. She attempts to counter David's illness, for example, with mystic incantation and considers him threatened by the Angel of Death. Her world is an amalgam of the rational and the magical, a synthesis of material and mystery. In contrast, David's father has a rigidly rationalistic view of the world. He sees all living things as having a function and a responsibility: "'It was the job of a canary to sing and not to fly,' he said"(p.29). That attitude extends to his view of the role of humanity in general, and of his son in particular: "It is the job of a child to listen to his father"(p.29). The father's perception combines a sense of logical place and order with a moral imperative to shoulder the responsibility that the defined function imposes. From this secure and rather mechanistic view of the world, he draws comfort:

He saw the world as firm and fixed. He said it gave him comfort to know that everything had its place and task; for example, he said, it was his task to provide for his family, and that was why he went away to his real estate business every morning and sometimes returned late in the evening. But he did not have to like everything in the world, he said. Some things had gone wrong of themselves after God had created them.(p.30)

From this model, the father can also draw moral and theological justifications for his activist stance. It is an attempt to restore natural and spiritual order.

Max's sense of order is fundamentally challenged by external events; the Depression and, above all, the holocaust radically upset the categorical certainties of his moral system. An inkling of that destruction is given when Max rages at the circumstances that challenge his efforts to establish order in his life. He concludes that, "The whole world is a joke!"(p.66). This momentary lapse from confidence is a recognition of the power of the irrational to limit man's effectiveness. It reveals man as weaker and the world as more irrational than Max would have it:

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!(p.66)

The tension between man and God, between a view of the world as rational and a view of the world as profoundly irrational, runs through the novel. The understanding of that tension, making sense of experiences that derive from it, is the source of the momentum of the narrative. It informs, for example, the assertion that Max makes in the face of David's accidents:

About accidents we do not have many choices. Our job is to make better the world God gave us. We are partners with God. One day you will understand. We have to work hard to make it a good world. But it is not an impossible job.(p.66)

That assertion is the ethical core of the novel, and it derives from Potok's examination of the paradoxes inherent in the role of God and man in the holocaust.

The view of reality as rationally ordered is implicitly undermined early

in the novel by the presentation of David as an innocent victim of a succession of accidents, all of them concerning death or the threat of death. David's childhood is plagued by an illness caused by an accident. He is a victim of what he calls, "this accident world..."(p.68), and is inadvertently the cause of the death of a pet canary and a dog. These events challenge a sense of a mechanistically ordered world where cause and effect are rationally related. Instead, the reader sees David at the centre of a sequence of accidents that cause him to question the idea of natural justice or order. David's situation is again used metaphorically to mirror the wider preoccupation with the meanings of the holocaust. His experiences establish an oblique critique of a rational world-view and his suffering is without identifiable moral justification. Further, what he suffers prefigures motifs of violence and death that permeate the preoccupation with the suffering of European Jewry. David's youthful consciousness of an irrational and unjust world is a reflection of the state of consciousness that Max will reach as events challenge his sense of "a firm and fixed" world.

The conflict of perception between the father and the mother is an extension of the dialectic that pervades the novel. The novel repeatedly moves around the issue of moral anarchy versus moral order, seeking to come to terms with the savage and irrational nature of mass murder. That dialectic is further focused in the family structure in the relationship between David and Max. Their efforts to comprehend the disorder of experience prefigure the struggle of a culture to come to terms with its destruction by irrational forces.

Through the Lurie family, then, Potok forges connections between the American and the European environment. Those connections are more explicitly realised in the landscape of the novel. David's experiences with the anti-Semitic Polish boy, Eddie Kulanski, are a direct transference of the Polish situation to the streets of New York City. The libel of The Elders of Zion is related: "He said goyim think there's a group of Jews who keep meeting secretly somewhere and planning ways to take over the whole world. They're called Elders of Zion"(p.60). David's cousin Saul illustrates further examples of

European anti-Semitism that David experiences in the American streets:

They think we're like Satan or the Angel of Death or something. They think we kill goyishe babies and use their blood in matzos for Pesach. They think we're like devils or demons. Every terrible thing that happens in the world they blame on us.(p.61)

It is not only this aspect of the European experience, however, that is translated into the American context. At the picnic, David is again exposed to the dual images of Europe: the pastoral drawn from his mother's stories and a sense of dark menace and fear, the masculine image, arising out of the fact that many of the men at the picnic were also in the photograph, an echo of a "darker land and time..."(p.63).

Through David's consciousness, Potok sets up fragments of the European experience in the American context, and this serves both to re-emphasise continuity, the persistence of roots and awareness of origin, and to inject ominous motifs of menace and danger. With the reader's fore-knowledge, these conditions dramatically signal the holocaust to come.

Images of Europe are directly associated with the park in David's mind, the location where pastoral and menacing elements coincide. It is there that he experiences a violation that serves to recreate the image of the suffering of his father in Europe. The assault by Eddie Kulanski and his cousin is a symbolic echo of the dilemma of European Jews. David, thus, learns the meaning of anti-Semitism, the burden of his own identity, and, in an American environment permeated with the shapes of Europe, he begins to learn to hate: "I sat on the trunk with my eyes closed and listened to the wood and sensed within myself a strange, quivering sensation. I wondered if that was what you felt when you experienced the feeling called hate"(p.135). Community sensibility is personalised and the experience is a preparation, a stage in David's education, for adult Jewish consciousness in an environment where the effects of European anti-Semitism are to be dramatically felt.

In the face of this anti-Semitism, Potok offers versions of Jewish defence. Mrs Horowitz offers one such defence method, a mystic and debased

use of spells and curses. Her idea of knowledge is based upon ancient texts she cannot read but which she sees as "weapons against the goyim"(p.142). This kind of cabbalistic ritualism is essentially inactive and based on superstition, in direct contrast to the rational activism proposed by David's father and manifest in the organisation he leads. Max explicitly attacks the mystic version of Jewish defence: "The rabbi in Bobrek was a superstitious fool. Better a man like Bader who is a man of the world and can also learn than a bearded shut-in with the brain of a genius and the soul of a calf"(p.118). Max's view leads to responsible action, an acceptance of the need to be as strong as your enemy. Mrs Horowitz, and to a lesser degree David's mother, take fragile consolation from what is finally futile and debased superstition. Further, Mrs Horowitz's view is essentially a corruption of knowledge. Books, which are in Potok's world view the path to enlightenment, become magical icons conflicting with the moral imperative that man has to seek understanding. That imperative drives David toward his role as biblical teacher. He expresses the fulfilment of ethical Judaism but Mrs Horowitz expresses the debasement of Judaism based on absurd idolatry. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Potok's view of Judaism remains steadfastly rationalistic. The re-invigorated Judaism of Wallant or Charyn, with its emphasis on the problematic dimensions of mysticism, has little or no place in Potok's moral universe.

The massacre of Jews at Hebron is used as an explicit example of the need for active community self-defence. The murder of the yeshiva students reveals the futility of passive trust in either God or non-Jewish authorities. Max rages at this passivity and David, in the role of initiate, learns the need for self-defence. Strength and action is seen, in the context of Europe, Israel and America, as the only means of preserving the Jews:

Tomorrow, I thought. We pay you back tomorrow. David Lurie son of Max Lurie will pay you back tomorrow. For everything. Tomorrow. Master of the Universe, why do they do this to us? But tomorrow we will do our job and pay them back.(p.170)

Out of personal humiliation and growing historical awareness, David learns to

share his father's stance.

This merging of father's and son's consciousness is explicitly realised when Potok injects the thought processes of the father in a battle in Europe into David's consciousness in the forest:

I stepped through the smoke and jumped lightly across the stream. Listen, I said. Listen to me. It cannot go on this way. They are all slaughtering us. Each side kills us as if we were bugs. We have to do something! Look what the stinking bastard Cossacks have left behind in Lemberg. Look! Look what they have left behind in Galicia. You are going to sit here reciting Psalms? When did a Psalm prevent a throat from being torn open? Are you listening, Meyer? Are you listening, David? We have to do something. All right, stay with your books. I have to do something. I have to stop them. I have to break their heads. I have to take revenge for my friends the Cossacks killed. Did you see how they died? We must do something! Avruml, are you with me? And the rest of you? We will go in together. The stinking Cossacks. We will sing Yiddish songs as they come charging at us before we turn Pilsudski's guns on them.(p.171)

Potok abandons narrative realism here to allow the father's thoughts to merge into David's interior monologue. Past merges into the novel's present and Potok signals a unity of attitude between father and son, a mutual determination to abandon the passive acceptance of death and to actively defend the community against its enemies. From that position Potok moves toward a concern with, and an examination of, the justification for Zionism, the political manifestation of Jewish militancy.

By abandoning strict narrative realism and using David's perception as a vehicle for the relating of events he could not know about, Potok is able to reveal the events behind the photograph as if they had emerged instinctively from David's consciousness. This shift presents David as having a sensibility that is part of a community awareness; memory becomes less an individual act of

mind than an aspect of self definition as a Jew sharing the collective sensibility of the group. Max's experiences, the death of his brother David, the fight against the anti-Semitic Poles, even the events in Nazi Germany, become an instinctive part of David's perception. He assumes the stance, the knowledge and the experiences of his father and European Jewry; a collective awareness that straddles continents and almost serves as Potok's definition of what it means to be a Jew, to share in a collective consciousness. In David's imagination, the anti-Semites of Europe merge with those of America and he takes up the banner of Jewish self-defence:

I had to kill them. Master of the Universe, how they hurt us. I felt the jumping and leaping of my heart. My hands and feet tingled with cold. I stood very still inside the dark forest, looking down at the bodies of Eddie Kulanski and his cousin and listening to the wild beating of my heart.

After a while I put the machine gun down on the forest floor next to the saber and came out of the trees into the slanting afternoon sunlight on the back lawn. Tomorrow I would play it all over again. Maybe tomorrow I would be Uncle Meyer or David. Yes. Tomorrow I would be my dead Uncle David.(pp.174-175)

Potok signals the integration of perception to point to the sense of continuity that links father and son, and American and European Jewry. David begins to assume the adult roles of his father and uncle, and even to echo the patriarchal, biblical role of Abraham related in Saul's story. A thread links Abraham, Max and both Davids and the thread is part of what Potok means by Judaism: "They won't kill David again, I kept thinking. We have to smash their heads. There isn't any other way"(p.175).

That "education" in instinctive consciousness precedes the beginning of David's formal education where, as often in Potok's fiction, his precocious intelligence and sensitivity serve to isolate him from his fellow students, and, finally, from the Orthodox community as a whole. If the first kind of education is acquired instinctively, then this latter process is strictly rational and

intellectual. In that world David moves toward a sense of certainty that mirrors his father's view. David's intellectual activity mirrors his father's political activity and is similarly undermined by the irrational forces of external events.

Potok presents another aspect of experience shared by father and son. He uses the same language to describe the shared sense of security: "The world had become firm and fixed and I was comfortable in it"(p.204). That concept is disturbed by the Depression, another "accident," a term that becomes Potok's shorthand for the intrusion of menacing and irrational experiences. The "accident" again raises questions of God's role in the world, and David asks the question that permeates the novel: "Doesn't it look like it makes no difference now if a person is good or bad? God is just destroying everyone" (p.214).

The Depression is used to trigger another stage in David's search for understanding. His childish incomprehension serves as an exact reflection of the bewildered incomprehension of the community as a whole. It is no different in tone from his father's sense of powerlessness: "I cannot understand it. What has happened? Nothing I do seems to help"(p.237). David's attitude serves, again, as a metaphorical expression of the situation in the community.

Faced with the disintegration of the society he founded and with the irresistible fact of the Depression, Max slips into the passivity of a child. His rationalist and activist approach, his sense of man's job, is futile when confronted by events outside of his control. Potok dramatises the tension between potential for achievement in man and his impotence in the face of irrational menace. David perceives that tension as the family pack to leave the apartment:

Then I scooped out the letters and there was the photograph of the men with guns and knives in their hands in the ice and snow of a Polish forest. I looked carefully at the faces in the photograph. It felt odd to be holding in my hands the heart of the firm and solid world molded by my father at the very moment when that world had disintegrated.(p.244)

From this situation, and from the ominous growth of Nazism perceived in his imagination, David retreats into silence after an injury to his throat. As in the other novels and in common with many of his contemporaries, Potok exploits the motif of silence by investing silence with meaning, in this context a fragile compensatory retreat from responsibility. Against the image of the "flood," a concept drawn from Noah in which Potok focuses the accumulation of menacing events, David creates a fantasy location through silence which serves to return him to a "fixed" and stable world:

It's better with silence, Papa. If the whole world were silent it would be better for everyone. And the fixed and quiet photograph would return. Don't we all want the peace and stillness of that photograph?(p.268)

Similarly, David fantasises about the myth of the Golem who, like a Jewish Superman, defends Jews from Nazi activity. These devices are clearly seen as an attempt to escape the problematic nature of reality with its accumulating problems and its "web of scratchy relationships...." He identifies "tranquility in silence. To speak would be to call back to life the troublesome web of scratchy relationships I avoided by moving quietly through the world" (p.269). This retreat is essentially a refusal to accept adult responsibility and another stage in David's education toward maturity is signalled when he simultaneously abandons the silence and the fantasy of the Golem. Those solutions, like Mrs Horowitz's magic, are futile. From passive and bewildered yearning, David, like his father, returns to the active pursuit of understanding and order as he begins to study the commentaries on Genesis. It is in this role that David becomes a seeker after comprehension and, like his father, begins again to attempt to evolve meaning out of moral anarchy:

But I was done with illusions and I knew it was shadows and cats lying among the garbage cans in the alleyway. When I finished my schoolwork I would turn to my Mikraot Gedolot, and my grammar, my notebook, my dictionaries.(p.284)

It is also clear that this search for comprehension involves anguish and struggle. The anguish derives primarily from the twin pressures David is subject to. On the one hand, the Orthodox community values impose imperatives upon him, but these clash with the urgent intellectual imperatives derived from his studies. As in The Promise, Potok uses the tension between modern scholarship and extreme Orthodoxy as the framework in which the central character's pursuit of understanding is dramatised. David's interest in modern Biblical analysis alienates him from extreme Orthodoxy and that painful schism is the price he pays for his desire to discover and comprehend the sources of his religion.

Potok signals metaphorical dimensions to this process. The events in the war evolve as background and they supply a framework for the simultaneous progress of David's studies. The desire to understand those external events is seen as a community impulse and that impulse is personalised in David's situation. There are also explicit connections made between intellectual weapons and the weapons of war. Learning is seen as a mode of active resistance while Orthodoxy is passive intellectually and politically: "Papa, some Jews fight with guns, other Jews fight with words"(p.374). A connection is forged between Jewish self-defence and the pursuit of genuine intellectual and historical insight. This reveals a major characteristic of Potok's writing: his capacity to invest the religious, intellectual world with a sense of tension, drama and conflict. Both military action and scholarship belong to the necessary field of active Jewish struggle:

It hurt that no one understood I had entered a war zone, that the battlefield was the Torah, that the casualties were ideas, and that without the danger of serious exposure the field of combat could not be scouted, the nature of the enemy could not be learned, the weapons and strategy of counter-attack could not be developed.(pp.393-394)

Max supplies the political dimension to that perception. A lesson of the experience of war is that there is a need for Jewish militancy. Max rages against the indifference of governments but mostly against the passivity of

Jews themselves and their failure to accept responsibility for their own fates: "David, the Jews are doing nothing to save themselves. Why should the goyim help us?"(p.349). An effect of the war is, in Max's view, to spread that awareness amongst the remnants of European Jewry and to transform the consciousness of the community: "Most Jews who are dying now are gentle. There will not be many gentle Jews left after this war"(p.376). Out of that transformation, comes the root of militant Zionism, the political equivalent of David's intellectual war, envisaged by Max:

When this war is over there will be a Jewish war. I do not know how many Jews will be left in Europe after this war, but Bader and others will try to bring them to Eretz Yisroel and then our war will begin. You will fight with words and I will fight with guns.
(p.375)

David's intellectual development is paralleled by changes in Jewish consciousness, and his growth into strength through intellectual curiosity and honesty mirrors the struggle of the whole community to make sense of the suffering in Europe. His determination reflects the political will of post-war Jewry articulated by Max. While David is always more than just metaphorical function in the novel, Potok uses the Bildungsroman structure to parallel personal and community education and development.

The meaning of the holocaust is at the centre of the novel's concern. The holocaust is seen to impose an imperative on the community to re-build with a new awareness, and David's new beginning at the end of the novel signals that process. The voice of the dead David defines the need to re-build on the basis of what has gone before, to create a change that maintains the fundamentals of Jewish culture.¹⁷ David studies the Bible with the intention of strengthening faith, enforcing continuity, not destroying it. Potok uses that process as a model of the obligation of the community to take new attitudes that will strengthen and protect the essence of Judaism:

Do you see the roots, my David?

Yes.

Who will water the roots? he murmured. Who will give them new life? The leaves are already dead.

I opened my eyes. The red world pushed heavily against my vision. David, he said softly. David. Will you start again?(p.433)

It is clear that Potok's ethical assumptions are traditionalist but not Orthodox. He values, particularly, the character of Bader, an active man-of-the-world who combines contemporary awareness with religious observance. The closed world of the Hassidim is seen as dangerously anachronistic and damaging. The post-holocaust Jewry is seen to have an obligation to re-build with the political and intellectual tools of the present. Those tools include Max's militant Zionism and David's scholarship. There is, as in My Name is Asher Lev, an underlying unity of purpose between father and son even while diversity of method leads to personal estrangement. The world of the father and the world of the son is profoundly reconciled in Potok's fiction even when that reconciliation is not apparent to the protagonists.

A great deal is made of continuity between the Jewish past and the present in the novel. The authoritative figure of Rabbi Sharfman is a personification of that tradition, encapsulating centuries of unbroken Talmudic scholarship. In his studies David is urged to "Listen to the voices talking to one another across the centuries"(p.428). Most explicitly, David is related by name, appearance and personality to his dead uncle, a strong symbolic link between past and present. The dead impose burdens on the living and those obligations are passed from generation to generation:¹⁸ "I have continued my brother's life. It is your job to continue his good name"(p.447). The obligations are imposed on David and the remnants of Jewry as a whole. In the grounds of Belsen, David is instructed by the voice of his uncle: "Never forget the past as you nourish the present"(p.453). That message from the past drives David back to Biblical sources: "I had left behind a secure life and was going out on an insane search for intangible beginnings"(p.450). Precisely the same impulses form the creation of the Zionist state: "The following year was 1947 and, with millions of our people everywhere, I exulted in the new beginnings we were

making on our ancient land"(p.451). Thus, Potok's ethical belief in the importance of continuity and tradition supplies the moral justification for Jewish Zionism and biblical scholarship. David and the community as a whole are involved in building the new with a faithful awareness of the past, bringing new life to ancient roots through both intellectual and political activity.

The morality of the novel is, then, fundamentally consistent with Potok's other novels. Here, however, Potok abandons some of the more rigidly realistic narrative procedures and manipulates point-of-view with less inflexibility and more sophistication. The novel is told through David's perceptions and, in the first half of the book, Potok frequently supplies narrative information through received fragments that filter into David's consciousness. His thought processes are used to reveal the child's confusion, in the manner of Joyce's or Henry Roth's interior monologues. That kind of perception is, however, abandoned when Potok wishes to present historical material to the reader. He uses the device of the "overheard" speech, but clearly the "hearer" could not be the infant David. David's consciousness is not used as the filter when Potok needs to impart historical information to the reader. For functional purposes, David as controlling perception is abandoned and the reader in effect joins the fictive audience addressed by the speaker: "The peasants and townspeople blame the Jews for everything, and Pilsudski does very little to protect the Jews. That is the picture"(pp.74-75). As the audience is enlightened, so is the reader.

Historical events are felt in a number of ways in the novel. They are, as in the speech, directly related through some device that enables the reader to "overhear" a discourse. They are also seen, as the Depression or the death of Roosevelt, to have direct impact on the lives of the Lurie family. Most significantly, they are perceived in David's imagination in a manner that indicates another departure from realist procedures. David in America has the events in Europe injected imaginatively into his consciousness. Those events become an instinctive aspect of the character's perception and relate him to a Jewish community consciousness. He is, often in fever or dream, allowed to

"see" things that he could not have known of. He "sees", for example, the Reichstag fire as it occurs, and the burning of books:

In a square opposite a university lay a vast heap of treasure, jewels piled on jewels, gold and silver, diamonds, all glittering in the light of the torches. Then flames were put to the treasure, and faces made red and pink and orange by the sudden leaping of the fire laughed as the jewels curled and the bindings smoked and cracked and the pages went brown and the teeth of the flame tore into the soul of the world. Books were being burned! Books! Golem! Stop them! He was suddenly by my side, in his gray shirt and baggy trousers, looking strangely small and weary, his face, my face, worn with the nights of sleepless forays against the hordes of the Angel of Death.(p.272)

The device allows the events in Germany to be injected with a sense of surreal nightmare. The "vast heap of treasure" signals a fairy tale that is quickly transformed into surrealistic terror where the flame becomes a devouring animal and the audience demonic observers of the fires of hell. Potok departs from realist description and from a strict socio-historical approach to narrative to evoke the texture of the event rather than the simple appearance; in short, he shows rather than tells. The objective observer is abandoned and the element of nightmare is stressed--nightmare that is objectively confirmed by later reports of the events.

The same kind of flexibility is used to emphasise a unity of consciousness between Max and David when their internal monologues are allowed to merge. In short, Potok moves away from a rigid adherence to realist procedures and, as a direct consequence, he evokes the texture of historical event more effectively here than in the earlier novels.

Potok has, then, produced a passionate analysis of the greatest catastrophe in Jewish history and has affirmed a continuity between past and present. The pursuit of understanding and enlightenment, the need to accept moral

responsibility, the need for the individual and the community to create the new on the foundations of the past--these themes are re-invigorated by Potok through a new willingness to adopt flexibility in the presentation of the fiction. His ethical position remains firmly traditionalist but there is movement away from those conventional narrative techniques that are sometimes, especially in The Promise, stultifying.

Another "terribly torn and lonely boy" emerges from the novel as a moral agent for post-way Jewry. Potok affirms again the political and intellectual energy of that community. In the context of contemporary Jewish-American culture that is a rare affirmation, and his preoccupation with the community is a rare preoccupation when that community seems to be becoming less and less visible.

VI

Potok occupies a special place in contemporary Jewish-American fiction. He is socially optimistic, realist in his fictional techniques and uncomplicated in his faith. He forges connection between Jewish values and the contemporary ethos. His version of Jewish values is, at times, unfortunately "home-spun" and wholesome in a way reminiscent of Harry Golden or Yuri Suhl with intellect. His version of the contemporary ethos excludes the whole landscape of irrationality and madness in which his contemporaries have built their fictions. His characters are moral and purposeful. The dark world of Jewish experience in Europe remains, in the earlier novels especially, on a curiously static level. Those experiences rarely shape, in a dynamic way, the nature of the reality created in the fictions. Basically the fiction is naive and anachronistic but in a particularly engaging way. His fiction suggests the possibility of reconciliation between assumptions and values that are, in the work of his contemporaries, generally irreconcilable.

His weaknesses are clear. The dialogue is too often simply a series of set speeches. Sentiments edge toward sentimentality. The fundamental goodness and intelligence of the characters strains the reader's credulity. Yet he has his strengths. He is an effective and, at times, subtle story teller. He makes available a society that is inaccessible and mysterious. Above all, he challenges the blacker assumptions of his contemporaries through a pervasive optimism in the wholesomeness of the world.

He has his admirers. Granville Hicks calls The Chosen, "a fine, moving, gratifying book."¹⁹ Robert Milch feels that "in Potok's writing Judaism is a living, complex force, not merely a subject of garbled nostalgic recall or an anachronistic sense of exoticism and background color."²⁰ Against these enthusiastic responses Kay Dick and Diane Johnson are uncompromisingly hostile. Diane Johnson delves beneath the surface of My Name Is Asher Lev and finds that "Asher always does as he is told, which is the secret moral of this book."²¹ Curt Leviant talks of "Mr Potok's utter pretentiousness...."²²

There is not much to be made from these extravagant responses. Potok's

undeniable weaknesses are apparent. Despite these he justifiably engages our attention if only, finally, because of his unconventional insistence upon the kind of fiction, the kind of possibilities, the kind of realities we thought had disappeared. The traditions sustained in Potok's fiction are melded in affirmative ways with the American experience, and it is possible to see Potok as an anachronistic moralist. That view, however, is too simplistic. There is evidence of the emergence of an alternative Jewish-American fiction that abandons the problematic landscape of contemporary secularisation, the comic-tragic perspective on the problem of Jewish against American identification, the bewildered sense of powerlessness in the face of religious decline and a troubled sense of dislocation. This fiction re-affirms Jewish sensibility in America and moves, in Cynthia Ozick's terms, "Toward Yavneh."

The procedure may be historical, a retrospective and unashamed recreation of the significance of Jewish history that is typified in Malamud's The Fixer. Alvin Rosenfeld has seen this as a trend in contemporary Jewish-American fiction that derives from the particular place that Jews have occupied in contemporary history:

For good or bad, history thickens around the Jews, and never so much as in the events of the last few decades. Far from being a marginal people, the Jews have been placed directly in the storm-eye of twentieth century experience....²³

A connected mode of affirming Jewish continuity is through the relation of the fiction to Jewish ideas and theology. In Fiedler, Wallant and Charyn Jewish history and ideas are felt pressures, elements in fictional systems that are transformed and manipulated for precise literary objectives. In Potok, however, there is a stronger, clearer and less ambiguous exploitation of direct Jewish thought and experience. That use of history and theology establishes in Potok's work, and in the work of Ozick, Nissenson and Rosen for example, a form for the Jewish-American novel that co-exists with the more ambiguous and troubled fiction produced by Wallant, Fiedler and Charyn. In that respect the

"anachronistic" characteristics of Potok's work signal a re-engagement with sources that offer what Ruth Wisse has called "an image of an alternative civilization."²⁴

Notes

¹ The term encompasses the social and religious context of traditional Judaism. Moral action and religious observance are essential elements of Yiddishkeit.

² Chaim Potok, My Name is Asher Lev (London: Heinemann, 1972), p.368.

³ Potok, My Name is Asher Lev, p.368.

⁴ My Name is Asher Lev is more accurately a Kunstlerroman which traces the process described in the development and growth of an artist's sensibility.

⁵ Chaim Potok, The Chosen (London: Heinemann, 1967), p.113.

⁶ Philip Roth, "Writing American Fiction," in Reading Myself and Others (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), p.120.

⁷ Chaim Potok, The Promise (London: Heinemann, 1970), p.178.

⁸ Potok's best selling status may be partially explained by two implications arising from this fact. The reader responds perhaps to the attraction of the exotic combined with a comforting sense of the security of belief in a contemporary environment generally inhospitable toward religious commitment.

⁹ Stanley Reynolds, rev. of The Promise by Chaim Potok, New Statesman, 27 February 1970, p.300.

¹⁰ Judah Stampfer, "The Tension of Piety," rev. of The Chosen by Chaim Potok, Judaism, 16, No.4 (Fall 1967), pp.494-498.

¹¹ Kay Dick, rev. of The Chosen by Chaim Potok, The Spectator, 18 August 1967, p.192.

¹² Eliot Fremont-Smith, "Sons and Fathers," rev. of The Chosen by Chaim Potok, The New York Times, 24 April 1967, p.35.

¹³ Potok, The Chosen, p.11. All further references to this work appear in the text.

¹⁴ Potok, The Promise, p.253. All further references to this work appear in the text.

¹⁵ Potok, My Name is Asher Lev, p.108. All further references to this work appear in the text.

¹⁶ Chaim Potok, In the Beginning (London: Heinemann, 1976), p.3. All further references to this work appear in the text.

¹⁷ Potok's interpretation of the implications of the holocaust, the imperative to re-assert Jewish identity, is widely echoed in Jewish literature. Ben Hecht's view in "The Last Tribe" belongs to that area of interpretation: "My meeting with Peter Bergson was the result of having turned into a Jew in 1939. I had before then been only related to Jews. In that year I became a Jew and looked on the world with Jewish eyes. The German mass murder of the Jews, recently began, had brought my Jewishness to the surface." in The Literature of American Jews, ed. Theodore L. Gross (New York: The Free Press, 1973), p.82.

Hecht's re-awakened sense of identity also led him toward Zionism in the post-war period. His experiences, and those of others, are mirrored in the ethical structure of Potok's novel.

¹⁸ That ethical characteristic of Judaism is identified by Daniel Bell in "Reflections on Jewish Identity." "For me, therefore, to be a Jew is to be part of a community woven by memory - the memory whose knots are tied by yizkor.... The yizkor is the tie to the dead, the link to the past.... In the yizkor, through memory, I am identified as a Jew." in The Literature of American Jews, ed. Gross, p.429.

¹⁹ Granville Hicks, "Good Fathers and Good sons," rev. of The Chosen by Chaim Potok, Saturday Review, 29 April 1967, p.26.

²⁰ Robert Milch, rev. of My Name is Asher Lev by Chaim Potok, Saturday Review, 15 April 1972, p.65.

Chapter 4: The Troubled Vision: Jerome Charyn

I

Jerome Charyn's attitude to fiction and the contemporary environment is explicit in the introductions to The Single Voice and The Troubled Vision. He identifies the absence of realist possibilities, and the reduction of material available to the novelist:

Abandoning character development and a strict linear perspective, and other props of the nineteenth-century novel of manners, no longer able to range through an entire society with the appetite and aplomb of Tolstoy or Balzac, to fit the individual notes and fragments of his own life within the continuum of a thousand-page novel, to feel rooted in a particular time, a particular place, a particular past, the contemporary writer has been left with little else than a sense of dislocation, a splintered reality, and the shards and bones of language.¹

He allies himself with a Post-Modernist impulse, a sense that the impenetrability of reality imposes limitations, and creates possibilities for the field of fiction.

He perceives the transformation of character and landscape in which that character operates. The model for the contemporary experience is, in an analysis which directly contrasts with Potok's model of a meaningful universe, the psychic cripple moving through a fantastic and perverse world: "The personae of our best writers drift through their fictive landscapes half-asleep, locked within the muted, disordered tones of the catatonic, in a dream-riddled, violent world."² Formal implications clearly arise; the novel moves into introspective mode. Faced with the present and future, adrift from the formal shapes and possibilities in traditional fiction, the subject of fiction begins to be fiction itself. Paradoxically, that introspective tendency is an outcome of, and an expression of, an engagement with the present. Non-realist procedures lead to the

clarification and crystallisation of contemporary experience and to the imperative rejection of traditional fictional techniques:

And what of the contemporary writer himself? Isolated, skittery, eccentric, feeling less and less human in a mechanical, Americanized world that honors moonwalks, kill machines, and artificial hearts, having only words to play with, he has retreated within the borders of his own fiction, knowing full well the limitations of his work and the emptiness around him.³

Charyn expresses common enough impulses: a mistrust of technology, a recognition of the need to invent the fictive system, the retreat from realist techniques as they prove inadequate to the task of rendering contemporary experience, an implicit recognition of new possibilities and limitations both in formal and thematic terms.

The last point is explicitly developed in the introduction to The Single Voice:

Accused of being brash, cruel, irrelevant, and antihuman by a generation of older critics stuck to the values and critical apparatus of thirty years ago, the black humorists, in refusing to buy the sentimental, supermarket humanism and homogenized morality of modern America, in forcing irrationality and illogic upon us, in reminding us that we are all part parody and caricature, in excess and madness, than in all the shopworn fiction devoted to character development and depth psychology, have shown themselves to be our most profound moralists, for they have not glossed over or denied the terror, the loneliness, and the perversity of human existence.⁴

Charyn recognises a cluster of imperatives and possibilities. He stresses the function of comedy in Post-Modernist fiction, melding that with terror to sustain moral energy. In this sense, his analysis differs in detail

from Leslie Fiedler's expression of the Post-Modernist mood:

We have, however, entered quite another time, apocalyptic, anti-rational, blatantly romantic and sentimental; an age dedicated to joyous misogyny and prophetic irresponsibility; one, at any rate, distrustful of self-protective irony and too great self-awareness.⁵

The difference is more in detail than in substance. While stresses are located differently, both recognise, in criticism and fiction, a sense of radical alienation from the "great books" approach to literature, and a movement toward comic mania born out of terror and despair. The appropriate language is "the language of hysteria."⁶

Charyn can clearly be located within the evolution of a Post-Modernist, non-realist fiction. Nathanael West signals and precedes the mood that Charyn describes in his anthologies. The choice of fictions reflects Charyn's taste for "black humour," the fictive invention, the comic-hysteric and the apocalyptic mood.⁷ To some degree or another, these elements are apparent in his fiction.

There are, however, impulses that coincide with and modify those characteristics. While the contemporary mood reveals bleak and comic projections of the future, Charyn's involvement with Jewish and ethnic issues evokes retrospective mystic and moral possibilities. What Leslie Fiedler calls, "The Present Future,"⁸ coincides with a Jewish preoccupation with the past that is manifest in sociological and historical terms, as well as in magical, religious and mystical shapes. Irving Howe called Isaac Singer "A Yiddish Modernist." Jerome Charyn might appropriately be called a Yiddish-American Post-Modernist.

Charyn encompasses Jewish motifs in his fiction in a variety of ways. Two major patterns emerge. He directly creates a succession of Jewish characters, and he invents, like Leslie Fiedler, fictions that examine the problems and characteristics of the ethnic stranger.

Charyn's Jews are not the contemporary, successful and assimilated group satirised in Philip Roth's Goodbye Columbus, nor are they Bellow's heart-wounded intellectuals. They are closer to Malamud's ambiguous Jews typified by Morris Bober in The Assistant. But Charyn's version of Judaism, despite some parallels with Wallant or Malamud, is wider and more inclusive than those. He creates a spectrum ranging from de-valued Jewish chauvinism, Uncle Nate for example, to mystical and magical possibilities. The Rabbi in On the Darkening Green, the characters in Schimmel's cafeteria in Once Upon a Droschky, Faigele, Imberman, Benny and Misha in the collection, The Man Who Grew Younger and Other Stories are creations who simultaneously evoke two essential elements in Jewish theology, a sense of social responsibility, and a consciousness of mystic and spiritual depth.

In essence, Charyn's work comes out of a synthesis of traditional Jewish morality and spirituality with Post-Modernist preoccupations. The Post-Modernist withdrawal from both the literary conventions of realism, and the commitment to psychological veracity implicit in Modernism, is precisely the pre-condition for the re-invention of traditional Jewish motifs in the contemporary context. Charyn recreates the past through the techniques of the present, using those to express historically redundant possibilities within the present and future condition. In the post-religious age, the re-invention of the significances of Judaism is a radically innovative act.

The Rabbi's comment in On the Darkening Green is at the centre of another element in Charyn's fiction that is shaped by his identity as a Jew: "And why stop with the Jews? The massacre doesn't begin and end there."⁹ The rhetorical assertion accounts, in part at least, for the generalised concern with the problems and issue of ethnicity. The experience of Jews is seen to create some kind of imperative to respond to the situation of other minorities. This response is manifest in a variety of forms ranging from the historical reality of the Japanese-American predicament in the Second World War, American Scrapbook, to the

fictive invention of the Azazian gypsy as an ethnic outsider, Eisenhower, My Eisenhower. Charyn's Jewish moralist mystics recognise the need for human inter-responsibility, the non-exclusive nature of the Jewish experience. That recognition pervades these fictions, and accounts for a central concern with the issue of ethnicity.

Charyn's connection with the conventions of Post-Modernism is modified in another sense as well. His "sense of dislocation"¹⁰ does not preclude a particular and deep engagement with specific locality, most often areas of New York City. He is a regional novelist in a sense, rooting his fictions in particularities of time and place. There is, of course, nothing unique in that. What is special in Charyn's fiction, and the source of much of its complexity, is the synthesis of this regionalism with freely invented fictional systems. The perverse structure of Uncle Nate's Home, for example, co-exists with a detailed sense of the atmosphere of the Bronx in war-time. The "California" of The Tar Baby is, simultaneously, comic absurdity and small town reality. Lippy's "map of the world"¹¹ is exactly New York and a landscape of mind--real world and extravagant fictional invention.

Charyn's imagination is clearly shaped by a variety of experiences: the New York of his childhood, the war experienced there, Jewish theology and history, the patterns of American-Jewish experience, an adult engagement with literature as a teacher, a writer and an editor of an experimental periodical¹², a contemporary sense of urban dislocation, and an uneasiness about the "Present Future." None of these is a unique experience, but Charyn's particular contribution is to have evolved fictions out of the dynamic co-existence of these experiences--to have synthesised, for example, Jewish consciousness, Post-Modernist aesthetics, and the experience of a child in the Bronx in the short story, "1944."

Among these experiences, the war is of particular importance. Charyn evokes the historical experience of the Second World War, and, at times, a more generalised image of war, to attack mythologies bred by the momentum

of hate. War appears as a contagious disease, spawning anti-humanistic institutions, reducing the complexity of humanity to stereotyped versions of enemy and friend, and creating and perpetuating simplistic and destructive systems. The motif of war focuses Charyn's objections to political or ethnic definitions that reduce the complex dimensions of man to images of hero or villain. He asserts, through the fiction, a belief in the multi-faceted nature of humanity, its limitations and capacities that exceed those represented by nationalistic or mechanistic concepts of man.

War also operates as a metaphor establishing a moral obligation to defend the weak and the powerless. In that sense, Charyn distinguishes the destructive mythologies of war from activist participation in morally just struggles that may exist either on a cosmic or personal scale. Charyn focuses the inter-responsibility of man within the framework. Images of war, most clearly in On the Darkening Green, are used to reflect both moral imperatives, and corrupt, contagious mythologies of hate.

A view of history evolves out of these concerns. Past and present co-exist within the fiction, and interact to define moral perspectives and locate implications for the present and future that arise out of the past. The rich density of Yiddish culture, the nightmarish destruction of that culture, the noxious perpetuation of racial prejudice, the Second World War and subsequent wars--these elements of the past intrude into Charyn's version of the present and future, and create profound implications.

Charyn's fiction is shaped, then, by a multiplicity of impulses, and these tend to focus and form around certain central and recurrent structures, most explicitly the individual in relation to institutions. The institution exists as a microcosmic version of anti-humanistic tendencies. The typical protagonist moves from passive insensibility in relation to these institutions to active revolt. Charyn's combination of radical anti-establishment politics and humanist ethics shapes this transformation. The act of revolt becomes an assertion of the persistence of human concern, while the failure of revolt reveals a bleak perspective on the momentum of the

present-future, a revelation of the powerful and ominous forces that seem to prevail.

The view of social reality that emerges out of this fiction is by no means simplistic. The bleak potential of the present merges with a sense of the persistence of spiritual and magical possibility, and is confronted by the activity of the human imagination moving between affirmations of love and acts of transcendent perception that, at times, recall Wallant's procedures in his later novels. The whole forges a complex synthesis of ambiguity and paradox.

Charyn, like Fiedler, is self-aware, identifying the merging of impulses in his work. His comments on Once Upon a Droshky are revealing:

After the novel was published, I first realised that the main character, Yankel, must have come from a great hidden affection for my father--his ingratiating tones and manner. As far as the actual writing is concerned, both my strengths and background are a very limited world--a few blocks in the East Bronx were my complete universe. It was a provincial world, but I combined a literary sophistication with this provincial world.¹³

That sophistication is used to reveal and transform the reference points of Charyn's fiction. He combines a "rooted" regionalism with an imagination that melds disparate tendencies into coherent and perceptive fictions. A local, Jewish experience forms the basis for a body of work that is significant both for its aesthetic qualities, and for the cultural characteristics it embodies:

A ghetto life can be very protective. I lived all my life entirely among Jewish people. It is the depth of the experience that matters. You can shake meaning out of yourself.¹⁴

Descriptions of the post-war Jewish-American novel are distorted and incomplete if they fail to include a recognition of this novelist who shakes meaning out of particular and deeply felt experience.

II

Nostalgia for a lost Yiddish-American culture is at the centre of Once Upon a Droszky. The social cohesion of that Jewish New York Community is focused on, and represented by, two institutions in terminal decline, the Cafeteria and the Yiddish theatre. They represent elements of a rich culture besieged by contemporary legalistic pressures. The title of the novel reflects Charyn's preoccupation with a cultural past that is doomed in a harsher, colder world. Within the present, that vital past seems as unreal as a fairy tale and the title appropriately evokes the language of a fairy story.

In Jewish-American fiction the conflict between past and present is often, in Chaim Potok for example, focused around the conflict between father and son. This novel adopts the same strategy, but, more unusually, the situation evolves through the perspective of the father. The son is an agent of the legalistic forces that are eroding the vitality of the institutions around which the values of the past cohere. This novel is, on one level, a comic, sadly whimsical exercise in nostalgia. It also exhibits, more seriously, an uneasiness. Schimmel's Cafeteria is threatened by forces of the present that represent an inhuman business ethic, legalism without concern for the culture that is destroyed.

Charyn's nostalgia operates on various levels. Most clearly it focuses on the language. The novel is narrated by Yankel Rabinowitz, an ex-actor, in the Yiddish theatre, in an English that employs Yiddish sentence structures. This language is of central importance in the novel and it relates the fiction to the American tradition of regional dialect narration. The region is the Jewish Lower East Side of New York, and the use of the modified dialect can be compared to Twain's use of Southern dialects in Huckleberry Finn, or to Salinger's use of local argot in Catcher in the Rye. Yankel's language, like Huck's is both characterisation and an exact moral language. It also permits free association of disparate elements and is, thus, often meditative. The breakdown of the strict logic

of grammar is enforced by a reduction in the structural continuity of events. The narrative moves from thought to thought, event to event, without conventional limitation. It can do this because Charyn abandons some conventions of grammatical form. He evolves a modified Yiddish-American that approximates the form of interior monologue, and that allows for a precise definition of moral attitude through repeated qualifications that more formally exact sentence structures could not carry. Yankel's language is emphatic, comically extravagant, but precise and moral.

The extravagance of the language also serves to extend the characteristics of the reality in the novel. The fiction narrowly focuses on a small area of New York, but Yankel's perspective, as revealed through the narration, magnifies and colours the environment to such a degree that it edges towards a heightened, almost surrealistic, form.

There is a sense in which the novel is close to the form of a Yiddish drama, magnified, expansive, with elements of moral melodrama. It can be seen both as an act of nostalgia for a lost culture and a recreation of the forms of that culture. It is, for example, permeated with a sense of role-playing. Yankel acts throughout in much the same way as he used to act in the theatre: "And right away I raise one eyebrow. I always do that when I want attention. That's my trade. I'm an actor, on the stage and off."¹⁵ Like Yiddish drama, the novel sustains the possibility of magic. Its prevailing tone is one of pathos; dramatic moments are heightened into something close to melodrama; characterisations are larger than life, and it recalls the past in terms that are almost lyrical.

Charyn is not, however, simply recreating a Yiddish drama. The novel also exhibits a sophisticated sense of the possibilities of Post-Modernist form. Yankel's language is both close to Yiddish-American and a device that allows the narration to move beyond the boundaries of realism. It is an experimental form modified out of a Jewish dialect, and serves to create an overtone of surreal distortion. It allows the momentum of Yankel's narration to move into areas of fantasy and fabulation without

any sense of qualitative difference in the credibility of what is recorded; the distinction between the real and the fictive begins to be eroded. Dreams and fantasies are not structurally distinguished from the external world. Yankel's narrative synthesises a sociologically credible landscape with a fictive environment in which all things are possible; magical transformations are no surprise to Yankel, nor, in the context of the narration, to the reader. The rhetoric reveals both real and fantastic possibilities. The novel combines a preoccupation with Jewish tradition with procedures reflecting contemporary consciousness.

Charyn's novel evokes the assumption that reverberates throughout the contemporary American novel: "With all the mishegas that goes around today, everything is possible!" (p.123). Everything is possible is an appropriate expression of a central assumption in the mainstream contemporary novel. The fact that these possibilities arise through mishegas, or obsessive madness, is precisely the disturbing implication that co-exists with that assumption.¹⁶ In this novel, then, Charyn combines contemporary impulses with preoccupations with Jewish cultural experience. It is, on one level, a comic-tragic drama of the kind played in the Yiddish theatre. It is, in itself, a representation of the kind of art lost and mourned by Yankel, and is, therefore, a recreation of the form that it is nostalgic about.¹⁷ However, the fiction is dynamically formed around contemporary procedures and current assumptions about the nature of American experience.

The America that Charyn creates is legalistic and anti-humanistic. Farbstein and Irving are the agents of oppressive elements representing the momentum of a disturbing future. The richly vital community of Schimmel's Cafeteria is, at the end, in doomed revolt in the face of this uneasy projection of the American environment. The interaction of Jewish elements, contemporary procedures and the bleak version of the American environment creates the complexity of this novel. The past and present remain in a state of unresolvable tension. Charyn recognises moral implications arising out of the confrontation of what is past, present and implicit in the future.

This novel exhibits a belief in the validity of emotional truth over legalistic right, or simplistic literal truth. Pincus's stories are, in detail, often distorted, but they have a profound emotional validity. Yankel often lies but in the service of valid moral concerns. Farbstein is legally in the right but his actions are often cruelly inhuman. Charyn emphasises, as Wallant does through Sammy's stories in The Children At The Gate, the distinction between emotional and literal truth, and in Yankel's lie to Tillie, for example, he clearly points to the greater validity of the former:

So why should I make her feel bad? "Tillie, shah! Hymie the painter, he was handsome like a prince. Half the women on Second Avenue would have given up their lives for a chance to go away with him for a week end." Was that man ugly! He had a nose like a trumpet and a chin like a spike. Children would run from him when they saw him in the street.(p.21)

Underlying, the comic devaluation of the extravagant praise, is a clear sense of the humane impulse behind Yankel's untruth. "The Truth," "The Law," "Right" are, in Charyn's world, often destructive of what is more profoundly right and true. This clearly reflects Charyn's mistrust of establishment values and institutions, a mistrust more explicitly expressed in On the Darkening Green or American Scrapbook. Farbstein has law on his side and legally his case is watertight. Morally it remains indefensible.

Yankel's Yiddish-American narration must, however, be central in any discussion of this novel. Charyn employs this language not only for a sustained comic tone but also for the specific fictive possibilities that it permits. The two most recurrent devices are the rhetorical question and the emphatic phrase:

I'm telling you, there will never be another Tillie! But look at her now! What can I do, memories are memories. For me she'll always be Tillie of East Broadway even with her pushed-in face.

Sure, laugh, you see the blisters and the veins, but I remember the breasts that used to stand out like plump potato blintzes. "Tillie," I want to say, "do you remember the time when the cat crawled through the window and started to howl and you thought it was Moskowitz who sent the cat to spy on us and you wouldn't get undressed until I made a Frankenstein face and chased it out?" What's the use? Where, she would say, when? Me, I remember everything. With me nothing dies. A slap on the face from my father fifty years ago and I can still feel the sting today. So whoever you are, if you threw a cup of coffee in my face in 1923 don't expect me to shake hands now and forgive. Do something to me, that's the way I am. And can you blame me if I try to look out for Tillie? Say I'm sentimental, call me a schlemiel, kill me if you want, but don't expect me to change.

"Yankel," Tillie says, "you saved the house for us."

Should I lie to her? No!

"Tillie, the house is lost. I'm moving out myself."

"Yankel," she says, "you mean it? And what about Irving?"

Should I tell her that Irving sold us out? No! After all, a son is still a son. But that's not the reason why I don't tell her. I'm not trying to protect Irving. Why should I become a hypocrite in my old age? You want to hear the truth, I'm too ashamed to tell her.(pp. 18-19)

On the most obvious level the devices have a mimetic function. They capture the tone of Yiddish-American. However, Charyn employs these devices for other reasons. There are two kinds of rhetorical question in this extract. The first emphasises the impact of past events on the narrator's consciousness, and distinguishes his sense of the past from Tillie's. Tillie will be unable to recall the events, but for Yankel they are still part of present awareness. The question "What's the use?" points to his inability to engage Tillie in this past. It also reveals a dimension of the character

and is illustration of the statement that follows, "Me, I remember everything. With me nothing dies." The rhetorical question is, in this context, an externalisation of Yankel's interior consciousness, and it is indicative of his motivation as it evolves. He attempts to retain the conditions of the past in the present, and "What's the use?" reflects the more or less impossible nature of the quest. The qualification "I want to say" enforces a sense of frustrated aspiration.

There is, however, another kind of rhetorical question that serves to establish Yankel's moral status. The reader sees the evolution of Yankel's reasoning and his motives. Questions like, "Should I lie to her?" or, "Should I tell her that Irving sold us out?", serve to indicate the problematic moral nature of Yankel's choices, the options that are discarded. They also indicate Yankel's involvement with the past. His memories define his perception of Tillie: "And can you blame me if I try to look out for Tillie?" Within this context, the interaction between Yankel's sense of the past, "For me she'll always be Tillie of East Broadway...", and his actions in the present is emphasised. Memory acts as a present moral imperative.

The rhetorical question is employed throughout and its functions are various. In addition to mimetic function, the device serves to reveal the narrator's consciousness which is moral and realistic, caring and sentimental. It also indicates the frustration of impotence in the face of Farbstein's power.

Yankel repeatedly uses the second person as a direct form of address to the reader revealing motives and insights that are not apparent to the protagonists. This device overlays the narrative with a sense of a story told directly to a listening audience, in the vernacular and in an intimate fashion, a dialogue between the narrator's voice and the unheard response of the reader. This is, clearly, another function that the rhetorical question performs:

You should see such a guard! His fly is partway open. His badge

sits crookedly on his chest, and is covered with grime. You want more yet? The wooden butt of his pistol is chipped, and his eyebrows move unevenly.(p.115)

The description is interrupted by a question that implies unstated dialogue between narrator and reader. Of course, the device is comic, extravagantly extending the visual nastiness of the guard's appearance. However, it also serves to transform the relationship between narrator and reader into the intimacy of story-teller and listener.

The other obvious stylistic characteristic of the narrative is the degree to which emphatic devices are apparent; ostensibly redundant and ungrammatical repetition pervades the preceding extract. "Me, I remember everything" would cause Fowler some discomfort. However, the repetition has a dramatic function, shifting the focus from Tillie and emphatically distinguishing Yankel's response. Similarly, a suit is not just made by Finkelstein, but "by Finkelstein himself"(p.32). The status of the suit is immeasurably heightened.

Yankel often extravagantly exaggerates his attitude. "Say I'm sentimental, call me a schlemiel, kill me if you want, but don't expect me to change." There is a comic incongruity between the first two phrases and the third. This is, clearly, a self-dramatising device, a means of elevating personal characteristics to the level of major significance.

Emphatic devices and rhetorical questions are employed throughout, transforming the events into drama. The overall effect is to create a Yiddish-American argot that sustains a comic tone while being simultaneously vivid, moral and inventive. The innovative possibilities opened through this language enable Charyn to go beyond limitations of reality and logic, to move in the direction of Post-Modernist fictional procedures.

Yankel's language transforms and re-preceives the reality of the urban landscape, and Charyn's use of simile extends this transforming process. The simile is repeatedly employed as a stimulus for meditation, but the extension of the simile then moves the fantastic into the centre

of the narration:

But how can you compare a puppet to Pincus? Sure, a puppet can dance and sing and work all kinds of wonders with its wooden legs, but even if the greatest genius in the world were pulling its strings and faking its voice, it could never tell a story like Pincus.(p.40)

The device triggers Yankel's meditation, and the simile is transformed until it becomes a subject worthy of meditation in itself.¹⁸ The image evoked by reality becomes an element of equal credibility within the narrator's consciousness. The technique is repeatedly employed to shift the focus of the narration from external to internal reality, and then to create equally concrete dimensions for both. A beetle is, for example, transformed into "my philosopher in the bathtub..."(p.54). Similes repeatedly trigger a stream of meditation, pointing the narrative out of realist conventions and into a quasi-surrealistic world. Hair curlers are "like the broken radio tubes inside the chassis that Schimmel still keeps behind the counter"(p.41). Farbstein's "bald head sits nervously on his neck like a cannon ball that's ready to be launched"(p.135). He also hides his head "like a turtle"(p.137). At another point a simile used to describe Farbstein is transformed into metaphorical condition, transforming a stylistic device into a condition in external reality: "His whole head begins to swell, and it looks like it's filling up with fire. What, Farbstein is turning into a fire bomb in front of my eyes!"(p.139). The droshky, an emblem of what has been lost, "looked like it was heading straight for the Valley of the Dead"(p.75). Yudel Yobelkoff, the actor on the droshky, "was a dybbuk or a spook"(p.75).

The use of this kind of imagery has a number of significant functions. On a simple level, it serves to invigorate the narrative, to render visual dimension to description. It moves the action out of mundane reality and suggests both the grotesque and, at times, the magical. It enables the

novel to move between credible social groups and fantastic possibilities. In short, it is another device that Charyn employs to integrate the traditional shapes of Jewish fiction with the contemporary tendency to exploit fantastic models.

The basic momentum that underlies the evolution of the plot reflects a process that occurs in a number of Charyn novels. The central protagonist moves from a passive role in a threatening or bewildering reality into an active role. Yankel moves from despair and impotence into active defiance that is implicitly doomed. At the end of the novel, the moral forces of Pincus et. al. gather in the Cafeteria and Pincus begins again to tell the story of Turgenev. Throughout the novel, Farbstein, leading the anti-Cafeteria forces, is associated with the image of the spider, and as the novel concludes his web is extending, his forces gathering. Charyn emphasises the ominously expansive nature of the impulses represented by Farbstein. A bleak projection of the future emerges.

While the moral values inherent in the past are threatened, the physical landscape is similarly in the process of decay and erosion. Yankel moves through a Second Avenue that is being transformed by the sorts of pressures Farbstein represents:

ON THIS SITE
 WILL BE ERECTED
 A MODERN
 19 STORY
 APARTMENT BUILDING
 SATISFACTION GUARANTEED
 M. FARBSTEIN, AGENT
 1221 EAST BROADWAY

Sure, first he'll tear down the house, and then he'll throw up another Empire State Building. I can already see the nineteen stories. The building will block out the whole Second Avenue. Schimmel will have to move the Cafeteria to East Broadway.(pp.101-102)

The scale of buildings will diminish the human possibilities of place. The erosion of cultural values is, thus, mirrored in the transformation of physical environment. The forces of the future belong to Farbstein and Irving. The values of the son swallow and destroy the richer world of the father. In microcosm, this conflict reveals a sense of disquiet that permeates Charyn's fiction. Rich human possibilities are under siege in the face of the inexorable forward momentum of the anti-humanistic. Yankel joins the revolt against those forces, a moral action that is, finally, doomed. In that view, the moral man finds himself, like the protagonist of Neugeboren's Listen Reuben Fontanez, in the ranks of a ragged defenceless army. The fragile persistence of the magical is evidence, perhaps, of a terminal assertion of human spirit.

Throughout the novel, Charyn employs a parallel with the Yiddish theatre that focuses particularly on Yankel, and, in one sense, is another dimension of the implicit impotence of Yankel's position. Yankel plays a succession of roles in conjunction with other characters who adopt dramatic poses. His rebuke to Irving, "so get off the stage already, go!"(p.17) is followed by his own sense of role: "And that's when I make my entrance. If only somebody had written a part for me like this, I would have been the biggest star on Second Avenue!"(p.17). The analogy between action in the novel and the events of a drama is particularly focused around the ninth chapter, "The Play's the Thing." The chapter is an extended dream in which Yankel attempts to construct a drama where Farbstein will be judged: "Farbstein, when I'm finished with you, the audience will chop off half your head"(p.172). However, as the play/dream evolves Yankel loses control of the action, the director fails to control the direction of the play. This failure reveals a growing impotence in the face of the momentum of events. Roles are reversed. Yankel, not Farbstein, is on trial: "Oy, I can see already that the play is getting out of hand. You think I have any control?"(p.177). The dream/drama collapses into nightmare in which Yankel is faced both by his own sense of guilt and his impotence in the

face of events he is unable to control:

I walk over to my father and clasp his knees. His eyes are hollowed out. Ants swarm inside the empty sockets and attack his chin and the folds of his ears. Mendele sings to himself. Someone presses my shoulders to the ground. My elbows bang against the floorboards. Farbstein stands over me. His jaw seems gigantic. The tables and chairs start to move. The counter slides forward. Downstage! Upstage! I hear myself shouting. The stage starts to crumble. I'm riding through a tunnel. Mommen, I'm inside Yudel's droshky! I can see the gleaming flanks of the horses. The pendants attached to their bridles flap crazily in the wind. "Coachman," Yudel shouts, "faster, faster." He's wearing hobnail boots and a black caftan. He puts one arm around me. My head leans against his shoulder. Our knees touch. He unbuttons my shirt. His rings shine in the dark. The coachman sticks his head through one of the windows. Farbstein. Farbstein. I scream.(p.179)

The comic mood evaporates. Farbstein looms over Yankel, powerful and angry. The face of Yankel's dead father swarms with flies, and only the long dead Yudel offers comfort.

The conditions of the novel are represented here in microcosm. The world of a rich past, even though permeated with guilt and regret, is Yankel's only fragile comfort in the face of a present reality dominated by Farbstein. The pathos of Yankel's plight is heightened by the fragility of this consolation. The ghostly image of Yudel on the droshky is slender defence against the intrusive terrors of the present.

The values of the Cafeteria, the rich humanity of the culture that is valued there, is focused around the dead and departed. Schimmel's Cafeteria is, on one level, a shrine to the culture heroes of the Jewish past:

The whole world burns candles, but Schimmel leaves empty chairs.

One for Pushkin, one for Lermontov, one for Turgenev, one for Lev Tolstoy, one for Gorky, one for Peretz, one for Jacob Gordin, the Jewish playwright. Pincus' seven favorites.(p.41)

Similarly, Yankel's values are embodied in the lyrical image of Yudel Yobelkoff:

Yudel stayed on top and danced all the time, and honest to God, wearing his shiny clown's suit in the dark, he was a dybbuk or a spook. The lamps kept swaying, and the way the droshky was moving, it looked like it was heading straight for the Valley of the Dead.(p.75)

Yankel, thus, joins Yudel in the journey toward the dead where all the heroes of his fading world now belong. Pathos underlying the comic tones is revealed. The heroes of Yiddish culture, and the world in which they dramatically and vividly flourished, are gone. On this level, the novel is both affectionate recreation, and an act of mourning for the loss of culture. The recurrent parallel with drama enforces the themes of the novel, a profound sense of loss co-existent with a reflection of the nature of the contemporary predicament. Yankel and his friends are actors in a drama that is directed by forces beyond their control.

Yiddish drama frequently presents a reality that is heightened and transformed by the possibilities of magic, and this clearly shapes Charyn's use of theatrical metaphor. The Yiddish theatre opened up the consciousness of a generation. It injected elements of the sublime into an often harsh and impoverished existence. Charyn's ageing Jews are a transitional generation culturally formed by Yiddish-European impulses, but living in economic poverty in America. They exhibit an enormous gulf between external condition and internal possibility; imagination transforms the harsh reality of Second Avenue forging new, magical possibilities within that landscape.

This becomes clear both in the transformations formed within Yankel's consciousness, and through the evolution of events. Early in the novel,

Yankel assures the reader that, "After all, there's a limit to everything"(p.22). The following events undercut that assurance revealing a reality in which the limits of the possible are precisely not definable. Mendel's battered merchandise, for example, cannot comfortably be dismissed as mere garbage: "He rubs the pot with both hands and his eyes start to twinkle, and I think to myself, who knows, maybe there's a genie inside? With Mendel's merchandise everything is possible"(p.23). The assertion that "everything is possible" permeates Charyn's novel. The predictable, Schimmel for example, masks mysteries and curiosities that defy reasonable expectations: "And how did it turn out? Schimmel was the biggest mystery on Second Avenue"(p.31). Charyn shapes his fiction around a dense and complex version of reality that, like Wallant's, encompasses mundane poverty and the transforming power of the magical and mysterious.

At the end of the novel, Pincus prepares to grapple with Farbstein's forces through the tale of Turgenev. He prepares to take the Cafeteria out of Farbstein's world into a landscape that transcends those conditions. He emerges as a magician, "a magus" who begins to transform and re-make the conditions of reality: "Who knows? Somebody gave him back his magic!"(p.215). Against the ominous implications of Farbstein's power, Charyn sets the counter power of Pincus, the magical use of a fiction to transform both consciousness and reality. Pincus is, in some senses, parallel to Sammy Cahan in Wallant's Children at the Gate, both counter hostile reality through fiction, both reveal an implicit faith in the act of fiction, the dimension of the human imagination that persists both as part of the novel, and within the author's concept of the function of the creative enterprise. Wallant and Charyn, Charyn to a much more self-conscious degree, integrate attitudes to fiction within the novel; the attitude to fiction becomes an underlying concern within the novel itself.

This novel clearly exhibits a number of literary antecedents. Farbstein is Dickensian. There is a pointed reference to Jonathan Swift in "Among the Brobdinbergs," a parody of the Brobdingnag episode in Gulliver's Travels. Charyn's characters too are magnified and expanded. Charyn owes

something to moralist satire, to Isaac Singer, to contemporary novelists. However, Charyn's imagination remains, of course, unique to him. As a Jew, an American and a contemporary novelist he forges fiction at the centre of those converging pressures, and that situation is not irrelevant. Clearly, though, there are rich peculiarities in this novel. Charyn synthesises a sophisticated sense of form, a nostalgic sense of Yiddish culture and an ominous vision of contemporary reality. This is a heady brew, and in this first novel Charyn emerged as a writer of major talent who created new insights into the confrontation of past and present. At this date, Once Upon a Droszky is still out of print and that is a disturbing comment on the condition of publishing in America and the state of our critical awareness.

III

The motif of revolt occupies the centre of Charyn's On the Darkening Green, and carries the ambiguity which permeates the moments of revolt that act as plot climaxes in Once Upon a Droshky, American Scrapbook and Eisenhower, My Eisenhower. A recurrent structure in Charyn's fiction, the doomed revolt of the dispossessed, acts as a focal point for the momentum of the narrative. Charyn's fictive system defines the dimensions of conflict in terms of the confrontation between the totalitarians and an alliance of "damaged goods,"¹⁹ the weak and powerless who, in inspired frenzy, challenge the forces of a mechanistic universe. The inevitability of defeat enforces the morality of the action--in Charyn's universe doomed defiance is, nevertheless, an act of personal re-definition and an act of spiritual affirmation. Charyn's friend and contemporary Jay Neugeboren²⁰ similarly projects, in Listen Ruben Fontanez, a revolt against the momentum of the future--an urban guerilla defiance of the inevitable:

Perhaps, together, we will lead a parade down West 76th Street. The children from the sewers and Ruben's brothers and sisters and the old people from Morris's home--they will all come dancing behind us. It would not be an unpleasant dream to have.²¹

The moral validity of revolt is represented as dream in Neugeboren's novel. Charyn translates that dream into action within the fictive system of On the Darkening Green.

That act of transformation is made possible by the interplay that Charyn operates between the historical realities of pre- and war time New York, and the absurd, quasi-surreal conditions of the institution "Uncle Nate's Home for Wayward Jewish Boys." The narrator, Nick, physically moves between a historically credible Jewish-Italian neighbourhood to a construct, Charyn's refinement of totalitarianism into a fictive institution. This procedure is familiar in Charyn's novels--the movement between environment perceived realistically and environments clearly fabulatory,

or fantastic; each operates as commentary upon, and refinement of, the other while uneasily merging into the other; parallel words in which a rabbi seeks to regain the power of Jewish magic while Moskowitz patrols the corridors of a New York High School. The movement between historical reality and fictional system is both a physical fact in the novel, the narrator moves between locations, and an imaginative act, a characteristic of the narrator's controlling perception.

On the Darkening Green combines an anarchic mistrust of institutions with a vision of war as corruption. War, as in Eisenhower, My Eisenhower, breeds evil mythologies, distortions of history that are employed to enforce and sustain absurd institutions. Thus, Uncle Nate is a manipulator of truth who, in classic totalitarian mode, creates corruptions of history to enforce his own authority by poisoning the perceptions of others. His institution is a microcosmic version of totalitarian order, and his distortions serve to enforce the absurdist rules of that institution:

Of course, I have had to twist the truth around a little to make it serve my own purpose. I won't deny it. The boys are almost completely unaware of what is going on outside the Home. We have a radio here, but I select the boys' programs beforehand, I allow them their quota of comic books, that's all. They only know what I tell them. And I've told them repeatedly that the Nazis have invaded Canada and are already building tunnels under Niagara Falls. And so we're on a constant alert. I could mobilize the boys in a minute. (p.83)

Revolt reveals both the impotence of human affirmation confronted by those forces and, nevertheless, the moral validity of the action. It reflects a bleak vision of humanity endlessly engaged in the gesture of defiance against the forces of mechanistic totalitarianism. On the Darkening Green, thus, reveals an impulse that is recurrent in post-war American fiction, expressed concisely, for example, in Ken Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest:

I looked at McMurphy out of the corner of my eye, trying not to be obvious about it. He was in his chair in the corner, resting a second before he came out for the next round--in a long line of next rounds. The thing he was fighting, you couldn't whip it for good. All you could do was keep on whipping it, till you couldn't come out any more and somebody else had to take your place.²²

Nick, the narrator of On the Darkening Green, is one of a series of heroic innocents who pervade Charyn's novels. The novel, like Going to Jerusalem, is essentially an ironic Bildungsroman where the process of education ends, not in Potok's wisdom or Wallant's emotional regeneration, but in fragmentation. The structure of the novel projects a momentum toward enlightenment, but Nick, like Ivan Farkus, is only "going to," not arriving. He exists in a landscape that is inexorably darkening and his "education" reveals bleak vacancy. The last paragraph of the novel symbolically crystallises the processes that the novel describes:

I stayed outside the synagogue for a little while, making promises to myself. Somehow, I would get in touch with the boys. I would scour every reform school in the country. There was a broken coffee pot in the street. Probably left by one of the raiders. Not worthy enough to be taken as booty. Its snout was missing, but its loosely hinged lid and old fashioned body reminded me a little of the tabernacle. I wondered what it contained. I picked up the pot. The lid came off. Only coffee grounds and bits of glass. I put the pot on the steps of the synagogue. And then I left Old Broadway and walked home. (pp.243-244)

Nick is seeker and activist pursuing social and spiritual goals within an urban environment that has literal and imaginative density; the coffee pot is simultaneously a remnant after a race riot and a reverberation of spiritual possibilities encompassed in the tabernacle. Within Nick's

consciousness, social concern for the boys and spiritual curiosity converge. Investigation, however, yields only fragments; the pot falls apart. Failure and defeat permeate the mood of the novel, but that defeat is, finally, an affirmation of the curious persistence of human values.

Allegorical elements are manifest throughout Charyn's fiction and in this novel they evoke a thesis about corruption bred by war. The novel is historically located before and during the Second World War and the conditions of war are metaphorically extended through the novel. They permeate the structure of Uncle Nate's Home, but they are also manifest in Nick's perception of social reality. Charyn employs a succession of military metaphors: "He left with only one recruit..."(p.3), and "Father Finnocchino kept a whole battalion of hunchbacks, dwarfs and gnomes..."(p.3). The perception of social reality shaped by the conditions of war serves a dual purpose. It defines a reality based on hostility; threat, counter-threat, attack and defence emerge as the basic structure of contemporary experience.²³ In addition, the procedure extends the boundaries of archetypal elements in the allegorical construction, Uncle Nate's Home. The home moves from allegorical element to real location within the fiction.

Similarly, Uncle Nate is initially perceived as a "bogey-man," a figure out of a child's nightmare and a threat used to impose discipline:

Everybody at G.W. knew that Moscowitz's uncle ran a reform school somewhere upstate, and during the senior assemblies, Moscowitz would warn us that we were all prospective candidates for Uncle Nate's. "Shape up," he would say, "before you all get shipped out." Of course, Howie had his own theories about Uncle Nate. "It's a fraud, the whole reform school bit. There ain't no Uncle Nate."(p.43)

Uncle Nate is transformed from archetypal nightmare figure to reality through Nick's movement from New York to the institution. The boundaries of

allegory evaporate when the allegorical elements are seen to exist and operate within the reality of the fiction.

Nick's perceptions of demons, devils and goblins is a further dimension of this process in the novel. The archetypal fears of Nick as a child are shown to have some kind of existence within his adult experience: "The little bastards never attacked when my father was around, only when I was alone. I called them beezlebugs"(p.10). Nick constructs a defence of metal soldiers and his recognition of the impotence of this defence prefigures the outcome of the revolt: "I knew even then that in actual combat my soldiers would have been no match for the beezlebugs, who, after all, fought without rules and conventions"(p.10). These archetypal forms transcend allegorical status, to exist outside the boundaries of the narrator's imagination, and then to reverberate allegorical elements around the reader's perception of the actions and events of the novel. Thus, the Rabbi asserts, "The devils are in charge of the world"(p.164), and Nick perceives the transformation of the Rabbi in terms that evoke the images drawn from archetypal forms: "I'm sure the Rabbi could have now wrestled with angels or demons and still come out on top"(p.187). The world of demons extends beyond childhood, becomes, finally, an aspect of Nick's adult reality, a fact of his perception: "Like a band of demented sprites, we charged across the lawn"(p.228).

The novel, then, forms around tensions that are traditional in Yiddish literature, the struggle between the righteous and the demonic. Charyn's procedures also encompass the ambiguity of fiction that evokes both real and magical possibilities. The liberating renunciation of realist conventions in Post-Modernist fiction enables Charyn to re-engage with, and re-invigorate by modification, the forms of traditional Jewish literature. In this respect, he consolidates, and extends, the more cautious fictional techniques of Isaac Singer and Bernard Malamud. Singer's fiction, clearly an important influence, is, however, largely retrospective, recreating the ambiguous conditions of European Jewish culture. Malamud re-imagines the

shtetl within a landscape that is nominally American, a static model that belongs somewhere between Europe and America in the 1930's.²⁴ In On the Darkening Green, however, Charyn imposes the dimensions of traditional Jewish mythology, its archetypal forms, upon a context that has clear roots within recent social history and contemporary assumptions about fiction. He forges the connection between a sense of the American present and the shapes of the Jewish past.

On the Darkening Green records a succession of transformations not only in terms of allegorical elements but also in terms of character evolution. The structure of these transformations is indicative of the moral preoccupations in the novel. The most significant process of change is the transformation of Nick from observer to activist. In the early chapters Nick is passive: "I never questioned the order of things..."(p.28), and this passivity is reflected in the tone of the narrative:

I hated dances, but Father Finnocchino had promised that his hunchbacks and dwarfs would be performing there. They were the main attraction. Everybody wanted to see Father Finnocchino's army of hunchbacks and dwarfs wielding saxophones and clarinets.(p.13)

The quasi-surreal landscape is revealed without any sense of surprise. In the early part of the novel, neutrality of perception precludes moral evaluation or activist involvement. The momentum of the plot, however, transforms Nick into participator. He undergoes the process that links him with other Charyn protagonists and with Angelo and Moonbloom in Wallant's fiction, Yankel in Once Upon a Droshtky or Ivan in Going to Jerusalem.

Emotional sympathy for the dispossessed is finally translated into involvement and action: "I kept thinking of the crippled boy. I wanted to stand on the mound with him and challenge the passing trolley cars, I know I would have wound up a creditable shit flinger"(p.55). That whimsical projection of the self into defiant cripple prefigures the transformation

Nick undergoes. In the penultimate chapter, movement is frenetic: "We ran up the stairs, Benny and I, the bannisters trembling in our wake. We ripped at the bolts and forced open the Dungeon door"(p.229). Passive neutrality gives way to emotional sympathy and is finally transformed into defiant revolt. Nick emerges as a defeated moralist. He reveals the heroic persistence of human values in the face of the inexorable pressure of a totalitarian, mechanistic world. He does in fact wind up as "a creditable shit flinger." The impotence of that action does not diminish its status as a personal act of redemption for Nick and the Rabbi, a re-affirmation of humanity on "the darkening green," in the face of enveloping bleakness.

The Rabbi, Rosencrantz, moves with Nick through the processes described here. He is the moral catalyst who moves Nick toward engagement:

And I promised myself, Rosencrantz, stay away from all obligations. Every involvement is a trap. Become mechanical. A machine without a heart. Keep the world between you and your toilet seat. But Nick, it never works. Could I sit idle here and watch Nathanson manipulate the boys.(p.138)

The Rabbi combines the mystic with the moral, synthesising those elements that move Nick toward engagement and defiance. In the figure of Rosencrantz, Charyn combines worldly corruption with spiritual affirmation. Around the "de-frocked" Rabbi, ambiguities accumulate that serve to affirm the persistence of human complexity against the prevailing odds. In this sense, he is a variation on a figure recurrent in Jewish-American literature, the corrupt-innocent with both comic and spiritual dimensions. Sammy Cahan in Wallant's The Children at the Gate is a vivid example. Nathanael West's Miss Lonelyhearts manifests certain of these characteristics. A recent example is found in Saul Bellow's Humboldt's Gift. The full dimensions of the Rabbi's stature, those characteristics that link him with this persistent figure, finally emerge as he moves into an activist role:

The Rabbi turned around. He saw me for the first time. His chin was covered with stubble. His face was drained and his eyes were a little bloodshot. The puny beard seemed to make his appearance a little less incongruous. It wasn't merely a question of respectability. The stubble had a magical effect: I'm sure the Rabbi could have now wrestled with angels or demons and still come out on top.(p.187)

This gesture of defiance, thus, injects magical and spiritual elements into an act affirming social responsibility. Revolt contains both spiritual and political significances. The Rabbi's halting movement toward active engagement is accompanied by a progressive physical decline--the boundaries of his body blur, his face forms "a patchwork of broken lines..."(p.223): "'Two recruits,' the Rabbi said. 'We came to join the revolution.' His eyes seemed a bit foggy, and the edge of his beard hooked unevenly"(p.221). As he moves physically out of focus, he emerges more clearly in the spiritual sense. Breakdown is synthesised, as in Wallant's work, with breakthrough. The Rabbi, then, is used to extend the meaning of the revolt beyond the political and the social, to interject the problematic, paradoxical, but still persistent implication of the magical and mystical. While Charyn's fiction reveals a bleak view of social reality, it is, nevertheless, complex enough to recognise the functions and operations of the unknown.

Magic serves a clear function in the evolution of the narrative. Nick perceives magical potential in objects: "I convinced myself that Crazy's hat had all sorts of magical properties, that while wearing it I could commune with Crazy's ghost, and maybe with Howie in Philadelphia, or even with Father Finnochino's hunchbacks and dwarfs"(pp.60-61). As the narrative develops this potential is extended, around the skull cap and Crazy's hat mysterious qualities are accumulated. They become mystic objects seen as having protective qualities.

Events as well as objects are implicitly seen to contain elements of

magic. As the revolt develops, the Rabbi grows into a figure around whom magical and mystical paradoxes reverberate. Magic operates, significantly enough, in the area of deprivation, exploitation and cruelty, the landscape populated by the dispossessed. Thus, Nick's attempt to free the "Wolfman" Boris from imprisonment involves an engagement with possibilities beyond the logical: "The Wolfman looked at us and then clapped his hands furiously and tried to force some sort of crazy rhythm from them. I was sure he was invoking the genie of the Dungeon, and I expected toads or bats to fly out of his hands"(p.229).

The Rabbi translates and extends Nick's perception into a view of the cosmos that precisely reflects the ambiguities within the fiction:

Nick, tell me, who can be a Rabbi in these times? Should I cherish my God when all the evidence in front of me not only denies his existence but also his name. Let the Cabalists find holiness in every act. Who knows? Maybe Boris in his cage is working out God's will in a cockeyed way. But why should I even bother maligning God's name. Let him exist or not exist, he's already out of the picture. None of us deserves a God. The whole tribe stinks. After all, the evil in this world didn't come from another planet. Hitler roasts Jews today, maybe tomorrow the Arabs will be out of fashion. Nick, what can I do? I still believe in all the mysteries. I should have been a conjurer not a rabbi.(p.230)

The Rabbi's argument begins with an agnostic sense of doubt, a recognition that evil might preclude the existence of God, that evil breeds evil and God is, anyway, irrelevant. However, the argument contains a paradoxical sense of spiritual possibility. Around the predicament of Boris, ambiguities are clustered. For Nick, he suggest magical potential. The Rabbi allows the possibility of Boris as a mysterious instrument of God's will. His concluding comment fully expresses the ambiguous status of the

mystic and the magical. Despite the evidence of experience, in the face of evil, the Rabbi still believes in "all the mysteries." The status of those mysteries is radically transformed--more, the Rabbi argues, the province of the magician or the conjurer. The Rabbi's comments at this point, then, are a reflection of the fiction of which they are a part. They exist, in one sense, as critical description, defining factors that permeate Charyn's fictional system. The complexity of the human spirit contains both the potential for evil, and magic that is uncertain, indefinable and even ridiculous. Nevertheless, the potential for spiritual redemption through these acts persists. Charyn's world includes madness, mysteries, the mundane, bricks and magic, the profane contains the profound.

On the Darkening Green presents a series of attitudes that are recurrent in Charyn's fiction, and of central importance is the issue of ethnicity. In Eisenhower, My Eisenhower Charyn invents the Azazians who act as a collective metaphor of an ethnic minority. In Going to Jerusalem he risks the inversion of stereotypes, the Jew persecuting the ex-Nazi. American Scrapbook focuses on the Japanese. In this novel, however, Charyn clearly defines his specific attitude to Judaism. He recognises two versions. Through the figure of Uncle Nate, he parodies Jewish chauvinism, the corruption of ethnic consciousness into the assumption of ethnic superiority: "Nick, in two, three hundred years philosophers and historians will undoubtedly say that this was the Jewish century. Undoubtedly"(p.81). That is, of course, the sort of attitude Philip Roth has repeatedly parodied and satirised. Against this, Charyn evokes the moral and spiritual possibilities inherent in Judaism. Nick's transformation from passive indifference to active involvement is accompanied by the assumption of Jewish identify, Lapucci to Lipshitz.²⁵ He moves through two conditions that reflect the duality described here. In the beginning, Nick acts as an agent of Uncle's system, an extension of ethnic chauvinism, but, finally, he abandons that role and moves into the landscape of

possibility inherent in the alternative version of Judaism. He becomes, in effect, a Jew in spirit joining the revolt of the dispossessed and assuming moral responsibility by aligning himself with the community of the doomed. Through this figure Charyn extends Fiedler's version of "the real Jew" in The Second Stone as the alienated outsider.

The Rabbi, also, counters Uncle Nate's Jewish chauvinism with a version of Judaism defined by moral responsibility: "Nathanson, you wanted to build your own Jerusalem in the wilderness, and you imported your little Jewish pioneers for that purpose. Delinquents from the Bronx. You wanted a new tribe of Judah, away from the Gentiles"(pp.232-233). Against that exclusiveness, the Rabbi's sermon and his revolt asserts a sense of the inter-responsibility of man. Charyn's focuses these issues on the Rabbi's status at the end of the novel. An urban race riot obliquely echoes the revolt in the home. The fictive construct is set in tension with a historical reality. The condition of the Negro in Harlem is paralleled within Uncle Nate's Home. In the aftermath of the riot, Nick meets the Rabbi outside the synagogue in Harlem:

"Rabbi," I said. "The synagogue. Is it for black Jews?"

He smiled politely trying to control the cigarette. "No, no. That's downtown. Near Lenox. They have their own jurisdiction. But don't worry, I have Seventh Day Adventists and Abyssinian Baptists up here for my sermons. And occasionally a Holy Roller. They all come in wearing skullcaps. The Rabbi hasn't lost his form." He winked at the shattered glass in the street, the pouch under his left eye wrinkling superbly. "Why do you think we were spared? The synagogue has already become a shrine."

(pp.242-243)

The ambiguities are sustained. The Rabbi's sermons create, with comic overtones, a non-exclusive community. Charyn also points toward the bleak continuity of spiritual possibility in Judaism. While Nick's coffee pot evokes images of the tabernacle, the Rabbi's ironic comments leave undefined the enigmatic status of the "shrine." Nick and the Rabbi are finally linked, then,

by a common act of social morality, the decision to join the revolt, and by an enigmatic sense of the persistence of the spiritual in the commonplace. Charyn's version of Judaism in this novel is a complex amalgam that evolves out of the confrontation of Uncle Nate and the Rabbi. The existence of Jewish chauvinism does not preclude a definition of Judaism that reflects profound spiritual possibilities.

Charyn also reveals an attitude toward history, and a specific perspective upon the logic of events. On one level, the war is seen as black comic disorder, and this perspective is also apparent in Wallace Markfield's Teitlebaum's Window. Major historical events are filtered through personalised and idiosyncratic perspectives in which priorities are distorted and inverted. Markfield refers to the Second Front in the following context:

Then on the first Tuesday of April, 1942, when Teitlebaum in his best hand and using a fresh box of Crayolas prepared a mock-up of his new sign ("To speed up the Second Front we will from now on be forced to sell our farmer cheese in quantities of no less than half a pound"); not long after Harry the Fish Man's daughter, Fat Rosalie, was taken to the Hotel Dixie by three soldiers who fed her on pecan pie and abused her most barbarously....²⁶

The war, in that novel, is reported through signs in Teitlebaum's Window. This is close to the procedure employed, in a more sober fashion, by Charyn: "The Germans happened to overrun Poland at an inconvenient time: our school was planning a massive pilgrimage to the World's Fair, and now the lower termers were beginning to panic"(p.42). The distortion of perspective and the inversion of priorities reflects Charyn's recognition of the illogical irrationality of war, and the procedure is used as an ironically appropriate mode of apprehending the madness implicit in the event described.

This view is also manifest in the way in which events are seen to occur. Social dynamics are based on both illogical and mysterious

principles. Things happen without reason or explanation reflecting a world devoid of reason, organised irrationally and based on madness. The Rabbi evokes the nightmare of the golem re-awakened:

The Talmudists will tell you that the golem will destroy every Nazi and Gentile in Europe. And it is only a question of time before the deliverer opens the doors of the ghettos and frees every Jew. But my views have a different bent. I say that the golem will attack Gentile and Jew without discrimination. He has lost the Holy Name. This time the golem is in other hands.
(p.198)

In this world, the devils are in charge.

The irrationality of events is reflected not only in cosmic scale nightmare, but also in the movement of the narration; connections are vague and inexplicable; events coincide and collide in a fashion that implies randomness but also contains the ominous suspicion of an inaccessible and anti-humanistic pattern. Beneath the surface of events, Charyn retains an oblique suggestion of the existence of magic, both black and white:

My father began having dizzy spells shortly after Crazy left for Fort Bliss. I suppose there's no real connection between both occurrences, but in my mind, they are linked in some inexplicable way. My father wasn't the only one who suffered after Crazy abandoned our court. Mr Dalrymple, the botanist on the second floor, fell from his window mysteriously and fractured one hip. Both of the Siamese cats in our building went into heat simultaneously and howled for weeks at a time. A few wire terriers in Mrs Schmuckler's dog hospital on Fort Washington Avenue staged a massive revolt.... It seems that no one escaped the affliction. All the toilets on the left side of the court suddenly refused to flush; Mrs Essegian's ceiling caved in; I jammed my thumb; and

Mrs Bemelman came down with a bad case of boils. I know Crazy can't possibly be blamed for everything, but I'm pretty sure that had he been around to protect the court, Crazy would have warded off most of the calamities.(p.30)

Both objects and events move in mysterious ways; the comic, grotesque co-exists with a complex and paradoxical sense of ordered irrationality. Crazy's white magic contrasts with the black magic implicit in the events described.

Wallace Markfield's Teitlebaum's Window has a number of elements in common with On the Darkening Green, and a shared anarchic scepticism about political ideas is particularly apparent. Both novels parody Marxist ideas. Markfield describes a radical meeting where a Negro cleaning woman is invited to address the meeting:

Whereupon Mr Sobler got immediately to his feet and Mrs Sobler ran wildly into the foyer, then radiantly reeled back into the kitchen hauling at and drawing slowly after her a small, red-eyed Negro lady who waddled forward on bent legs and began saying in a voice as rich and huge as the voice of Paul Robeson, "Morgan morgan droogan morgan morgan."²⁷

Markfield's extravagant satirical perspective is, in a more restrained form, apparent in Charyn's description of Nick's involvement with Sonia, a Young Communist League member. Charyn's target is the abstract nature of principles that fail to recognise the human and the particular:

Sonia began lecturing me. "This," she said, pointing to the mound, "this is what we're fighting for. So landlords won't be able to dump their garbage in the street." Then she began talking about the playgrounds and the garbage disposals in Moscow, and how Stalin had declared war on all the rats and lice in Russia. I kept thinking of the crippled boy. I wanted to stand on the

mound with him and challenge the passing trolley cars.(pp.54-55)

Charyn emphasises Nick's response precisely to distinguish ideological abstractions from simple human realities.

In a wider sense, Charyn's novel reflects the assertion of the particular over the generalised, exhibits an impulse against abstraction. The neighbourhood is, for example, a major factor and the fiction evolves out of a particular locality that is re-invented, but is, nevertheless, dense with local detail.²⁸ Reviewers have compared Charyn's use of the region to Faulkner's transformation of Mississippi into Yoknapatawpha county,²⁹ and the comparison is just. Charyn uses the region to root the fiction in the particular. The New York locality is a point from which the novel departs and returns. It does not impose a rigid realism on the fiction, but supplies a concrete environment which counters and balances the temptations of fictional abstraction.

The dangers of the abstract in political terms are closely related to the threat of the mechanical in the novel. Both forces seek to reduce the nature of humanity, to simplify what is complex. The revolt is against both the inhumanity of the institution and the simplistic, mechanistic assumptions on which the institution is founded. Mama, the grotesque agent of Uncle Nate, is described by the Rabbi:

Mama believes in a mechanistic universe. Give her an act and she will find you a bundle of motives. She can talk for hours about compulsions and complexes. Anything can be defined and explained. Even the worst horrors. Morality doesn't count. Good and evil become outdated terms.(p.164)

In a sense, this description reflects the moral centre of the novel. Charyn attempts to re-energize the concepts of good and evil, to frame a contemporary fiction around traditional confrontations. The novel accumulates a sense of ominous threat, presents a reality that is dense enough to enclose the magical and the mundane, and, in a clear sense, it

contains elements of moral fable. The inter-responsibility of man, the need to accept that responsibility despite bleak implications, is a concept that shapes the fiction. In the end, the novel asserts, "someone has to be responsible"(p.165). Thus, while Charyn's procedures differ radically from Potok's more realistic approach, there is, not surprisingly, a common ethical core that is, in part, derived from a sense of moral imperative involved in Judaism.

IV

Going to Jerusalem, a novella, presents a journey through a contemporary landscape infected by madness. The journey takes the central protagonist, Ivan Farkus, through geographically credible locations in the Southern and Western States of America. He is, under orders from his father, following the ex-Nazi chess champion Kortzfleisch on his last tournament tour. He acts as guardian for the six year old chess prodigy. Walter Van Buren who, trained by Ivan's father, pursues the champion and finally defeats him in a succession of matches. The momentum behind this pursuit derives from the obsession of Admiral Farkus who, in his Castle in Brooklyn, mythologises the tournament into an extension of the Second World War, the pursuit of the ex-Nazi. Within this narrative structure, Charyn creates a complex and, at times, bewildering analysis of contemporary America--a fable of our times that begins and ends in madness.

The analysis is essentially ahistorical, moving between images of Nazi atrocities and lunatic asylums in New York State, undermining the credibility of moral and historical complacency, transforming Nazi into victim and denying any essential distinction between the "monsters" of history and the creators of new forms of inhumanity. As Fiedler does with Baro Finkelstone in Back to China, Charyn inverts and manipulates the stereotypes of victim and victor to extend the moral implications of Jewish experience.

This is made particularly apparent in Chapter Nine which begins with a description of Nazi atrocities and ends with a description of the atrocities Ivan was subjected to in a farm for epileptics in New Jersey:

We were all treated like lepers. They assigned a few of us to the chicken coop. The guards made us work naked. And they had their fun with us. They would prod the roosters with pitchforks and then throw us in with them. The roosters pecked our elbows and went for our eyes.³⁰

This rather crude allignment of events reveals the basic assumption that creates the momentum of the narrative. Ivan articulates the thesis that permeates the novel: "Papa, I want to say that madness can't be localized.

The symptoms are too widespread" (p.63). Charyn creates an America reminiscent of Kafka's America, that echoes Nathanael West's vision,³¹ and that bleakly articulates the nightmare of a world insane.

The structure of the novel is episodic, moving through a succession of moments that illustrate and intensify Charyn's preoccupations. Journeying supplies the narrative movement and underlies the harsh irony of the title. There is no "Jerusalem," only the endless process of "going to." Jerusalem, for Ivan, is, at the end of the novel, a lunatic asylum--the exact microcosm of the world he has been travelling through.

Ivan travels between absurd institutions that encompass the characteristics frequently invested in Charyn's version of the institution. The Admiral's Castle is organised on secretive, military-totalitarian principles. It is an alternative version of Uncle Nate's home or the camp in American Scrapbook. Ivan visits his mother in an asylum and ends in an asylum. Between these institutions, Ivan moves in a world fundamentally indistinguishable from the institution itself; the conditions of "inside" are seen to apply "outside," the distinction between the two situations is eroded.³² The journey of Ivan's consciousness between these conditions controls the movement of the novel.

The events are primarily narrated in the first person, and in Part One Charyn employs the present tense to represent stylistically Ivan's inability to achieve perspective on reality that defies his comprehension. His dislocated and crippled consciousness renders him out of proportion with the surrounding environment. He is physically and morally alienated, a psychic cripple and, precisely because of these characteristics, the moral core of the novel. Charyn attacks the myth of the superman, the concept of ubermensch with all its attendant evils as manifest in Nazi totalitarianism. Inverting stereotypes, Charyn invents the figure of the Admiral who, paradoxically, in an ostensibly anti-Nazi crusade, adopts the methodology of totalitarianism, attempts to mould Ivan into the mythic ubermensch: "He was going to defy all of nature and form me in his own way. Any dope could have told him that his superman-to-be was a gawky, twitchy, unruly bag of

bones"(p.65). Ivan's failure to meet that definition of himself is an expression of his complexity, his status as a human rather than an abstraction.

Similarly, the figure of Kortzfleisch is used to demythologise destructive simplifications bred by war. The pursuit of Kortz reveals, not a monster, but a complex and ambiguous human. Ivan identifies the source of the Admiral's obsession:

Why Papa? Because thirty years ago he gave an exhibition at the Castle and you had a chat with him in Greek about Achilles and Priam and the absurdity of the Trojan war? You expected him to be some sort of moral superman, and he turned out to be an ordinary kraut. And now you're ready to strike back.(p.28)

The concept of ubermensch is discredited to the degree that weakness and powerlessness are revealed as morally valid conditions. Power, the Admiral's for example, leads to the moments of grotesque exploitation and destruction that permeate the novel.

Most of the novel is told in the present tense to reflect the unstructured nature of the perception that records the events--one follows the other without the luxury of perspective, or selectivity in retrospect. Charyn denies Ivan retrospection for most of the novel. His narration and, thus, his consciousness as revealed to the reader is rooted in the present tense. The effect is to enforce the sense of a character adrift in time and unfocused in space. Ivan, adrift in a perverse world, cannot understand or engage, and it is that inability and powerlessness that makes him the central focus of the novel's bleak morality. The persistent use of present tense emphasises Ivan's incapacity to act or perceive in a decisive or effective manner.

Ivan's narrative reveals the incapacity of the moral figure to define the boundaries of the enveloping reality, and to define the self in relation to that reality. It is, for example, not clear until the fourth chapter

that the narrator is Ivan. At the opening of the novel he describes himself in the third person: "The Admiral's almost seventy; he has a bad foot, a demented wife, and an epileptic son, but his aides are very loyal"(p.5) or, "Three weeks ago the Admiral's son packed his cardboard trunk and left home"(p.5). The tone is flat and unemphatic, the perspective neutral. The effect is to merge first and third person narrative, to create the illusion of objectivity in the opening pages and, finally, to reveal an unselective consciousness. The narrative voice adds no moral perspective to the situations described. He is a participator without will acting in response to sets of imperatives: "The foghorns blast three times. That's my cue"(p.9) or, "I follow the Arab's orders"(p.33). And, "I follow Mitkin's orders to a T"(p.35). Ivan, in the beginning, does not act; he is acted upon. He is another character in Charyn's fiction who moves from passivity to desperate and futile activity.

The journey is organised by the Admiral, and Ivan is acting under orders throughout the progression of events that leads to his new and fatal definition of self. By the end of the novel, Ivan's position, as in an ironic quest, is transformed from stoicism to desperate and futile commitment to love, a commitment that isolates him in the roles of clown, schlemiel and then madman. Ivan's final breakdown is simultaneously breakthrough, a re-definition of self in relation to the dispossessed, the victims and the innocents. At the end of the novel, Ivan visualises a new circus of clowns, and the narrative moves into an assertive, visionary tone. It is Ivan's declaration of independence, the severing of the bond with the Admiral and the ethical system defined by him. It is also, therefore, a retreat from the reality inherent in the perverse institutions which partly comprise Charyn's vision of the contemporary American environment.

Ivan's last words in the novel express the ambiguities of morality and madness that Charyn exploits:

Herr Kortz, the outlook is bleak, very bleak, I agree, but I believe in love. I don't mean concupiscence. Don't ask me now.

I haven't the head for definitions. I keep my philosophies in a dish. Virtue and vice would both be very nice, if we could all pay the price and outfit ourselves with morals that could be dripdried and worn inside out.(p.176)

Ivan has moved toward a recognition of the ambiguities of vice and virtue, the complexity of the human which defies simple definition. Moral, or political abstractions, the remnants of war mania, the Admiral's obsessive commitment to victory--these things are replaced by a shadowy, quasi-mystic idea of love that recalls Moonbloom's position at the end of Wallant's The Tenants of Moonbloom.

The narrative is now, significantly, directed to Kortz not to the Admiral. Ivan has, in a sense, chosen sides, and he chooses the side of the clowns, the defeated, the losers. He is unwilling now to be on the side of the victors and to share the perverse mythologies that motivate them:

Herr Kortz, we'll bring our act to the people. We'll perform in the streets. Melvin will juggle his bottles. Michael will catch pennies. I'll sing a few songs. You'll tell stories. Show your war wounds. Let Axel keep his tent. There are all sorts of circuses under the sun. It doesn't pay to advertise. In Brooklyn the organ grinders went from street to street. We'll need some music. To announce ourselves. Can you play the fife? Melvin can make tuba sounds. We'll wear piebald shirts. Hats with feathers. And boots. Children will die to see us. They'll drag their fathers along. The pennies will fly. They'll watch us from the roofs.(p.177)

The full ambiguity of Ivan's vision is expressed in the verb "to die." The children will want to see the circus very much, and the pre-requisite is death. Ivan's vision belongs to some projection of heaven. It is a strange mystic paradise forged in defiance of bleak realities.

The language here reflects the fragmenting consciousness as it moves

toward breakdown and breakthrough. It reflects Ivan's revolt from his father and the implications of his father's attitudes. It asserts his sense of community with the dispossessed, and it recognises the role of the moral man in the world defined. Ivan's assertion that "You can't build on your father's bones"(p.177) is a fatal affirmation of his own humanity that condemns him to the lunatic asylum. The absence of conjunctions removes the grammatical link between the statements. Each stands in isolation, reflecting an accumulation of images, a series of epiphanous visions. In short, Charyn creates a language that is, in a sense, an attempt to render dream and mystic vision in a violent frenzy of insight.

Ironically, the final words belong to the child Van. The father-son relationship of Ivan and the Admiral is paralleled in the letter of Van to his father. Van moves into the role predefined for him, an agent of obsession, the role just rejected by Ivan. Van, moulded through the Admiral's obsession, reports the inevitable outcome of Ivan's revolt. The futility of Ivan's vision is inherent in the vision itself, but Van's description serves to emphasise the totalitarian nature of the reality defined, his own corruption within that environment, and the fate suffered by the dreamer and visionary:

MR AXEL couldn't keep him. IVAN had too many fits. CRABBY took HIM to the hospital. IVAN didn't WANT to go. NANO and everybody had to drag HIM out of the trailer. THEY tied HIM up. I SAW the hospital. It has bars on the window and a guard with a GUN.(p.179)

The apparently random capitalisation emphasises grotesque nature of the events. Emphasis is given to Nano, Crabby and Mr. Axel, the totalitarians, against IVAN-HIM, the victim. The description of Ivan reflects both his personal disintegration, and the disintegration of the ethic of love that he finally embodies:

IVAN looks like a ZOMBI when he has a fit. BUBBLES comes OUT of HIS mouth and HE makes pee and HIS legs shake and HIS eyes

disappear. THEY do,, DADDY,, THEY do. The muscle in HIS neck sticks out and rattles and blood comes OUT of HIS beard and HIS face TURNS into CHALK. I'm glad HE isn't here.(p.179)

The future projected at the end of the novel is bleak indeed and, ominously, it is irresistible. Van, the agent of an expanding perversity, is "CYCLONE and WHIRLPOOL and SWAMP ANGEL"(p.179). The chess tournament, Charyn's metaphor of the immoralities of victory, conflict and success, moves onward.

It is through metaphors drawn from chess that the novella obtains its fragile cohesion. Chess is Charyn's metaphor of conflict--an abstract microcosm of the larger war against which the action is set. It generates, like that war, its own obsessions and gives momentum, energy and mythological dimensions to hatred. Chess is employed as an image of the mechanistic reduction of human potential, the perversity of reducing human complexities to simplistic issues of victory and defeat. It also stands as an illusion of order in the real disorder of history. Rich human potential and ambiguity is grossly simplified through mechanistic rules. Love, responsibility and morality are reduced to two issues, victory or defeat. It is a metaphor that expresses Charyn's version of the effects and atmosphere generated by war. Further, it reflects Charyn's mistrust of "order," the organised arrangement of experience that precludes human diversity.

Kortz is the enigma at the centre of the novel. He undermines the definitions of himself made by the Admiral who, like Uncle Nate in On the Darkening Green, evolves a simple mythology of hate. He is neither superman nor monster but a complex amalgam of emotions. Charyn's procedure is clear. Kortz is the figure pursued because, in the Admiral's simple and perverse equation, he equals the enemy. Finally, however, Kortz is revealed as ambiguous and paradoxical, a master of chess and a student of madness. Definitions of Kortz need to be re-formulated, as Ivan attempts to do, to comprehend this complexity. Kortz is the figure through which Charyn reveals distortions that emanate from moral simplifications forged in war,

and are evidence of the contagion of war. The division of the universe into enemy and friend, or black pieces and white pieces, are in this analysis, grotesque and damaging distortions. In the end, Kortz is reduced to impotence. Van writes: "KORTZ is sick. HE stays in HIS trailer all the time"(p.179). Kortz and Ivan, thus, share a similar fate. They, and the values Charyn invests in them, are swept aside by the irresistible momentum of war and the obsessions that war generates.

Madness is a recurrent concern. It permeates the America Charyn invents, it is the condition that Ivan reaches, the subject Kortz has studied, the condition in which Ivan's mother languishes and, above all, it is the infectious obsession that motivates the action. In this sense, the novel creates the shapes of madness, both as thematic concern and stylistic device. Charyn creates an insane world through the afflicted eyes of a narrator driven toward moral madness. History and fiction both reflect worlds insane, versions of experience transformed into surreal nightmares. Chaos, mindless violence and perverse cruelty characterise the historic past and the invented present. The recognition of this leads Ivan into incarceration. It leads Kortz toward the appropriate role of clown: "An old man should be a circus performer. But this is an appropriate ending for me. Yes"(p.162). At the centre of the novel is the assertion that in a world gone mad, the moral man is reduced to clown or lunatic. What the world calls insane is, paradoxically, the last remnant of impotent sanity.

Going to Jerusalem is an ambitious and difficult book. It attempts to synthesis a range of issues that are reflected throughout Charyn's fiction, and it attempts to forge some of his most ambitious paradoxes--the Nazi as victim, for example. Stylistically, the cohesiveness of the novel is problematic. It relies finally on the metaphor of chess and that, set against the episodic structure of the novel, is a fragile device. The twenty two brief chapters present a bewildering synthesis of moments and, as a whole, the novella is flawed, dense and crude. It is an original and profound attempt to create, through fable, a bleak version of an

American epic. It employs the familiar convention of the journey across America³³ and Charyn attempts to forge an epic vision--a fable of contemporary America shaped by recent history. However, the narrow scale of the novel and the abstract nature of the environments fail, finally, to convincingly transcend the fable. Its implications remain rooted there. The chess metaphor is a fragile device to sustain the cohesion of the book. It is one of Charyn's most complex works, but the complexities do not always reflect the density apparent in the other novels. They are, at times, confusions rather than revelations. Going to Jerusalem clearly shares many of the concerns apparent in On the Darkening Green, but it does not achieve the credible integration of those concerns with the fictive system invented.

V

The title story of Charyn's collection of short stories, The Man Who Grew Younger and Other Stories, includes propositions that permeate the collection as a whole. The title refers to a story written by the central character that goes beyond realist possibilities, evoking the persistence of magic and magical transformations. Bernstein asserts that the invention reveals a profound insight into real conditions: "What does he say, your man, your man, who grows younger all the time? 'The world is a shithouse.' The man is a lunatic, but honest to God, he's a hundred percent right. A shithouse!"³⁴ That fiction illustrates conditions extended throughout the collection. The creative imagination acts upon and transforms experience, renders the status of events and character complex and ambiguous, and proposes the simultaneous existence of the mundane, the grotesque and the magical.

Charyn creates a succession of characters who construct alternative mental landscapes within historically and sociologically credible settings. In "1944," Benny accepts the credibility of Gehinnom³⁵ and the credibility of the cheder class with an equal absence of scepticism. The two landscapes have equal status within the consciousness created. This is partly an insight into a child's perception, but it moves beyond that definition when elements of magic and the inexplicable are seen to have a dynamic function in shaping events.

In "Faigele the Idiotke," Manny shares the idiot's dream of flying. That massive aspiration contrasts with the reality of gravity, and in a literal sense Faigele's fatal attempt to fly is simply evidence of her moronic mental condition. The action remains ambiguous though. In a metaphorical sense it enforces Bernstein's association of lunacy with transcendent imagination.

The impoverished writer, Misha, awaits the arrival of the ominous figure of Itzie in "The Man Who Grew Younger." That bleak prospect co-exists with the mental landscape created by Misha. The unresolved balance between

the two conditions is sustained by the conclusion of the story at precisely the moment when the plot leads the reader to expect a final confrontation.

"Imberman" presents a personality that, like Faigele, is an amalgam of grotesque failure and visionary. Imberman is shabby and illiterate, but a maker of fictions rich in mystery and paradox. His status is unresolved, and he synthesises both the mundane and the spiritual potential at the point where bleak realities meet imaginative possibilities.

"Farewell!...Farewell!..." moves into familiar Charyn territory revealing the destructive and anti-human effects of war and the implications of war-time mythologies. He injects, though, the character of Augie who, like Imberman or Faigele, counters the conditions of the present with a richer inner landscape. He and Faigele are destroyed by facts, war or gravity, but they act as fictional projections of a persistent human capacity to transcend or transform the world of fact.

The narrators of "Race Day at Hiawatha" and "Sing, Shaindele, Sing" also have perceptions that merge physical conditions with imaginative possibilities. Both stories accumulate ambiguities around the grotesque, Torpedo and Notte, who share a refusal to conform to inevitable limitations inherent in the circumstances defined.

A variety of characters in this collection are touched, in varying degrees, by a persistent refusal to locate meaning exclusively within the external world of social fact. They create mental fictions against which physical reality reverberates. They mirror, in fact, the procedures of the novelist, and in micro-cosmic form reveal the assumptions of the fiction in which they exist. Urban landscapes are tinged with magical or spiritual possibilities. Historical reality merges with mystic or transcendent imagination. The collection is formed out of that kind of interaction where the characters mirror the procedures of their creator, and emerge as non-realists who paradoxically reveal the density of the human experience. It is a radically expanded version of what constitutes the real world. It extends, throughout the fictions, the position Wallant moved towards in his last novels.

Lippy's "Map of the World" exactly enforces this point. It merges the landscape of New York with the landscape of mind, defines the physical limitations of the fiction, and the action of the imagination as it re-perceives and transforms those physical dimensions. The map is, in this sense, a visual correlative of the fictional procedure employed.³⁶

War is a recurrent motif. It is used as a framing metaphor for Manny's moral conflict in "Faigele the Idiotke." The world scale conflict frames the moral issues that confront Manny, and that lead him to attempt to defend the idiot against the inhuman pressures that threaten to incarcerate her:

King Kong was outside my room, banging away at the door. "Lemme in. You saw what she did to my kid, the idiot. And you're the one who's responsible." He rammed the door with his shoulder, but I still didn't give in. And for the first time in a long time I didn't feel guilty about not being in the army. The hell with the Germans; I had a war of my own.(pp.90-91)

As in On the Darkening Green, the World War exists in an appropriate context in which to define an individual act of moral engagement.

The atmosphere of war simultaneously poisons the environment, leads to deprivation and loss in "1944," and to the perpetuation of fatal anti-humanistic mythologies in "Farewell!...Farewell!..." Benny's father is killed. Leo commits suicide as a direct result of idealised images of courage which pollute the consciousness of his brother and lead to a rejection of the particular human condition in favour of perverse simplifications.

War is, thus, both corruption and, alternatively, a framework in which individual acts of moral commitment are located. Charyn forges the distinction between abstract concepts of nationalism and courage, and valid moments of personal affirmation when Benny, for example, wages "war" against the powerful who attack the weak:

I heard a colored kid call out, "Gawd lea' me be!" It sounded like

somebody I knew, I looked over and I saw two big white kids knocking the crap outa this little colored kid. I didn't wanna mix in, but I hate to see it when somebody beats up a little kid, even if it's a boogy. So I walked over and I knew who the colored kid was right away. It was Henry Clay. He goes to P.S.61 with me and he's only six. Why would anybody wanna beat up a little kid like that? The two white kids looked like they went to P.S.61 too, so I said, "Hey, you fucks, leave him go, I'm Lippy's brother."(p.67)

Clearly, these stories approach serious concerns, and Charyn repeatedly moves between comic and serious mood, often within the context of a single short story. The comic momentum of "Sing, Shaindele, Sing" evaporates into the desolate image of Shaindele waiting for Notte who will never appear. The conclusion of "Farewell!...Farewell!..." is deeply anguished. "1944" reveals genuine deprivation, but ends in triumphant celebration. "The Man Who Grew Younger" concludes with an image of selfless love. Clearly, while certain elements recur, there is no single tone or texture in this collection. Each of these fictions operates in a particular manner and the whole reveals a rich creative imagination.

The opening of "1944" indicates the nature of the consciousness of Benny, the narrator. The world of the cheder class intrudes into the fiction of Pinocchio, the real and the fictive and integrated through the controlling perception:

So Pinocchio and Lamp-Wick and the hundred bad boys waited for the wagon to take them to the Land of Toys. Pinoke was a little nervous because he promised the Good Fairy he'd be home before dark and do his Hebrew homework and here it was with the moon already out. But Lamp-Wick called him a schmuck for worrying so much.(p.3)

The integration made in the book that Benny is reading mirrors both Benny's perception and the procedures of the fiction that defines that perception.

A particular landscape at a particular point in time co-exists with a projection of fictive possibilities forged in the alternative reality of the imagination.

The impact of war is clearly and precisely rendered in the narration. Benny's father is a victim of war, and that injects a sombre note into the story:

I started thinking about my father. For a minute I made believe I was him and I tried to feel how it was like to be dead. At first it felt all right, because it didn't hurt or nothin, but then I got the creeps. It started in my toes and went up my legs and right through my belly and reached all the way up to my brain, and I knew it must be a terrible thing to be dead, and I couldn't help it, but I started to cry.(p.26)

The poverty of the family arises directly out of that circumstance, and is reflected in the conditions in which Benny's mother works: "When we got to Seabury Place we looked through the window of Fox's lousy sweatshop to see if my mother was still inside. She's always the first one in there and the last one out"(p.38). The deprivations of war are directly felt. The story evolves around Leo's theft of a variety of luxuries not easily available in the circumstances. The war is both a factor conditioning perceptions, and a situation that directly shapes the evolution of the plot.

In a similar sense, the urban landscape is a central fact in the fiction. The environment shapes Benny's experience. He moves through situations that repeatedly bring him into contact with violence or the threat of violence:

One of Crapanzo's stooges stepped all over my Hebrew books and swiped Hymie's Band-Aid box with all the puries inside and I prayed that Hymie wouldn't cry because the Assassins hate sissies. But it was all right. Hymie didn't cry. He was too scared.(p.8)

The historical reality of war and the sociological condition of urban life

are thus directly felt. They shape the evolution of both plot and consciousness.

Against those factors, Charyn reverberates an alternative landscape of imagination that interacts with the historical and urban situation. The tone established in the first paragraph is sustained throughout. Charyn integrates the motifs of the fairy tale (Pinocchio) with the conditions of external reality (hebrew homework), and this procedure is sustained in Benny's perception. Heroes, villains, magic names and triumphant happy endings are facts in Benny's world. Early in the story, Benny protects himself through the archetypal device of the magic name: "What a dope you are, Hym, I swear. If they woulda found out you wasn't a Lipkowitz, your guts would be hanging out in the street. Lipkowitz, that's a magic name around here!"p.10).

In Benny's consciousness, the characters also form around archetypal fairy tale divisions. Uncle Max and Big Bernie are the villains. Lippy is the activist hero, a figure with what is repeatedly called "style," Benny's shorthand for heroic modes of behaviour.³⁷ Grandpa emerges at the end as the good angel who magically intrudes and brings the events to a happy and celebratory conclusion.

These characters act out a moral drama that creates a variety of ethical imperatives in Benny's mind: "See! That's why it don't pay to lie. When it comes a time you're telling the truth, then people won't believe you"(p.64). Or, "So what! That aint no way to win. If he couldn't win the right way, he didn't wanna win at all"(p.45). The morality of the fiction is shaped, therefore, around ethical positions that permeate the traditional fairy tale. Benny's perception of these positions is formed around the interaction of event and that kind of fiction.

The moral drama is framed by the idea of God as an active agent on the side of the heroes:

I wished to God the chair'd cave in or something, but I knew it wouldn't. God don't listen to wishes like that! But right away

I stopped worrying because I know God likes Leo and He wouldn't let nothin bad happen to him. That's a fact! Don't ask me how I know it, I just do. God don't care much for sissies and fags. He likes guys that cut up a little. And if Joe Crapanzano was a Jew, I'll bet He'd like him almost as much as He likes Leo.(p.15)

Thus, Charyn invents another version of the Jewish God who is the most heroic of Benny's heroes, a fact in Benny's consciousness, and a supporter of the good-tough guys who are part-comic book, part-fairy tale protagonists.

The story thus integrates sociological, fictive, historical, imaginative and religious realities. The moral centre of the action derives out of Benny's love for Lippy, and the sense of responsibility for others that they both exhibit. Social pressures in conjunction with archetypal fictional forms are elements in the narrative. The tone is also largely comic as the reader measures adult perception against that revealed through Benny's argot. His innocence reveals the persistent vitality of the imagination as it confronts often bleak realities. Out of these elements, Charyn creates a fiction that is dense, comic and serious; an artifact that embodies qualities that permeate Charyn's work.

In "Faigele the Idiotke," Manny, awaiting the draft, comes into contact with a moron who, like Imberman, has an ambiguous status. Faced with the growing pressure of the international conflict, Manny seeks "one little adventure"(p.76), and leaves home to find a small grubby room. The action is essentially escapist, an attempt to obtain insulation from conflict through painting. However, the idiot erodes and intrudes into that insulation, and finally imposes a moral responsibility on Manny to assume an activist role against the forces of moral corruption.

The condition of war creates the original momentum of the action, but, as in One the Darkening Green, the impact of conflict moves from an international to a personal issue. Manny's consciousness of the nature of the conflict is transformed. At the beginning, the war is a threat to his existence, a presence that intrudes into his life:

I sat home and didn't say a word to anybody and every time I heard the air-raid sirens wail I could feel my heart contract and dig all the way down to my bowels, looking for some place to hide. It was no joke. I couldn't paint or eat or anything.(p.76)

Manny's fear is reflected in an attempt to avoid engagement, to remain a non-participant. Faigele transforms this stance. He becomes a moral activist, defending the weak and translating the wider conflict into a particular moral context: "The hell with the Germans; I had a war of my own"(p.91). In the periodical version of this story, the transformation of Manny's role is even more explicitly indicated:

I stood in front of the mirror and congratulated myself. "Manny," I said, gloating at my image, "hello. You finally turned out to be a mensch. You stood up to King Kong and beat him yet." I was too overjoyed to do any work. I sat back on my bed with my hands clasped absently behind my neck and started to dream. Manny, Faigele's protector, that's me.³⁸

After Faigele's death, Manny moves from the particular to the general struggle with a transformed consciousness. Faigele has taught him moral responsibility and eroded his sense of detachment. The war is Faigele's war on an international scale and he no longer seeks to avoid engagement: "Finally I settled outside a recruiting station and sat quietly on my duffel bag. I glanced at all the recruiting posters. Uncle Sam pointed his bony finger at me and I heard him say, 'Faigele, Faigele, Faigele'(p.96). Manny is another of Charyn's moral activists transformed through the impact of an ambiguous, quasi-mystic figure.

Faigele, in her idiocy, defies the logic of reality and tries to fly. Symbolically, she operates as a manifestation of the illimitable nature of human aspiration. She is also a defenceless idiot and Manny is pulled toward the two elements that are associated with Faigele. He becomes an active defender of the weak, and confronts the beautiful and mysterious

capacity to aspire toward the impossible, the magical dimensions of the imagination. Faigele, little bird in Yiddish, is moved through a series of transformations in the last incident that indicate the dimensions of possibility that Charyn accumulates around her:

A pigeon landed on the roof and Faigele started to imitate the way it walked. The pigeon limped for a minute, and Faigele limped too. She smiled at the pigeon, and I stared at her, because it wasn't the smile of an idiot girl. No. Her whole face glowed and her smile was so gentle and warm that even the pigeon was baffled and stood motionless for a moment. She reached out her hand to touch the pigeon, but then she started to moo, and her features coarsened and her smile lost all of its enchantment. She was Faigele the Idiotke again, and the pigeon flapped its wings and retreated to the other end of the roof. Faigele flapped her arms too and ran after the pigeon. "Faigele, Faigele," I cried, "come back...." The pigeon stood on the ledge of the roof. Faigele approached the ledge, flapping her arms and mooing. Hymie and the Maccabees started to shout. "Fly, Faigele, fly." The pigeon remained on the ledge for another moment and then flew off triumphantly. "Fly, Faigele, fly." Faigele stood on the ledge and watched the pigeon, and I could see now she was crying. "Fly, Faigele, fly." She looked at me once, and then flapping her arms rhythmically, she jumped off the roof. I tried to grab one of her legs, but it was too late. Her arms flapped once or twice as her body plunged, and for a minute I thought she was really going to fly, and then her body struck the ground with a heavy thud and she lay motionless out in the yard.(pp.94-95)

She momentarily gives the illusion of flight, momentarily appears magically transformed, but then crashes against hard reality, dies upon the real ground. She straddles a status somewhere between idiot and angel; a synthesis of the two conditions is represented in her features which shift

between vacant stupidity and gentle beauty transfixing Manny and the pigeon. Charyn points towards some mysterious capacity within Faigele that links the animal and the human in silent communion. At that point Faigele, evoking images of St. Francis, is moved from idiot to holy fool. Her status is finally problematic, a combination of elements sustained and unresolved. She joins Sammy Cahan as another of the ambiguous holy fools of Jewish-American literature. She is another example of a figure recurrent in Jewish literature. Like Singer's Gimpel, Malamud's Angel Levine, Wallant's Sammy Cahan and the figures in Sammy's stories, Charyn's Imberman et.al., her condition is intensely complex, rich in oblique spiritual suggestion.

The contact with Faigele leads Manny to abandon painting, that activity by which he isolated himself from experience. Manny's friend recognises the transformation:

"You a nut, huh, Manny? First you hug me and now you wanna throw me out. All I wanted to do was stay here for one -"

I pushed him out of the room and bolted the door.

"Manny," he said, standing outside, "you turned into a madman, I mean it. Lemme in."(p.93)

Manny behaves like a madman in a sense beyond that recognised by his friend. He moves through inspired derangement into a sense of association with Faigele, as protector but also as imitator. Manny dreams of joining Faigele in flight, celebrating the human capacity to explode the limitations of fact within the consciousness:

"Faigele, Faigele, come down. People can't fly. Come down, before you fall." But she kept flying higher and higher. And I had to find some way to make her come back, so I started pumping my arms like mad, and believe it or not, here I was, flying too.(p.90)

In the dream Manny can never catch up with Faigele and falls. In reality Faigele is killed. The attitudes of "King Kong" and Hymie reflect the conditions that undermine implicit possibilities evoked in the dream. Nevertheless, from that dream and out of Faigele's ambiguous status, Manny

draws a new perspective on experience: "And no matter how hard I flapped my arms, I couldn't keep myself from falling. But even as I plunged I thought to myself: It's worth it, just to be able to fly for a little while"(p.90). He engages strengthened by the recognition of moral responsibility. He also faces experience with a consciousness expanded to encompass the complexity of humanity which, in Charyn's fiction, is a profound synthesis of the external, often weak, ugly or grotesque, and the ineffable mystery and beauty of inner potential. He is a man awakened, like Wallant's protagonists, to spiritual and human mysteries.

"The Man Who Grew Younger," like Once Upon a Droshky, reflects a nostalgia for Yiddish culture. Poverty and threat co-exist in the story with possibilities inherent in the imagination. A variety of elements shape the plot. The on-off courtship of Misha and Rosalie finally collapses. Popkin refuses Misha's manuscript after Bernstein has talked him into submitting it. Itzie threatens revenge, and in a conclusion reminiscent of Once Upon a Droshky Misha and Bernstein await his arrival. On the level of events, then, the situation is bleak. Misha is an ageing Yiddish writer existing at the terminal point in a tradition of Yiddish-American fiction.

Alternative perspectives on the events are, however, integrated into the story. A simple, persistent love draws Misha and Bernstein together:

Bernstein clutched his chest; his lips turned ashen and his eyebrows twitched. Misha strode across the room and gripped Bernstein's hand. Then he stooped, lifted Bernstein gently and brought him over to the bed. Bernstein's eyebrows stopped twitching. Misha covered him with a blanket.(p.108)

The essentially comic figure of Bernstein, engaged in the endless and thankless task of selling Misha's work, projects not only his frailty but also the faithful permanence of his concern: "Forty years I worked with you, Misha. Forty years. I was for you an agent, a friend, a translator, a father"(p.101). He embodies a recurrent ambiguity in Charyn's work. A comic, shabby insignificance contrasts with a moral validity that transcends

appearance.

Charyn's connection with, and transformation of, the tradition of Yiddish fiction is projected into Misha's stories. They mirror Charyn's procedures going beyond realist conventions. Bernstein's comment on this connection is clearly an ironic critical perspective on the fiction that contains it:

Misha, who can understand the stories you're writing now? I mean it! Now you write riddles, not stories. Cows that talk in ten languages, men who grow younger instead of older, women who go go around naked day and night. Can you blame Popkin if he doesn't like them? You don't even bother to write sentences any more.

(p.103)

Bernstein's outbursts focus the concern with fiction that is an important element in the story:

"What does he say, your man, your man who grows younger all the time? 'The world is a shithouse.' The man is a lunatic, but honest to God, he's a hundred percent right. A shithouse!"

Bernstein clapped his knees. "Nobody, not Chekov, not Tolstoy, not Babel, not Gogol, not Sholem Aleichem, nobody writes a story like Misha Dubrinoff."(p.110)

Misha's fiction, and implicitly Charyn's fiction, is freed from realist conventions through a re-engagement with, and transformation of, ostensibly archaic European and Yiddish forms. This factor enables the novelist to form a precise metaphorical shape for the bleak nature of the contemporary condition.

That condition is, however, merged with the moments of love and concern that permeate the story. Charyn and Misha, his invention, are weavers of bleak and beautiful dreams. The fiction brings together a literary self-consciousness, a Post-Modernist manipulation of fictive parallels, and a

deep involvement with the terminal moments of Yiddish culture.

Imberman is another manifestation of the novelist, a fabulist who writes grotesque and fantastic fictions that, through mystery and paradox, reveal the simultaneous existence of cruelty and beauty. In "Imberman," Charyn uses the narrative device more fully developed in On the Darkening Green. The young Catholic narrator is transformed through contact with an ostensibly grotesque character encountered in a Jewish context alien to the narrator-initiate.

Imberman's status is, like Faigele's, ambiguous: "He was seventeen, but with his pinched, goblinlike face he look about thirty"(p.120). Within the narrator's consciousness, he begins to transcend those physical peculiarities, until he emerges as a figure who evokes heroic and magical possibilities:

I dreamed about Imberman from time to time. In my dreams he always appeared at a moment of crisis and managed to save me from all sorts of disasters. Sometimes he wore a cloak like Captain Marvel, and at other times he wore a sweatshirt with "I" emblazoned on his chest.(p.125)

Imberman's transformation derives essentially from the long, rambling and virtually illegible manuscript that he leaves with the narrator. Various fragments are reproduced in the story, and Imberman appears as the defender of Crazy Jack against the heartless hostility of "LuCie Shittems Father." Imberman's story is an oblique commentary on "Faigele the Idiotke," and more generally upon the fiction that contains it. It is a fantasy that, in microcosm, crystallises the concerns and techniques of Charyn's work:

I droppd my pack. I broke open the cirkul and thruu the JunkMan on top of his Wagon and I knockd the Wagon over and a wheel broke off and started spinning down the Roade. I stopppd the Hors and untied Jack. LuCie Shittem thruu her Doll at me. Her Father calld me SONOFABITCH and said GO GET FINNEY. The JunkMan Moand.

Evrybody started moving in with the Branches and the cirkul
closed arownd me.(pp.129-130)

Crazy Jack, like Faigele, imitates flight and Imberman attempts to protect him from hostile forces. The distortions of grammar enforce the surreal nature of the events, and out of these Imberman emerges as both a moral activist and a visionary: "The Devil is lonelie sometimes Too"(p.131). Imberman is a neo-mythic hero who, according to Mr Kriputkin, will inevitably return: "You will meet with him again. Could be ten years, could be twenty. It will happen"(p.132). He is also poet-magician in an environment that straddles the real and the surreal.

Meaning in Imberman's story is illusive. Like Misha, he constructs riddles, fictions that ambiguously evoke mystic or spiritual significance. The manuscript is a mystery that the narrator studies and tries to decipher. In that sense, it is implicitly related to a holy book, but more explicitly it might contain spiritual density that defies comprehension: "Here the manuscript became illegible again. I worked for an hour and wasn't even able to decipher another line. I thought I saw the word "GoD"(p.180). Charyn points through the sometimes comic distortion to spiritual possibility left in mystery and paradox. The invention of metaphors for spirituality, a recurrent concern of the novelists studied in this thesis, is integrated here into Imberman's text. Marvin Imberman is a comic, shabby grotesque who is simultaneously a contemporary saint. His narrative is an oblique mirror of the fiction that encloses it. "Imberman" thus combines two central concerns in Charyn's work, the evocation of the persistence of spiritual possibility, and the introspective fictional procedure that makes critical description an issue in the work itself. With Wallant, Fiedler, Potok and others discussed here, Charyn invents a framework in which to represent a spiritual potential ostensibly denied in the contemporary environment.

Images of war link "Farewell!..Farewell!.." "Race Day at Hiawatha" and "Sing, Shaindele, Sing." "Farewell!..Farewell!..." is a bleak war story not about combat, but about the wider moral implications inherent in the

experience. The reduction of human complexity to destructive abstractions is, as in On the Darkening Green or Going to Jerusalem, a central issue.

"Race Day at Hiawatha" and "Sing, Shaindele, Sing" similarly reflect recurrent preoccupations and procedures. The landscapes of social reality, the camp and the Yiddish theatre, are filtered through perspectives that magnify, distort and re-perceive. Shaindele's rape is, for example, described in an almost entirely neutral tone enforcing the quasi-surreal atmosphere that surrounds the event:

And they made Notte watch. I cried the whole time. Itzie's friends picked up the baseball bats and then they left. I untied Notte. His body was shaking. I kissed his nose, his forehead, and his eyes. We left the dressing room.(p.190)³⁹

Notte and Torpedo in "Race Day at Hiawatha" share, like a variety of characters in this collection, an ambiguous status that moves between the grotesque and the heroic, the mundane and the magical.

This collection as a whole clearly reflects a set of issues that are recurrent in Charyn's fiction. However, the experience of reading the book reveals a rich variety of textures and tones. Charyn evokes both laughter and deeply troubled silence.

VI

American Scrapbook is a further examination of the thesis that war is a contagion of madness infecting the nation. It is the most specifically political, and located of the novels. Charyn focuses on the treatment of Japanese-Americans during the Second World War, and undermines the stereotypes of hero and villain by presenting the Japanese as victims in American prison camps. The novel, also, clearly reflects Charyn's involvement with the predicament of the ethnic stranger as Jew, Azasian gypsy or, as here, Japanese.

The techniques of the novel are modifications of procedures employed in On the Darkening Green. The camp acts as a microcosm of the larger context, and a commentary upon the conditions identified in that context. The Japanese are interred in "The Manzanar Relocation Centre" and at Tule Lake. Their predicament is revealed through six first person perspectives, the various members of the Tanaka family. Their dilemma illustrates the tensions that oppress the ethnically isolated American who is forced to feel neither fully American nor fully Japanese. This condition of ethnic dislocation is further evidence of a generalised concern with the issue of ethnicity. The dilemma of Charyn's Japanese is, for example, substantially the same as the dilemma of Fiedler's Indian in Back to China. The experiences Charyn's Japanese suffer serve also to emphasise the moral distortions that arise out of war.

Charyn confronts a part of the American past which renders problematic historical cliches. He challenges the moral self-satisfaction of the victors by a radical re-appraisal of the banal mythologies of war. His specific political anger is directed at the absurdity of a national policy that takes ethnicity as the factor through which the "enemy" is identified.

These issues are focused in the Tanaka family. The family is fragmented, and anguish is expressed through varying perspectives that asserts the persistence of individual and unique humanity in the face of a racial definition that allows for no distinctions. The novel avoids didactic pomposity through this procedure. There is no dissipation of moral anger in abstraction. Instead, that anger is directly expressed through the suffering and deprivation revealed in each narrative.

The first section records the thought of the youngest member of the family, Napoleon. His bewilderment expresses the predicament in which he innocently finds himself. At the beginning he aspires to be an American:

Because even if Lightnings are faster than Grummans I wouldn't fly in an Army plane. I'm going to be a Navy bombardier. And the President will say, Napoleon, Napoleon, I didn't mean what I said about your mother, and he'll have to let her go free.⁴⁰

His internal monologue is significantly interrupted by an intrusive voice which undercuts the nature of his dream with a racial insult: "Napoleon, where's your boochie brother? Chuichi the boochie. They don't let no boochies in the American Army"(p.3). Napoleon's dream hits the rock of bitter reality, and the exchange prefigures the transformation of his attitude from hopeful speculation to hopeless immobility.

The insult raises the issue of identity. He has lost both mother and nationality: "What am I? Catch Napoleon by his toe, and if he hollers, drown him. I don't want to be the man without a country"(p.14). His dream of the dead Mr Matsubara, a victim of a trigger-happy guard, enforces the sense of a loss of identity: "I saw Mr Matsubara's head in a dream. It had blood all over it, and asked me a question--Napoleon, who are you, Napoleon? I didn't know what to say"(p.18). The loss of a sense of self-identity as a result of ethnic dislocation is, of course, a recurrent consequence, manipulated, for example, throughout Fiedler's The Last Jew in America. Fiedler, as Charyn does here, relates the condition to groups other than Jews, most radically to the dispossessed gentile in the West.

Napoleon is not, however, devoid of spirit. Despite the dehumanising nature of the experiences he undergoes, he retains his special individuality. His anger is a reflection of the moral anger underlying the novel. He is asked by his teacher to write an essay on America, and his question "Isn't Manzanar America?"(p.21) directly undercuts the banality of war-time myths. Charyn uses innocence to challenge chauvinistic cliché, to reveal the brutality of a policy that transforms reasonable aspiration into pathetic bewilderment.

Napoleon's narrative also reveals the tensions that finally erupt between the Japanese loyal to Japan and those committed to America. Mitsuo, the block manager, attacks Toshio: "Kibei bastard, he wants the Japs to win the war. We're Americans here, Understand?"(p.8). Chuichi's attitude reveals, however, the real impetus behind the growing antagonism toward

America: "Tosh didn't put us in here, remember that..."(p.8). The stupidity of a policy that transforms citizens into enemies because of ethnic origin is emphasised throughout, and is reflected in Napoleon's bewilderment. The policy defies his attempts to comprehend it precisely because it is incomprehensible from an innocent and reasonable viewpoint.

Not only the policy appears ridiculous, but the camp itself is a focus of a national lunacy. It is a physical expression of the bleak immorality that created it. The situation evokes a grim desolation that verges on black comedy: "The door knocks, the windows rattle, and the bedbugs drop from the walls. Bats are blind, and I could catch them in my shirt, but Chuichi wouldn't care. Chuichi has the scabies. The bedbugs won't leave him alone"(p.14). Mr Matsubara's pathetic wanderings before his death illustrate the tone of comic desolation: "Whenever he goes for a walk he dreams about his farm, and he can never remember how to get back to the bachelors"(p.5). His endless search for turnips is a further expression of the contrast between life dreamed and intrusive reality. The absurdist momentum of events further moves the novel toward black comedy, both event and location exhibit elements of black comic desolation.

A central result of the internment policy that is directly felt in Napoleon's consciousness is fragmentation of the family. The mother is interned in Montana; the father chooses to live with the bachelors. Napoleon repeatedly addresses his thoughts to his absent mother revealing a deep emotional deprivation, and a sensitive consciousness of loss:

Mom, Chuichi is mad at everybody, Ruby hides in her little room, Harold is busy with the Patriot, Mitsuo won't let me wear my uniform, and Dad is living with the bachelors because he says that Fumi tries to boss him around. It's cold in Montana. Do you have a warm coat?(p.9)

The collapse of family cohesion is also felt in the breakdown of order in the camp. Hoodlums peddle pornography. Violence is rife and Napoleon is a victim on two occasions in the first section of the novel. The erosion of

community cohesion is felt both on the public level, and in pitiful sense of loss reflected in Napoleon's concluding words that express human concern and impotence in the face of a brutal reality:

Mrs Hildegaard, if I could take that siren and wind it up so that it went louder and louder, and then shout into it, maybe my mother could hear me in Montana. I would say, MOM, DONNNNNN WORRRRRRRREEEE BOUUUUUUU MEEEEEEEE ANNNNNN CHHHHHHHUUUWEECHEEEEE.(p.21)

Impotence in the face of camp reality is also the central characteristic of Mitsuo's narrative. He is the block manager, mediator and organiser who is unable to mediate or organise with any particular effectiveness. He is defeated by the environment and the tensions that derive out of it, a neo-comic failure to control the absurd momentum of events. Mitsuo's pretensions are repeatedly deflated, and he is revealed as powerless despite his official status.

The narrative describes the visit of an anti-Japanese senator on a tour of inspection. Despite Mitsuo's attempts to create a good public image, riot ensues. The events are, however, chronologically inverted so that the preparation for the visit is seen through a consciousness of the outcome. Charyn manipulates the narrative to present an official report on the riot before the events are related. The device emphasises the distinction between the superficial dignity of Mitsuo's status, and the indignity and impotence implicit in his situation. It is also a comic device that contrasts the neutral description contained in the report with the momentum of the event. Fragmentation and chaos is inappropriately rendered in the ordered neutrality of official language.

As an agent of the institution, Mitsuo exists at the focal point of diverse pressures. His narrative points to the political tensions on the camp that eventually erupt into violent and doomed revolt.

Charyn develops two kinds of analysis. The narratives of Napoleon, Ruby and Fumi focus on the domestic dimensions of the predicament. These sections are interspersed by the narrations of Mitsuo, Hal and Chuichi which present

perspectives on public and political issues in the camp. Charyn shifts focus repeatedly, from the domestic to the political, and creates a composite image, through this "scrapbook" technique, revealing a common sense of isolation, frustration and anguish.

Ruby is unmarried, pregnant, despised by the other women, and confined within a grim, small room. Her particular condition is not unique; it reflects the predicament of all the inmates: "You'd be crazy too if you had to stay in one room all day"(p.61). Through Wendell's anger Charyn identifies the factor that conditions Ruby's dilemma, and the more generalised dilemma of the camp:

"Wendell, say the dirtiest thing you know. I don't care."

Wendell was suspicious.

"I can't. It's too dirty." So he wrote it on a piece of paper with the pencil stub he always carries in his coat. He folded it up and gave it to me. I didn't know what to expect. I unfolded it and put it near the light bulb. All it said was UNCLE SAM.

(p.66)

Wendell also articulates a parallel between the Indians and the Japanese: "You think Manzanar isn't a reservation?"(p.63). That view reflects the generalised concern with ethnic minorities that is precisely focused here.

Ruby is a victim of the nationalistic disease of war-time chauvinism and racial prejudice. Though young, she is isolated from the community, separated from domestic security, and transformed through the general collapse of moral constraint into a despised object. The experience of internment robs her of family and dignity. Neighbours hiss and the guards call her "cuntie pie." While the dilemma has comic dimensions, it is a credible portrait of a young, vital girl suffering an isolation she neither caused nor is able to account for.

Hal Tanaka's narrative is the longest and most complex, recording the breakdown of the precarious rationality of events into surrealistic disorder. It serves to emphasise the erosion of individual dignity in the camp, and

points to the debilitating effect of internment upon the consciousness of the characters. The nature of the daily life recorded by Hal moves inexorably in the direction of absurd experience, life without function and ritual without meaning.

The section opens with an extract from the recently closed down camp newspaper, and it records political divisions and the massive stupidity of official policy:

We tried to join his army once, and we were refused. And many of our brothers and cousins who were in the army before the war were kicked out. Now the good Captain would like us to volunteer for his segregated suicide squad. How many other American soldiers were inducted from behind barbed wire?(p.70)

The article at least reflects a dignified sense of anger, a consciousness purposefully examining its own condition.

The activity described by Hal following the article reveals the erosion of that dignity, a movement into endless and purposeless ritual attempts to fill time:

I had nowhere to go.

Watched two old men fight over bathtub privileges.

Went for a nature hike.

Walked into the cactus in Block 32's rock garden.

Poked the ground for lizards.(pp.90-91)

The structure of the sentences invests them equally with an absence of significance or distinction. Suffering the debilitating effects of this life, Hal is reduced to Oblomov's absurd condition⁴¹: "It doesn't pay to get out of bed"(p.85).

The erosion of personality is also reflected in Napoleon's situation, and, after the emotional energy of his narration, the impact of the transformation is particularly poignant. After Chuichi's enforced departure to Tule Lake, Napoleon is reduced to virtual immobility:

Can a body be in one place and its spirit in another? Little brother's made of wood. I poke him on the head. "Poleon, Poleon, come play with me." No response. I shake him good and hard, put an ear over his heart, and listen for some music. Nothing. His spirit's fled.(p.125)

The society is further fragmented when it is decided to send the pro-Japanese, the "No-Noes," to Tule Lake to segregate them from the pro-American, "Yes-Yeses." The momentum moves then toward fragmentation of both personality and society.

This process is mirrored in the collapse of the rational continuity of events, and in the significance of action. When Hal attempts to take the moronic Sam off the truck, the "No-Noes" assault him in an almost loving manner that reflects the irrational and paradoxical nature of the prevailing mood:

The cooks had their hands under ugly daughter's skirt. Sensei's tongue was in her mouth, Daughter moved her torso in rhythm with the cooks' probing hands, she even sighed, but she kept her sneer. Gordon, Hiroshi and Wendell crowded around us. Their intentions were most ambiguous. They smiled, they stroked my hair, they grabbed me, they pushed Sam out of the way. They socked me, they abused me, they tore my shirt, they tossed me overboard.(p.122)

Hal's narrative momentarily collapses into linguistic chaos, a stylistic reflection of the breakdown of the logic of events and the coherence of Hal's consciousness. Significantly, it is the devil who is at the centre in a curious "black mass" that evokes the nature of a reality edging grotesquely toward the surreal. The Rabbi's comment in On the Darkening Green, "The devils are in charge of the world,"⁴² is echoed in Hal's words that recognise the credibility of the devil rather than the existence of God. The inversion of the structure of the sentences is a further expression of the collapse of logic and order: "Or? world the Destroy? life in aim Devil's

the What's--be true only the Devil's the Nowadays? Name His Sanctify beast or man for place no Manzana's"(p.124). A diabolic element is, thus, injected into the predicament of the Japanese.

The section ends with Hal's dream in which he is reunited with his father and Gordon in a frenzied, joyful but ambiguous dance. In the dream, Hal emerges as a guide who leads Napoleon and his father out of the present reality: "Anchor man, I was left to fight the vegetation, to steer us through the jungle, blind, my knees churning full speed to keep us from being caught in the muck"(p.133). The conditions of the camp are transcended in a frenzied dance, a celebration of freedom:

Oh, the dancing we did! Me and Gordon in tune again, like old times, but better, much better, because we weren't colonists now or miserable Nisei journalists feeding off our futility, and Blackstone no longer had any power over me.(p.134)

The dream projects an act of reconciliation and transcendent joy that, ironically, reverberates against the final chaotic and doomed revolt. It is also an expression of the erosion of Hal's coherent grasp in reality.

Even the dream concludes in a manner than expresses an inexorable and absurd momentum that engulfs the protagonists. Hal, caught in the frenzy of the dance, is trapped within the dream and is unable to reach out and help unite the family. A frenzy of celebration ends in a frenzy of perpetual and impotent motion: "Dad, I'll help you, I will; Poleon stay where you are, I'll find you, only let me finish my dance"(p.134). The dance focuses the various elements of Hal's condition. He aspires toward freedom, reconciliation, joy, the restoration of his active purpose, and the re-unification of his family. Against this, the dance projects a condition of frenzied impotence that undermines those aspirations. The tone of the narrative shifts towards surreal distortion that precisely synthesises the elements identified within the predicament.

Fumi's diary reflects a radical shift in this tone, and is another perspective upon the domestic anguish arising out of the situation. The

diary reveals a consciousness precariously clinging to reality through an emphasis on mundane domestic detail. It is also an expression of the aspiration that moved Napoleon, an attempt to improve her English as a means of assimilating into American society. The futility of the aspiration is implicit in the events recorded.

Chronologically, the first entry moves back to the situation preceding Napoleon's narrative, and the retrospective device reveals the pride of Mitsuo in Chuichi's status, an optimistic assertion that is radically undercut by the other perspectives. This manipulation of chronology emphasises the grim pathos inherent in the situation:

How many other managers have
brother-in-law who is in USA army?
Mitsuo is a boaster. "Do you think the
President could win war without my
brother-in-law? He is a machine gunner.
He writes us every day."(pp.136-137)

In the second entry, however, Chuichi's ragged and ignominious return to the camp is recorded, and Fumi's response reveals the dimensions of the experience that evokes comparison with dream or nightmare:

I gave
myself encouragement. Fumiko, there is
nothing to fear. You are in the middle
of a dream. Men do not walk through fire,
not even Chuichi. But I could not hide
my dread. Darling brother had not come
to us from Georgia on furlough.(p.143)

The diary records the fragmentation of the Tanaka family in the face of forces that undermine cohesion. Ruby's pregnancy, Harold's fearful retreat into hospital, Chuichi's rejection of American identity, and the father's refusal to leave the bachelors are all situations arising from internment

policy. Fumi's attempts to sustain the unity of the family are pathetically inadequate, and they are another expression of the helpless impotence that unites the separate perspectives.

The diary extends the chronological breadth. The first entry precedes any other reference, and the last describes collapse into violence and chaos, as well as Fumi's attempts to restore something out of the ashes. She grapples heroically to restore family cohesion, but is finally forced to leave her father behind. Her actions are not, however, uniformly bleak. She successfully erodes the neo-catatonic condition of the family, and projects a new future:

With much persistence I have cured
 husband, sister & little brother of
 dreaded immobility. We will have a
 happy life in Chicago. We will
 forget the scars of war. We will not
 congregate too closely with Nihonjin
 community. We will not give people
 opportunity to say: Japs are dangerous,
 Japs are unclean, Japs always stick
 together....(p.153)

The projection reveals, however, the impact of the experience, the erosion of cultural identity, and the persistent fear of being defined and attacked through racial stereotypes. It is evidence of the psychic wound inflicted.

Fumi's section is recorded in a single column running down the centre of the page. Charyn employs this device to enforce the sense of a consciousness aspiring toward order, a typographical correlative. This formal order records a collapse into formlessness. The paradoxes apparent in the situation, thus, find stylistic expression through a contrast between the events described, and the structure employed to record those events.

In the final section, Charyn shifts the focus to Tule Lake. Chuichi describes a doomed and fatal revolt, an unchecked decline into chaos that

leads to Gordon's death. The community has split into warring factions, and violence is rife. The community of "No-Noes" is now fully committed to the Japanese cause, but the transformation is fundamentally absurd, a ridiculous and impotent gesture of alienation:

Taro was a barber's apprentice before evacuation. Now he shaves the heads of Hokoku strong arms boys. Our ceremonial haircuts are supposed to make us good warriors and give us Yamato damashii, Japanese fighting spirit. I don't need Grandma Odo to remind me how foolish we are with our shorn scalps. All I have to do is look at the bumps on Gordon's head.(p.157)

The absurdity of the camp exists on a deeper level than that of appearance. It is apparent in the momentum of events that, moving inexorably toward disaster, engulf Chuichi and Gordon. The section opens with a description of a raid on the women's bath house with the object of enforcing Japanese style mixed bathing. Gordon's response reflects both despair and the comic incongruity of the action:

Gordon made a whimper under his mask--it was twisted around. The eye holes were in the back of his head. He stumbled. Sitting on his knees he pulled off the mask, stuffed it inside his shirt, and vomited. Chuichi, no more missions for me. I will write speeches for Hokoku and Hoshi-Dan, but I can't go on frightening naked women.(pp.155-156)

Gordon's suicide is the culmination of that despair.

Another dimension of the situation is Chuichi's transformation into fanatic, a cultural displacement of personality whereby he is torn between his sense of himself as an American, and the pressures of the camp that engulf him within the pro-Japanese organisation:

Tosh, I said a prayer to the Emperor tonight. I begged him to purify me, to take the taint of America out of my blood. I

growled at the schoolgirls last week, I dared them organize another lindy hop, but what would you say if I told you that in the middle of dismantling their loudspeaker I had to resist the desire to dance with the girls, to swing them over my shoulder, to bounce them off the hip--that's the kind of knave I am.(p.171)

The dilemma is a crystallisation of a central issue, a minority forced into the role of ethnic stranger by the stupidities of nationalistic stereotypes. Chuichi recognises the absurdity of his condition: "the empty pomp of the morning exercises..."(p.162), the ridiculous allegiance to an alien militaristic code. Charyn, as Wallant does in The Pawnbroker and Fiedler does throughout his fiction, manipulates the ethnic stereotype to achieve specific fictional objectives.

Chuichi moves between engagement in the destructive momentum of the camp, and recognition of the immoralities that he is both subject to, and a reluctant perpetuator of. Thus, when the Reverend refuses to recognise him, he responds not as a "warrior," but as human recognising the quality of compassion:

I'm afraid that the Reverend's been sorely used. He was more concerned for my cuts and bruises than for his own bandaged face. It wasn't Hokoku terror that told him to say, I don't know this boy, when the corporals made me put on the mask. Compassion's a better word if you dare use it.(p.169)

Even within the camp, the qualities of compassion and concern have a fragile persistence. They are, however, ominously inappropriate emotions.

Chuichi is finally a reluctant participant in the inexorable momentum of violence:

I must have immobilized a policeman. I had a gas mask in my hand. The hose was disconnected, the goggles were twisted out of shape. I put it on. Were the policemen confused? Why was I on

the ground? My prick was out, lolling in the grass. Gentlemen, officers of the law, I have to pee.(p.177)

The questions reflect his bewilderment, adrift in landscape that exists without logic or sense.

In the concluding vision, Chuichi sees Napoleon's face and Charyn ironically evokes Hal's dream. That dance of joy and reconcilliation is transformed into a grotesque engagement with death. The lovely disorder of the dance reverberates against the ugly and fatal chaos of the revolt. Charyn synthesises Chuichi's sense of loss, the separation from the family, with a sense of the absence of choice, the imperative pressures that drag Chuichi into violence. He is, at this point, a doomed, pathetic and reluctant rebel:

Groggy, all I could think about were bats. I crashed through trees. Napoleon's face was under the leaves. Didn't he recognise me? Brother, don't cry. I never wanted to be a warrior. I got up, took off the mask, and went back into battle.(p.177)

The full absurdity of the event is recognised.

This novel is constructed, then, out of a specific moral anger in relation to the treatment of Japanese-Americans in the war. It recognises the stupidity of a policy that transformed patriots into enemies on the grounds of ethnic origin. On a more generalised level, the novel reflects a theme that runs through a significant portion of Charyn's work. He sees war as a kind of national psychosis in which madness is transformed into an organizing principle.

On this level, the novel shares certain common characteristics with On the Darkening Green.⁴³ Similar procedures are employed. The motif of the camp, populated by the dispossessed and surrounded by a world touched by the spirit of totalitarianism, links the novels. The camp becomes a microcosm of the larger madness that encloses it. Both conclusions are bleak and essentially apocalyptic, although final ambiguities are sustained.

The motif of the camp is, of course, a potent one for the Jewish author apparent, for example, in Nazerman's perception in The Pawnbroker, in the consciousness of Potok's protagonists in In the Beginning, and in Fiedler's story "Let Nothing You Dismay." Charyn translates the image of the camp into an alternative context and, as in Going to Jerusalem or Eisenhower, My Eisenhower, this translation of image serves to widen the base of the novelist's ethnic concern.

American Scrapbook is, however, born out of a specific historical moment, and it exhibits a sense of political and moral anger that evokes clear contemporary implications. It is the nearest Charyn comes to a Modernist novel in a Faulknerian mode. The historical event roots the preoccupations that permeate Charyn's more freely inventive fictions, and creates both formal limitations and emotional intensity.

VII

Eisenhower, My Eisenhower is a political and ethnic fable that approaches its subject through the creation of a freely inventive fictive system. Charyn synthesises the atmosphere of urban American reality with an ethnic fantasy, the Azazian gypsies. The novel is narrated by Toby Malothioon, an Azazian gypsy who is transformed from an authoritarian elitist refugee from ethnicity to a reluctant, politically impotent and, finally, hysterical revolutionary. The events, characters and fictive mythology that Charyn creates serve to reflect and comment upon the underlying political and social realities that he perceives as negative and destructive in the recent American past. The novel operates as ethnic allegory, as political satire, as mystic invention and it employs a narrative style that permeated with disjunction, edges toward surrealism..

The density of Charyn's prose, the strangeness of his invention presents the reader with a succession of interpretative problems. The novel resists critical interpretation precisely because it is illustrative of the failure of the controlling perception to interpret the reality invented. If there is a single underlying assumption in the novel, it is that the impenetrability of experience defies understanding. Toby's consciousness actively seeks to penetrate the complexity of the fictional world. His pursuit ends in failure. The first person narrative is fragmented, impressionistic and chronologically distorted reflecting the consciousness in an activist mode, a stylistic device to represent the mind of the seeker in an engagement with reality. By the end of the novel though, Toby projects a future in which the consciousness is in retreat. He envisages continual travels, the condition implicit in Going To Jerusalem, an impotent perpetual retreat into oblivion:

I'll buy another sharkskin sample case and one of these little foreign econo-cars that practically run on air, tour the whole of Oregon, upper California, lower Washington, picnic on the road, visit movie houses in Klamath Falls, Walla Walla, Puyallup, Weed Crescent City, Lake Chinook, Myrtle Point, Hoquiam, and a few

private nooks, turn candy merchants Toothberry's way, stuff their counters with Almond bars, hum, wink, chat with state troopers, pencil in rich, curvy routes on my map, exercise my native foxiness at roadside flea markets, barter with scratchy old men, pick up a transistor radio for pennies, lounge in motel swimming holes, hum some more, spit, gargle, drop from sight.⁴⁴

The Azazian God Karooku is at the centre of the novel's system. In Charyn's fictive mythology Karooku is a synthesis of opposites, a perverse, peevish and unpredictable God:

Like the Jews, we Azazians have only one god, but he's also the devil, and since he's both well-wisher and malefactor, beautifier and befouler, who gives, who takes, without any conceivable plan, a gypsy never knows where he stands with him. His name is Karooku. It's no wonder we aren't a very stable tribe. How many other gods encourage paranoia? Karooku is a confused, chatty god who is often pictured with a fire in his lap, a lyre on his knee, and his own finger in his anus.(pp.6-7)

The centre of the Azazian mythology is composed of ambiguity and confusion. The deity operates in a random, perverse manner and the gypsy is in a state of confused bewilderment. Charyn thus invents a religious system that encompasses the disorder and disjunction of experience, a God appropriate to the experience of the Azazians. The Judeo-Christian version of God's moral order is replaced by a mythology of moral chaos, an absurdist and bleak vision of man made in the image of a god who is "a paranoid and a clown"(p.11). Karooku's song enforces the sense of an Azazian cosmos which encompasses moral inversion, ethical ambiguity and impotent confusion:

I created Azaz to amuse me.
 A god should have his special tribe.
 I dipped them in my marrow
 I gave them my temperament

Bits of my flesh and bone.

Who made their women industrious?

Encouraged the men to be so lazy?

Taught the children to steal?--Karoo!k!

Now they use my tricks against me.

They squeeze me and mock me in the open.

I could snuff them out with a finger

Drown them in mud and piss

But wouldn't I be lonely without their winks

Their squeals? The world's gone huggery-buggery

When a god has to beg to be adored.(p.97)

Azazian mythology inverts Judeo-Christian mythology. It replaces Potok's vision of order with a vision of moral chaos more appropriate to Charyn's fictive system. The Azazians also, however, are given a distant and recent history that partially operates as an allegory of ethnic isolation in America. They are a composite of an immigrant minority, ethnic strangers undergoing the painful trauma of assimilation and their experience reflects the processes and problems of upward social mobility and acculturation. Toby Malothoon, for example, moves from the Azazian ghetto to American suburbia and operates as an agent to encourage assimilation into the majority culture of the Anglos. His return to the ethnic ghetto is a despairing and impotent last gesture, an attempt to preserve the vestigial elements of an eroded ethnicity. The ethnic distinctions operative are only between the Azazians and the rest, the Anglos and, in this sense, the allegory is tenuous. The Azazians cannot simply stand for the experience of Jews, Blacks or Spanish-Americans, but their experience is an attempt to synthesise the common issues of ethnic isolation and, in consequence, to evolve meanings that are widely applicable.

This fantasy history is welded on to a credible social history. The Azazians are refugees who have fled from Europe to American in pursuit of

prosperity and security: "What do they say about us? Whenever European soil is unnaturally rich, it's because of gypsy blood, gypsy bones, gypsy shit. Why shouldn't we love America?"(pp.11-12). The immigrant dream is at the root of Charyn's preoccupation here and it is a dream soured. The reality of political life, the amoral erosion of ethnic identity and, of central importance, the war situation, serve to undermine an idealised version of America. Charyn's America is a poisoned environment both domestically and in the foreign wars against which the action is set. The ironic title historically locates the novel against the background of the Korean and, by implication, Vietnam wars.

Charyn's political environment is a central element in the novel and raises a succession of issues. It clearly operates as a major factor in the critique of an idealised immigrant version of America that permeates the novel. Toby Malothioon's experience is directly related to the issue of ethnic identity. He is an ex-Commando, a hero of the war against the "Gooks." His experience reflects successful immigrant upward social mobility from Ghetto to suburb, "Bedlam to Pallidton" from madhouse to insipid colourlessness. He is, until his return to the ghetto, aspiring toward assimilation into American values that are satirised and presented as morally degraded. Toby's uncle Anton is a revolutionary Azazian who resists the assimilation into the Anglo world and his attack on Toby reveals the degree to which Toby has lost identity. His pursuit of the Anglo's America robs him of self-definition: "Toby is still on the Shaftesbury seesaw, halfway up, halfway down, not a gypsy, not a man, nothing"(p.35). The hopeless pursuit of that lost sense of identity creates the momentum of the final pages, Toby's emergence as terrorist/revolutionary and his haunted hysteria faced by images of the past and the projected vacant future. A racial curiosity, a gypsy with a tail, in Anglo Pallidton and, in Bedlam, a neo-Anglo, Toby is Charyn's version of a debased "Uncle Tom," an ethnic stranger who pursues assimilation, loses identity and gains nothing.

At the root of this analysis of an ethnic predicament, related to that described in American Scrapbook, is a critique of the American values into

which Toby seeks to assimilate. The political atmosphere is, in the domestic and foreign context, rendered perverse. Eisenhower, My Eisenhower reveals a poisoned sensibility, the erosion of self in acts of military savagery. Charyn's recurrent occupation with war as a contagion finds full and vivid expression in Toby's narrative:

Bam pointed to a storage hut. I allowed the Yards to lob the first grenades. Otley timed the operation: we levelled the hut in four hundred seconds. Six minutes more to locate the strikers. Two of them. We dug them out of a pile of clay, paper and excrement. They had suffocated in their own tunnel.(p.25)

The tone of the narrative at this point is neutral, the emotional response of the narrator is muted. Charyn creates a gulf between the events and the language in which those events are described. The neutral, unremarkable tone serves to render the horrific commonplace. The absence of moral indignation reflects the degree to which Toby's perceptions are blunted through the transformation of the horrific into the ordinary. This version of American military reality destroys both the victim and the victor.

The domestic political landscape is characterised by urban guerilla resistance to the authoritarian, assimilative, paternalistic rule of Spiru.⁴⁵ The foreign war is thus mirrored in the domestic environment and the contagion of that war has already spread. Charyn's moral position is clearly revealed. The effects of "The Great Gook War" are destructive and damaging in America. A diseased, polluted urban environment breeds moral corruption, disorder and a sense of helpless impotence. The doomed revolt, a recurrent motif in Charyn's fiction, ends in failure and retreat that echoes the conclusions of On the Darkening Green and American Scrapbook.

The Azazians are a nation debased by this version of the American experience. They possess a simple ethical system which emphasises sensuality, affection and joy but this system has been perverted as Sandor's experience indicates:

Father wasn't disturbed by Sandor's boyfriends. Queerness never made a gypsy an outcast. Most Azazians are bisexual from birth. Karooku, who can stretch his body in marvellous ways, who was the first god ever to dance, often sits with his prick in his mouth. For us, it's only a tribal joke, and nothing more, when the Anglos tell us to fuck ourselves. Sandor offered his tail for money, that's his crime. The Azazians celebrate desire in every shape, we allow our priests to fornicate in and out of church, our calendar is studded with days honouring the potency of our saints, but prostitution, male and female, is forbidden. That's why you won't find streetwalkers in Bedlam. The rookuka, gypsy trash, operate out of other boroughs. But is Sandor to blame if the Anglos have made our flesh marketable, if they covet our cunts, our cocks, our tails?(p.28)

The American experience is a pressure that leads to corruption in a succession of ways. Toby's sensibility is dulled by the war. The urban environment is polluted and violent. Azazian ethics are corrupted. By the end of the novel Sandor is physically debilitated, an ex-muscleman, a magician declining into drunkenness, a figure familiar in popular cinema, the drunken "Indian" musing pathetically upon the past. Azazian magic and Azazian sensuality prove powerless against pressures emanating from Charyn's version of American reality.

Toby, in the aptly named suburbia of Pallidton, perceives the world made grotesque, a landscape that simultaneously seems both real and surreal: "So I trundled off to Jennifer, riding past clumps of azaleas and mountains of plums, while ordinary cockroaches and globs of city tar met inside my head"(p.4). Toby exists at the centre of conflicting perceptions and cultures. His movement in the novel is between a variety of identities and locations, between different versions of failure and isolation. The chronological disjunction of the narrative creates a framework in which Toby is seen to jerk between past, present and future without being able to achieve

either significant insight or self-definition. The process of the novel does not reflect progress or development, but rather it illustrates a predicament in which the character remains simultaneously isolated from and riveted to the conditions of a richer cultural past. Memory and past experience exert a recurrent and ambiguous pressure on the present. Toby faces the moral paradox of being an ex-commando turned revolutionary, a successful suburbanite turned urban ghetto guerilla, and he moves between these roles without clear motivation and ineffectively. Toby's journey through time and landscape is a succession of involuntary spasms. Charyn denies Toby the luxury of choice because, in this version of America, social reality diminishes the effective capacity to act or to comprehend. The impressionistic, promiscuous nature of the narrative reflects a consciousness that is unfocused and unselective and, as in Going to Jerusalem, the activity of mind at the centre of the narration is illustrative of a failure of understanding, a persistent going toward and a perpetual failure to arrive.

Eisenhower, My Eisenhower is built around a succession of tensions. On one level, the aspiring consciousness is set against an impenetrable, surreal social reality. Within that social reality conflict arises out of the tension between authority and revolt, assimilation and ethnicity, majority and minority racial and cultural differences. The analysis of contemporary experience that underlies Charyn's novel is familiar enough. He employs the fantastic to emphasise tendencies inherent within social reality, an oblique procedure that already appears as a characteristic of a significant proportion of contemporary fictions. Out of a synthesis of fantasy and social reality, Charyn melds a fable that both reflects and comments upon a succession of amoral realities and future possibilities. Anger and uneasiness permeate the novel. Impotent moral outrage is the characteristic stance.

The fictional history of the Azazian Americans is illustrative of the repression of sensuality, spontaneity and, above all, the repression of difference. Toby and Sandor are corrupted psychic cripples alienated from their culture and joined to no other. Out of this bleak analysis Charyn

projects the possibility of an urban guerilla war focused on the ghetto, the Bedlam of the novel, or, the analogy is unavoidable, the Harlems of America. Within the fantasy Charyn creates a succession of what Scholes calls "cognitive signals," "Time" and "Life," "Coca Cola," the Eisenhower-Stevenson election, to emphasise the moral impulse underlying the fictive enterprise. Charyn inverts the practices of Mailer or Capote through procedures comparable to those used by Fiedler in The Messengers Will Come No More. History is not rendered as fiction but fiction invents mythic histories to reveal history. Non-realism evokes the real, and Charyn's grotesque cosmos is a disturbingly familiar landscape.

The motif of the journey, employed in Going to Jerusalem, forms the narrative. The novel is a perverse Bildungsroman in which the protagonist moves from childhood to maturity without gaining insight; the narrative spasmodically jerks between present and past and the principle of selectivity appears random. In the middle section of the novel Toby recalls a variety of unrelated incidents. The sections are superficially structured by the alphabet. Section A, "Tableau of Sandor in Our Chipped and Meager Tub," precedes section F or G and the events described under these headings are, thus, given the appearance of progression. The alphabet is employed to give an illusion of order that is undermined by the fragmented moments recalled. Charyn exploits a distinction between form and content. The form recalls the modernist epiphany, single moments presented in a manner to suggest special significance. The content undermines the formal implications by describing a selection of moments in which the protagonist comes up against the impenetrability of experience. Superficial order masks fragmentation and confusion. This Bildungsroman is not about growth; this "journey" is not about progress--rather it creates an illusion of growth and progress to reflect a reality in which those processes are redundant.

Charyn's novels repeatedly encompass the possibility of magic. In Once Upon a Droshky or On the Darkening Green the magical is a recurrent possibility in the fictive environment, and in Eisenhower, My Eisenhower the Azazians are a people progressively isolated from the sources of their

magical powers, a transitional community, like the Jews of Once Upon a Droszky, left with only vestiges of a culture rich in magic and mythology:

Nobody can decide whether gypsy society is patriarchal or not. Our mothers carry us around in their bellies, nurse us, and then go off to work. Our fathers sit home with us. Can sorcerers and wizards become carpenters and plumbers in a day?(p.31)

The novel encompasses the decline of the efficacy of magic, a perverse god Karooku slipping into impotence. Sandor, defeated and perverted by contact with Anglo society, a musclemans become whore, retreats from Anglo reality toward the magical possibilities inherent in Azazian mythology: "He swears Karooku has given him magical powers. He can change his shape, become a slug, a lion, a seal, but so far his transfigurations have been minimal"(p.68). When Basil, the nationalist puppet, comes to life the efficacy of gypsy magic would seem to be restored but Basil confronts a transformed gypsy world:

_____ Presidentu's cornucopia. Borough's a wonderland now. I preferred the gypsies when they were hungry and dirtier.

_____ Why, Basil?

_____ Because an honest man's intentions are in his gut. Fatten him, clean his pipes, and you take away the edge of his humor, numb his moral tone.(p.152)

Azazian magic is impotent in the face of transformed social reality. It reflects moral nostalgia for a richer, simpler past untarnished by the organised perversity of the present. In that sense Eisenhower, My Eisenhower transforms the central impulse behind Once Upon a Droszky. Nostalgia for a lost Jewish culture is generalised in this novel, becomes a bleak analysis of the loss of ethnic particularity and a moral condemnation of a reality part-madhouse, part-pallid suburbia.

That is the version of contemporary America that engulfs the ethnic sensibility throughout Charyn's novels, and the Azazians suffer the recurrent trauma at the centre of tensions between assimilation and ethnic isolation.

Toby's problem reflects his cultural schizophrenia at the point where these pressures coincide: "How to arrange the colours of my new three-pronged life at thirty-seven and thirty-eight?"(p.130). He is part-gypsy activist and part-Anglo suburbanite jerking between mutually exclusive identities. The magical puppet, Basil, analyses one of the outcomes of this predicament and this analysis is close enough to the historical reality of American ethnic groups to confirm the allegorical elements reverberating around the novel:

Because the gypsies love America. Because they despise our bombs even more than the Anglos do. Because tribal loyalty can go screw. Your everyday Azazian thinks, feels, sees with his fatty bottom. Give him a choice and he'll gravitate toward George Washington, Jesse James and Ike. He'll stroke Madrag with one hand, squeeze him with the other. Anglos ruin Dolph Barookioon? It was the gypsies who defied him, expected him to bat .600 at home, brooded over his statistics on the road. Even with Zalushioon there was more than a touch of rancor. He embarrassed them. If the gypsies had to have a rescuer, they would have preferred some obscure Anglo. Self-hate? True. Though it's common enough among other tribes as well.(pp.146-147)

The cultural referents are inventions, the cultural predicament is rooted in history. Charyn's analysis implies a future of doomed revolt, of urban blight, of guerilla warfare, of pollution and moral impotence. The fantastic future merges uneasily with the present and the conditions of the past.

Charyn's basic achievement in Eisenhower, My Eisenhower is to transform images of an incredible social reality into credibility and, thus, to lay disturbing emphasis upon those elements within contemporary America that challenge the reader's perception of an ordered and logical world. It is literary chutzpah on a grand scale, a fantasy shaped into the form of a credible contemporary experience. In On the Darkening Green the protagonist moves between a historical landscape and a fantastic microcosm of that landscape in the orphan's camp. In this novel historical reality is evoked

only through a minimal number of references to the American social environment. The fictive invention supplies the essential structure of the book. As in Going to Jerusalem, this novel reflects a radical re-invention of reality, a self-enclosed version of urban experience, a fictive system defining its own interior logic, history and social structure. The novel transcends mere fantasy by employing that system to reveal an oblique perspective upon the grosser absurdities of contemporary America. Operating outside of the conventions of the realist novel, Charyn is able to define a fictive system that is neo-surrealistic, grotesque, incredible, and, simultaneously, disturbingly credible. The issues of ethnicity raised within this fictional system are found throughout the work of the novelists discussed here. The fictional system itself is evidence of a commitment to the radical shapes of Post-Modernist literature, a commitment that finds further expression in The Tar Baby.

VIII

The Tar Baby parodies the form of a literary periodical, an extended satire on the pretension of academia published on the death of the central figure, Anatole Waxman-Weissman. It is, according to the editor, "an attempt to celebrate and grasp my one-time friend and contributing editor, Anatole Waxman-Weissman."⁴⁶ The various contributions, however, primarily reveal the jealousies, vanities and affectations of the contributors. Anatole remains shadowy, a complex eccentric and the creator of a fictional Wittgenstein in a much revised memoir. While the periodical ostensibly aims to present this figure from a variety of perspectives, it is, in fact, the contributors who loom large and grotesque.

The novel is, in a sense, an extended literary joke must clearly related to John Updike's Bech, or Nabokov's Pale Fire. It abounds with ambiguities, puns and literary references. The title is taken from an Uncle Remus story by Joel Chandler Harris: "Brer Fox went ter wuk en got 'im some tar, en mix it wid some turkentine, en fix up a contrapshun what he call a Tar-Baby...."⁴⁷ Harris's Tar Baby is a trap and an illusion created to approximate the form of a man. It is close enough to reality to confuse Brer Rabbit. Similarly, Charyn's Tar Baby is close enough to reality of the literary periodical to reflect and ridicule some of the characteristics of that form.

According to Seth Birdwistell, a tar baby is also a folk object of India which "performed a thousand functions: votive, seer, voluptuary, scarecrow, caretaker, shaman, murderer, saviour, stud, moralist, viper, broom"(p.189). It is, in other words, a construct with ever changing functions with problematic, ambiguous and uncertain meaning. It changes with changing perspectives. Charyn's fiction is similarly a simple construct around which complex meanings accumulate. The cartoon that precedes the title page is of indeterminate sex and grotesquely formed, a distortion of anatomical reality. All these elements coincide in this elaborately complex novel. The Tar Baby is black, dirty, silent, grotesque--an artifact that distorts and reflects reality.

The periodical is published in a California that is geographically and historically credible. The town of Galapagos is a fictional construct injected into that landscape. Darwin investigated the Galapagos Islands and noted the existence of species peculiar to that place. Melville's story "The Encantadas or Enchanted Isles" is set there. Charyn translates Melville's enchanted islands into a small Californian town populated by species peculiar to that context, but uncomfortably close to recognisable forms.

Ambiguities are also accumulated around the name Waxman-Weissman. In one sense, the character is a wax man, a moulded construct created by Charyn through the idiosyncratic perceptions of the contributors. He is parallel to Harris's Tar Baby, but vulnerable and liable to melt. He is also white man, pure and untarnished, or a wise man. Essentially the figure that emerges is an amalgam of these characteristics, a synthesis of contradictions. Any single or clear sense of character is undermined, and the definition of personality becomes an issue in the fiction.

The novel abounds with ironic references. There is, for example, a computer named Kit Carson. A mental hospital is inappropriately named Minerva State, after the Roman goddess of wisdom. The novel includes a recipe for Turtle pie, a reference to the large population of tortoises that exist on the Galapagos Islands.

There is, then, a strong element of literary jokiness both in the structure of the novel and through the puns and references accumulated. The novel is, in one sense, about literary conventions, a self-referring form. It contains, for example, a critique of itself thinly veiled as a comment on Anatole's memoir:

Not even a "heartless old neuter" such as myself could deny Anatole's gift for caricature or the playful energy of his prose. But the humor seems a bit ingrown, even incestuous, to me; almost as if the "Wittgenstein" were a private joke written for the benefit of the faculty and brighter students at the School of

pragmatic Letters and Philosophies.(p.69)

The contributor's style is undeniably "academic" and the criticism is, at least to some degree, relevant to Charyn's novel. Yet it is, disarmingly, a part of that novel and comes from a satirised academic elder statesman, Birdwistell. The critic is uncomfortably forced toward the same devalued position. It is an elaborate and witty device, but nevertheless a further extension of what is "a bit ingrown"--an excellent joke on the activity of making a critical judgement on the novel.

Charyn's humour is, however, repeatedly employed to reflect essentially serious issues. The comic elements in Once Upon a Droszky, On the Darkening Green or Eisenhower, My Eisenhower enforce a sense of serious moral disquiet and, in this novel, the comic procedures co-exist with a version of reality that is perplexing and insubstantial. Each event and each perspective is undercut and challenged until the sense of a single definable reality or personality is clouded into a blurred set of conflicting fictions. The editor's declared intention is to clarify the character of Anatole, but the novel undermines the idea of clarification. The novel is, then, non-realist in two senses. It employs the procedures of satire and fantasy, and also projects the problem of perception in relation to a sequence of events and personalities that repeatedly outstrip the boundaries of satirical invention. On this level, the novel reflects the point that Wittgenstein makes in his later philosophy. David Pears argues that Wittgenstein "abandoned the idea that the structure of reality determines the structure of language, and suggested that it is really the other way round: our language determines our view of reality...."⁴⁸ The novel engages with the problem that implicitly or explicitly permeates the contemporary novel; the fantastic nature of reality undermines the creative possibilities open to fiction precisely because the grotesque and disordered elements in contemporary existence outstrips the novelist's capacity for creative invention.

Charyn presents a fiction that approximates the form of a satire, but it also carries the implication that, through exaggeration and distortion,

incredible, grotesque aspects of contemporary experience are revealed. The novel looks like a non-realist fabulation but it may, in fact, signal the evolution of a new form of realism--non-realist techniques employed to reflect the underlying atmosphere of reality, a shift in focus from surface to somber implication of events, the kind of shift found also in Fiedler's fiction and critical work.

The serious implications of the novel do not rest, however, in critical abstraction. Anatole and his family are, like a number of Charyn characters, ethnic strangers in America, and Charyn's concern with the issue of ethnicity is developed obliquely rather than explicitly here. Benno Waxman-Weissman, "of Jewish descent"(p.15), is transformed from a lexicographer and philosopher into a carpenter after leaving Austria.⁴⁹ He suffers the common enough immigrant experience of cultural dislocation, a loss of status and a profound sense of isolation. Anatole is similarly an outsider in Galapagos society described as "Nigger baby..."(p.30), a tar baby, and more accurately as "the little Jew..."(p.29).

Anatole's isolation exists on more than the ethnic level. He is an eccentric who shuns the facile activities that constitute the cultural norm of Galapagos. W.W.Korn's assessment is revealing:

There is no indication that Anatole entered the photography contest sponsored since 1939 by Penn Geimenhardt and our Merchants Association; he shunned yoyo tournaments, fishing expeditions, Kite Day, and softball games.(p.18)

He spent his energies in creating two fictional constructs, enterprises that mirror the fiction of which they are a part.

As a boy, he created the history of the "Pitfaces," and as a man worked endlessly on his version of Wittgenstein as another cultural stranger who teaches the dumb to speak. That Wittgenstein emerges as a doomed visionary idealist, a shadowy mirror of Anatole himself, who is rendered ineffective within the society of Galapagos. Wittgenstein "becomes a coprophiliac..." (p.71). Anatole, after mental illness, is killed or commits suicide by walking into a bus. In the fiction in which Anatole is the central figure, and in

the fiction that he creates, there is one common factor: the destructive and culturally facile atmosphere of Galapagos.

This factor reflects another serio/comic element. The town is populated by a whole series of comic grotesques from Drexel Fingers to Turkey Semple. It houses a university riddled with intellectual lightweights, and, as the articles indicate, jargon is confused with insight. It is also politically corrupt. Sherrif Drexel Fingers has his fingers (dreck or shitty) in every pie. Galapagos is a cultural desert and the environment is destructive of original intelligence, a joke but finally a painful and fatal one.

Co-existent with these issues, the novel exhibits massive inventiveness and wit. An assortment of styles and perspectives create the sense of the town, the presence of a large cast of grotesques, and a shadowy indication of Anatole. All of this is achieved without a third person narrative intrusion, or an unambiguously credible narrator. Idiosyncratic first person statements contradict each other, comment upon each other and undermine each other's credibility. The novel is close to collage in its accumulation of bewildering contradictions.

There is no chronological development in the conventional sense, but the events that the contributors focus on are simplistically outlined in "A Waxman-Weissman Chronology" early in the novel. Through this procedure, Anatole's life is reduced to a combination of mundane and ridiculous facts that minimise the dimensions of his humanity. The various contributions are also preceded by brief biographies which serve to enforce formal similarities with a literary periodical, and to reveal often bizarre experiences consistent with the personalities that emerge through the articles. The technique is the nearest the novel gets to a kind of third person perspective on the first person narratives that follow.

The letter columns, "Cries to the Tar Baby," and the extracts from "Galapaga, the official handbook to Galapagos" add to the portrait of a small town. McNabb, a convict admirer of Anatole, is unable to contribute an article because he suffers from "a very gassy stomach"(p.10). The

"Galapagos Businesswomen's Bureau" object to "the new Royal Sponge Freak-Out at the Flea Market"(p.12). A piano tuner leaps to the defence of his fellow townsman, Seth Birdwistell, who has been attacked by a colleague Nina Spear:

Nine herself is the guilty party. She has pissed on all of us. Were it not for Provost Birdwistell's charity and sense of fair play, I would demand that Miss Spear either apologizes at her earliest convenience or be goosed, feathered and fucked by the entire College, and be rode out of Galapagos on a broom.(p.195)

Elvina Cassidy, Stevie Butcher and the rest dispute and comment upon a variety of absurd issues and events. The accumulating effect is to edge the reader into a landscape more surreal than real, to create a comically grotesque and detailed version of Galapagos society through the interaction of the discordant voices in the novel.

The extracts from the official handbook give this society a historical context, a past that echoes the authentic history of frontier town while distorting that history into a shape that edges toward the fantastic. A fictional history emerges:

In the early 1850s, disillusioned Chinese miners from the "gold country" (the Dogtowns, Whiskey Bars, Jackass and Lizard Flats, Nigger Slides, and the other camps of Placer, Nevada, and El Dorado Counties) poured into Galapagos. Soon a plethora of laundries, spice shops, opium dens, gambling houses, eating places and one temple cropped up....(p.24)

The various extracts serve to locate the town historically within the context of the frontier, gold rush experience. They also define the geographical location, and represent another of the styles parodied in the novel, the lifeless language of an official guide book.

The "small ads" further extend the sense of the grotesque: "Cripple, age 30, would like to meet generous person any age to teach him to dance socially"(p.62), or "FEMALE IMPERSONATOR (traveling thru Galap. area

w/daughter) needs feminine companionship"(p.63). Charyn merges the real and the surreal, employs black-comic perspectives to create a society located somewhere between fantasy and history. This society frames the various contributions and is an intrusive "personality" within the fiction.

The editor, W.W.Korn, writes, "Speculations on Benno, Anatole, Sophie, and Drexel Fingers." The article employs a procedure that permeates the novel. It contains information that is ironically devalued through the undermined credibility of the narrator. Korn interprets events and personality through psychological explanations, a pseudo-Freudian approach. Korn's language has a tone of attitudinizing self-importance and cliched self-satisfaction. The rhetorical question is employed to overlay the "speculations" with a profound and dramatic sense that conflicts with the banal nature of the explanations:

Did the marks on her arms indicate the extent to which she hated herself? And we should not forget the arrangement of the gin bottles--compulsive neatness while she lay dying. Am I cruel to suggest that this was Sophie's ultimate gesture? The need for one final token of order amid the shambles? Drexel must have sensed this.(p.21)

Korn's analysis is based on a turgid neo-Freudianism that is clearly of problematic credibility both because of the language employed, and through the attack of Seth Birdwistell later in the novel.

In the Dalton Chess article, "Galapagos: A Topographical Sketch," Charyn parodies another kind of academic approach. Chess attempts to reconstruct Anatole's youth through a description of the environment which is again amalgam of the fantastic and the real. A succession of real, if obscure Presidents, are reported to have stopped in the town. Further dimensions of the early history are supplied. The section also introduces Mother Margaret Chace, a crude overblown whore-house madam, but the least devalued voice in the novel. Her contribution is the final one. It carries a tone of authentic concern for the dead Anatole, and, as it follows Birdwistell's

generalised assault on the others, it is the only contribution that is not attacked by him. Chess' contribution, like Korn's, reveals however, more of the affectations of the writer than of Anatole.

Charyn's capacity to reproduce an enormous range of styles and tones is further revealed in the following section, a taped interview with Cynthia Waxman-Weissman "Stokie," Anatole's wife. The interview is partly a parody of Korn's role as a tape-recording sociologist, and it reveals Cynthia's sluttish but vulnerable personality. The three participants interact in an absurd domestic comedy. Stokie is by turns crudely hostile, "Tell the motherfucker to shove his talk machine up his smelly hole"(p.41), and then abject in his attempts to pimp for Cynthia: "Ol' Woody Wilson, come on back to the bungalow. Cindy's dying to entertain. She likes you. Don't you concern yourself about me. I'll sleep in the woods"(p.49). Cynthia moves from vigorous brusqueness, "____ Anatole. What do I think? He's a fish is what. Or was. Husband ha. Booby hatch philosopher is better"(p.41), to comically inappropriate hospitality: "Millard, take that bottle out of your mouth and offer Woody some. ('Fuck off', Stokie said, gurgling the beer and spitting it back into the bottle)"(p.41). Korn is again self-important, attempting to elevate the mundane into drama: "Gambling coldly with myself, I played back a part of the tape, aware that her voice might add to her panic or shake her out of her fit. The sounds shamanized her"(p.45). The article ends with Korn absurdly scribbling notes in the bathtub, notes that attempt to overlay the interview with profound psychological significance that the words spoken simply do not carry.

Joachim Fiske is Anatole's pedantic teacher:

The class's initial reaction to Anatole's report was one of horror and amazement. We were disturbed by his description of the Pitfaces. Their habits appalled us; wanton copulation; avoidance of parental responsibility; orgies of bloodletting after rubbing heads with a corpse. However distasteful the Pitfaces were, these bleak fumblers affected us sorely, and we pitied the trickling

out of their lives. Still, I could only give Anatole a B for his efforts. I closed my eyes to his atrocious spelling, but I had to penalize him for abusing his imagination. Anatole's "Report on the Pitfaces" was a shameless coupling of fact and fiction.(pp.55-56)

The report gives the reader an insight into Anatole's imagination that is clearly meant to reflect the procedures employed in the novel. Anatole is, in this sense, a mirror of Charyn's own self-conscious role as fiction maker. Anatole creates a fictional tribe of Indians, tar babies, who exist in absurdist limbo and who value only death: "Alive, a Pitface meant nothing to himself or his Pitface brothers. But once he was a rotting corpse, his value went up considerable"(p.55). The youthful Anatole ironically prefigures his own condition, a status transformed by death. The report is attacked by Lucian Bonnefroy, who later constructs the computer, Kit Carson. Anatole, however, counters the attack by producing a fraudulent Pitface, translates his fiction into a real figure. By this manoeuvre, Anatole forces Lucian into a recognition that permeates and shapes Charyn's novels: "'There's factual truths and mythical truths,' Lucian declared with his customary pith. 'The Pitfaces are short on one and long on the other. Nothing further has to be said'"(p.60). Anatole's action is simultaneously fraudulent and true; his Pitfaces, and by implication Charyn's fictions, are both fantastic and real.

Anatole's fiction parallels Charyn's fiction in another sense. Anatole creates a tar baby: "He brought that disgusting person into class: a pockmarked, beshitted Indian who claimed to be the last Pitface alive"(p.59). Like Charyn's fiction, or Harris's creation, Anatole's illusion reveals something of the nature of reality. Charyn's novel reflects elements of credible social and academic behaviour. Anatole's Pitface is a construct fraudulently brought to life to reveal a minimal distinction between what can be imagined and what exists. Both artifacts attempt to transform the status of fictions.

The jealousies and hostilities of academia are revealed in Seth Birdwistell's contribution "Auguries of Futility: The Misinventions of

of Anatole Waxman-Weissman." The footnotes reveal a succession of political, academic and personal disputes often focusing on the computer's role and function. The issue of technology and the status of Anatole are the points around which the arguments form.. Birdwistell's objections further blur the outlines of Anatole's personality. He undermines the credibility of the previous contributions without having any serious credibility himself. Character description becomes a central issue.

Around Anatole's fictional Wittgenstein, Charyn accumulates other theoretical positions with regard to the relationship of language, reality and fiction. Anatole, Anatole's Wittgenstein, Ava Plotch and Glorianna Plotch all exhibit various failures and malfunctions with regard to language. The capacity to speak and read is mysterious, appearing and disappearing in illogical and unpredictable ways. The language of the novel obscures and confuses far more than it reveals. This view of language is clearly related, if tenuously, to certain positions held by Wittgenstein. David Pole argues that Wittgenstein saw the breakdown of language as a central subject for philosophy: "language itself is deranged; the machinery is out of order."⁵⁰ Charyn translates that proposition into a physical reality. It also emerges as a subject for fictions (Anatole's and Charyn's), and a central issue in this novel.

The issue is, however, ironically integrated into the novel as a critical comment from one of the elder academic statesman:

I am well aware of the connection between aphasia and the pessimism of Wittgensteinian philosophy. Casting his semi-fictional Wittgenstein as a man who attempts to restore the power of speech to brain-damaged children seems a remarkably poignant invention.(p.67)

Discussion of the novel is, thus, again part of the novel itself. A serious concern with the nature of language is integrated with a serio-comic manoeuvre that indicates introspection, a sense that the breakdown of language impels the novel to discuss itself.

Morris Plotch's contribution, "Some Preliminary Notes Towards a

Morphological Survey of 'Wittgenstein Among the Redwoods' (Including an Account of My Relations with The Tar Baby)," extends the concern with language and sustains a satirical tone. The extravagances of the linguistic "scientist" are parodied. One of the characters hopes to compile "a universal grammar for speakers of American English between the ages of zero and six"(p.83). His studies move even more grotesquely into the area of "Fetal crying. Sounds before birth"(p.90). The bizarre narrative describes a hip-transvestite burdened by freakish daughters and an unfaithful wife. Integrated with this, Plotch present two futile and mechanistic descriptions of Anatole's language. Furthermore, it is suggested that the entire article is the invention of the computer. A series of grotesques engaged in futile and absurd endeavours are presented, and, characteristically, the entire narrative is undermined by the suggestion of fraudulent authorship.

Monte Falke describes Anatole's various functions, "At the JC:W.-W.as Teacher, Cop, and Rodeo Dog." Anatole is shown as moving between absurd moments, existing in relation to an extravagantly outlandish, serio-comic landscape that is a combination of the real and the surreal. Monte Falke's function at the rodeo is to dress as a clown and roll around in a barrel being buffeted by a bull, an exact metaphor of the condition in which Anatole exists.

"Scrapings" represent a contribution from Anatole that is of doubtful veracity. The original manuscript was lost and these fragments purport to be a re-translation from the French. A central tension in this section is between the human and the mechanistic, between Anatole's actions and the computer's outpourings. Anatole describes, in the third person, his uneasiness with regard to the computer which has reduced his writing to a set of formulae:

The computer was his exegete. Kit Carson had studied his sentences, contracted them, converted them into digits. A metal bulb pecked his hand: in his confusion, brushing against the keyboards, Bonney had slipped him a microphone.(p.121)

The computer, in effect, de-humanises Anatole's work, and when he begins

to draw a map of the town he attempts to counter the computer's street plan with a more humanistic vision, an illusory Galapagos based on the shape of his own body. Literal, scientific reality, as in the Pitface episode, is contrasted with the human version that is both a distortion and a deeper perception of the underlying truth concealed by literal fact:

On Anatole's map A street led nowhere, and he created the illusion of a disjointed, spongy town without contours or a definite interior, which had little to do with the actual life, shapes, and street plan of Galapagos. Expecting relaxation, to free himself of analogies and systems, to sketch only those patches of Galapagos that appealed to him, he discovered the opposite: he was mapping the carbuncles on his own body. The ridge of fat around his navel resembled his drawing of Sonoma Mound; the irregular, hairy arch where his eyebrows met could easily have been Sheriff's Bridge; the veins on his calf anticipated the windings of Coronado Road. (pp.122-123)

Anatole's idiosyncratic map is a fictive enterprise that combines insight into Galapagos culture with a recognition that place is shaped and transformed by perception. It is also a humanistic assertion of independence from machine-dominated versions of reality, and, more ominously, a reflection of the deep impact of Galapagos society on Anatole's consciousness.

Two contradictory modes of apprehending reality clash, literal truth confronts emotional truth and this reflects a central preoccupation in the novel. Anatole is, to a large degree, obscured in the context of the periodical which is printed by, and possibly part constructed by, a computer. Anatole, after losing his capacity to read, receives a "computer-generated document" (p.132) of condolence. The making of language, communication itself, is progressively reduced from a human activity to a mechanistic function.

"Scrapings" is also a record of Anatole's eccentricity and failure. Margret Chace appears to be his sole source of comfort in a bizarre,

oppressive and paradoxical environment. Confronted by the motor-car, he composes a pedestrian's handbook: "At the first sign of an approaching vehicle, the pedestrian owes it to himself to scream and run...(p.129). He re-examines that assertion from the perspective of a motorist:

With their shoulders humped, the lips on their browned faces clutched in a snarl, their bellies wobbling, their arms and legs paddling with awkward choppy strokes, they seemed as mean-spirited and ill-postured as any motorist.(p.136)

These contradictory perceptions reveal Anatole's confusion in the face of a landscape that is an amalgam of the threatening and the grotesque. Anatole is unable to construct a permanent or coherent vision of an environment that appears irrational. That confusion illustrates both inner characteristics, and the nature of the reality proposed by Charyn in the novel. It is precisely this kind of shifting and indistinct perspective that motivates the endless revisions of the Wittgenstein memoir, fluidity of perception acting with a fluidity of environment.

"Conversations with Stefan Wax" is a comically vulgar interview by Nina Spear in which Charyn integrates Nina's crass intellectualism with Wax's crude responses. The interaction between the two voices creates a dialogue rich in comic incongruity:

INTERVIEWER

... the world consists of one interminable sentence we pick up before we are born and utter after we die; that there is no such-

STEFAN WAX

You keep flinging that theoretical puke at me, Nina, and I'll bite your nipples off. Paralinguistics can kiss my ass.(p.150)

Wax is another of the grotesques who populate the fiction, "a drop out" who spends his time in absurd artistic endeavours: "You wallow on a beach, draw animated genitals for a porno syndicate, you don't even bother sketching faces, and you call that a life"(p.152). Through the figure of Wax, Charyn

extends the satirical perspective to Galapagos underground culture. He denies, alternative ethical systems. Neither mainstream nor underground culture offers ethical alternatives. Only Margaret Chace, structurally isolated in the novel and physically isolated in the society, present any alternative moral possibility.

Korn's "The Other Anatole" recalls the ambiguous details of Anatole's death. No two witnesses agree on the occurrence and the event remains elusive. The article is consistent in tone with Korn's previous contribution. It exudes pomposity and self-importance, and, like Birdwistell's contributions, contains an oblique critical commentary upon the fiction of which it is a part. It is another example of Charyn's introspective procedure, integrating critical commentary with the fiction itself:

Anatole wasn't making any move to stencil in the rude facts of Wittgenstein's life; ignoring the conventions of time, space, and local color, scornful of all facts, he attempted to reconstruct a weightless Wittgenstein who might function three centuries from now, in Rabat, Hong Kong, or Macon, Georgia.(p.161)

By substituting Charyn for Anatole, and Anatole for Wittgenstein, the analysis reveals certain accurate perspectives on The Tar Baby.

Seth Birdwistell's "The Tar Baby Reappraised" has a comparable function. It offers a critique of the preceding contributions without having any credibility itself. It completes a maze of ambiguities, undermining the portrait of Anatole that has evolved through the novel, offering critical judgements on the periodical, and representing a parody of literary criticism.

Margaret Hatchpaw Chace's contribution concludes the fiction and it contains the only authentic emotional voice in the novel. The article is called "With Me" and this title has a marked simplicity in comparison with the rest. Charyn uses the device of suggesting that the article was received too late to undergo Birdwistell's jaundiced analysis, and the

procedure isolates the contribution structurally as well as leaving it with a credibility unchallenged by any other voice in the novel. Furthermore, Chace's language is crude and brusque but does not parody a definable form. It obliquely reveals an emotionally responsive personality who has a genuine attachment to the human dimensions of the dead Anatole, rather than to some mythic invention of Anatole's significance. Charyn risks a sentimental cliché, the whore with a heart of gold, but her role in relation to the others transcends the cliché. She perceives the quagmire of Galapagos, suffers its oppressiveness, but retains her humanity despite those conditions:

Water hissed and bubbled around Anatole's knees. Scratchy hair under his lip was blobbed with snot and eye crust. Paid that prick attendant to wash him and shave him, but I'll bet he spit on him and scraped him with his ruler.

"Anatole, should I drop the heat? Only take me a second to locate the proper knob."

"Heat's fine, Margaret. But you can hold my hand."

Damn peculiar sight, chilled fingers coming out of a boiling tub. Sucked his thumbs to warm them. (p.238)

In addition to intimate and active concern for Anatole, Chace exhibits a stoic acceptance and tolerance in the face of the absurd. These characteristics further distinguish her from the other characters. Her comment, "Now I aint indicting anybody" (p.216), reveals a basic good heartedness that is clearly absent in the preceding contributions.

Chace is, also, the only character to retain a sense of humour in the face of adversity. Charyn stresses the ridiculousness of the contributors in the previous sections; in this section, a sense of the ridiculous is integrated into the character's consciousness:

Girl inherited my loquacious mouth. Could have told her everybody's too busy wondering about the new buildings the College is putting up. We'd have to undress on O Street just before noon hour to

scare up enough customers who'd be interested in Bruno, her,
and me.(p.202)

In deflating the significance of her own predicament, she radically alters the tone of self-dramatising importance that permeates the other contributions.

The narrative also reveals an authentic and desolate loneliness. Her predicament is credible precisely because it abandons the tone of pompous self-aggrandisement. There is no sense that Margaret assumes a public role in relation to Anatole. She responds on a personal level and, unlike the others, she avoids using Anatole as a prop for political, academic or social assertions: "Anatole, did you have to lay down in Coronado Road? Were you worried about completing your water therapy? Could have bathed you everyday in my tub. Aint such a disgrace to have a runaway wife"(p.243). Margaret's loneliness and emotional loyalty to Anatole finally shifts the focus of the novel away from the merely clever, away from philosophical anxieties, academic jealousies and away from the accumulated paradoxes of Anatole that arise out of conflicting attempts to use his image for personal self-advertisement. She fixes the novel in a credible emotional landscape that balances the pre-occupations apparent in the other contributions.⁵¹ She exhibits a humanity and a sense of responsibility that distinguishes her from the others: "I bent to collect the trash off the floor, bottles, filthy spoons, paper bags, and there I was, bawling on my knees, the dust so thick and heavy you could make patty cakes with it. Shh, Mother, you'll wake the boy"(p.206).

Charyn's The Tar Baby is, as this discussion indicates, a bewildering synthesis of styles, tones, ambiguities and issues. The form is impressionistic and fragmentary. A complex, multi-faceted portrait is accumulated, but the veracity of the portrait is made problematic. It evokes the issue of character in Post-Modernist fiction, integrating that concern into the material of the novel. Charyn's American small town is a grotesque, quasi-surreal construct that destructively engulfs the ethnic

outsider and the eccentric intelligence. The procedures reflect a self-consciousness of the fictive enterprise that places the novel within the mainstream of Post-Modernist fiction, that relates it, for example, to the kind of fictive introspection noted in the discussion of Fiedler's The Messengers Will Come No More. The rhetoric of this novel is employed, not to engage the reader within the fictional system, but rather to cast doubts upon its veracity, to use techniques that mask rather than reveal the subject. To some degree, it makes literary activity its central theme, evolving a fiction about the activities of making and talking about fictions. Yet, for the most part, it avoids being "in-bred" both because of enormous wit and inventiveness, and also because of the underlying sense of serious disquiet. Finally it is a startlingly original novel, a novel that leaves the critic groping for an appropriate language and hopefully avoiding the more ridiculous grotesqueries of Korn and Co.

IX

The critic of contemporary literature is in a precarious position. He attempts to form judgements and identify tendencies within a culture that is inevitably in a condition of change. His judgements and perspectives are, to some degree, part of that condition. The judgements and descriptions formed in the present about the present must, therefore, be provisional and speculative.

A study of Jerome Charyn is a particular example of the challenge and predicament inherent in this activity. He is a prolific writer deeply engaged, as novelist, teacher and editor, in the experimental and innovative tendencies associated with Post-Modernist culture.

It is, however, imperative to attempt to establish coherent grounds for judgements and convictions that are albeit provisional and subject to amendment. Serious engagement with contemporary culture imposes the necessity to understand, describe and evaluate the condition of change.

This discussion attempts, therefore, to locate Charyn at the centre of a developing tendency in Post-Modernist Jewish-American fiction. His status as a major figure within that context is based on an identification of particular aesthetic qualities, and the more generalised characteristics that are integrated to shape the fiction. His work sounds both retrospective and futuristic notes. The density of that work challenges critical conceptions of Jewish-American culture.

It is symptomatic of the present condition of publishing in America that a number of these novels are at present out of print. The majority have never been published in Britain. The fact that this is largely unnoticed is symptomatic of the state of critical awareness on both sides of the Atlantic. No full scale study exists, and this reflects the generally timidly conservative nature of criticism in the field of Jewish-American fiction. Any perspective on the current culture that recognises, and attempts to engage with, the dynamic fluidity of the present is incomplete without a description of the contribution of this prolific, profound, comic and serious novelist.

It is not the traditional job of the critic to make predicative statements, but we live in a world where traditional role definitions are changing. This view of Jerome Charyn's fiction, therefore, implicitly suggests that he is, and will be seen as, one of the major figures in late twentieth century American fiction.

Notes

¹ Jerome Charyn, ed., The Troubled Vision (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1970), p.ix.

² Charyn, The Troubled Vision, p.x.

³ Charyn, The Troubled Vision, p.xi.

The style of Charyn's criticism is also familiar in Post-Modernist literature. It is impressionistic and moralistic, diverse and expansive in form and content. It is moving toward, or at least recognising, Leslie Fiedler's concern with "a Post-Modernist criticism appropriate to Post-Modernist fiction" In Cross the Border - Close the Gap (New York: Stein and Day, 1972), p.62.

It comes close to meeting Fiedler's quasi-definition of that criticism:

"it uses one work of art as an occasion to make another"(p.64).

⁴ Jerome Charyn, ed., The Single Voice (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1969), p.xi.

⁵ Fiedler, Cross the Border, pp.62-63.

⁶ Charyn, The Single Vision, p.ix.

⁷ In his introductions, Charyn gives special emphasis to Nathanael West, Rudolph Wurlitzer, William Gass, John Hawkes, John Barth and Thomas Pynchon. In short, a credible reading list for a course called, perhaps, "Post Modernism: Origins and Development."

⁸ Fiedler, Cross the Border, p.74.

⁹ Jerome Charyn, On the Darkening Green (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), p.196.

¹⁰ Charyn, The Troubled Vision, p.ix.

¹¹ See appendix.

¹² Charyn is editor of the periodical, Fiction.

¹³ In an interview with Beatrice Levin, "Once Upon a Droshky," Chicago Jewish Forum, 23, No.4 (Summer 1965), pp.320-321.

¹⁴ Levin, "Once Upon a Droshky," p.321.

¹⁵ Jerome Charyn, Once Upon a Droshky (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p.13.

All further references to this work appear in the text.

¹⁶ A list of novels that approximately share this assumption would reflect the central works of contemporary innovative fiction. The list would include the work of John Barth, Donald Barthelme, later novels of Philip Roth, Heller, Pynchon, Stanley Elkin, Ronald Sukenick etc.

¹⁷ Charyn's nostalgia for the Yiddish theatre is also revealed in "Sing, Shaindele Sing," in The Man Who Grew Younger.

¹⁸ This chapter first appeared as a short story, "On Second Avenue," Commentary, 36, No.1 (July 1963), pp.26-34. In that version, the simile is not extended and the devices discussed here are much less in evidence, an indication of careful and functional re-writing.

¹⁹ Jerome Charyn, On the Darkening Green (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), p.141. All further references to this work appear in the text.

²⁰ A description of this friendship can be found in Jay Neugeboren's autobiography, Parentheses (New York: E.P.Dutton, 1970).

²¹ Jay Neugeboren, Listen Ruben Fontanez (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p.153. First publication, New York, 1968.

²² Ken Kesey, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (London: Picador, 1973), p.248. First publication, New York, 1962.

²³ The procedure, like Heller's in Catch 22, presents absurdity socially organised; war spawns contagious lunacy manifest in a succession of anti-humanistic structures.

²⁴ Certain Malamud novels clearly deviate from this pattern, A New Life,

The Natural or Dubin's Lives for example. However, the pattern described exists in a substantial body of his work which includes Idiots First and The Assistant.

25 The name clearly reverberates against Nick's image of himself as "a creditable shit flinger." As he assumes the name, he begins to assume the role.

26 Wallace Markfield, Teitelbaum's Window (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), p.378.

27 Markfield, Teitelbaum's Window, p.253.

28 See appendix for Lippy's "Map of the World." This is the first page of The Man Who Grew Younger and Other Stories. It maps the location of this novel, the setting of Once Upon a Droshky, and the short stories. It is a visual indication of the "rooted" nature of Charyn's fiction.

29 See, for example, S.I.Bellman's review of American Scrapbook, Saturday Review, 23 August 1969, p.40.

30 Jerome Charyn, Going to Jerusalem (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1971), pp.65-66. First publication, New York, 1967. All further references to this work appear in the text.

31 Ivan is, in many ways, a figure similar to West's Lemuel Pitkin.

32 Going to Jerusalem, thus, employs a familiar procedure comparable, for example, to Heller's use of the institution in Catch 22.

33 The motif of the journey is, for example, at the centre of On the Road, Lolita and The Sot-Weed Factor. All can be said to employ the motif for roughly comparable reasons.

34 Jerome Charyn, The Man Who Grew Younger and Other Stories (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p.110. All further references to this work appear in the text.

35 This is defined in the story as a Jewish version of hell.

36 See appendix.

³⁷ Charyn evokes Huck Finn's description of Tom Sawyer through the use of the word "style." The story goes on to translate some of the other motifs in Huckleberry Finn.

³⁸ Jerome Charyn, "Faigele, the Idiotke," Commentary, 35, No.3 (March 1963), p.226. In the book version Charyn reduces that sense of self-satisfaction that is inappropriate with the transformation of Manny's stature. There are other significant omissions that improve the story. Charyn removes various levels of mystification. The duffel bag, for example, loses the symbolic significance that it has in the Commentary version. Symbolic complication is generally discarded, and the issues in the story are less crudely developed.

³⁹ In the periodical version of the story, Charyn included phrases that more precisely indicate the immediate responses of Shaindele and Notte.

"And they made Notte watch, while they had their fill of me. Notte's eyes looked haunted, and I cried all the time. Itzie's friends picked up the baseball bats and then they left. I untied Notte. His body was shaking. I kissed his nose, his forehead and his eyes. 'Notte,' I said, Notte.' We left the dressing room."

"Sing, Shaindele, Sing," The Transatlantic Review, No.22 (Autumn 1966), p.145:

The omissions in the book version strengthen the grotesque elements in the action, isolate the participants from the events, and enforce a sense of emotional dislocation in Shaindele's narrative.

⁴⁰ Jerome Charyn, American Scrapbook (New York: Viking Press, 1969), p.3. All further references to this work appear in the text.

⁴¹ The protagonist of Ivan Goncharov's Oblomov (1859) refused to leave his bed finding nothing of particular worth in the outside world.

⁴² Charyn, On the Darkening Green, p.164.

⁴³ Technically, the novel can be compared with The Sound and the Fury or As I Lay Dying. The whole is revealed through a succession of first-person perspectives. Samuel Bellman's review refers to the "Faulknerian mode" and the comparison is, in general terms, apt. The Saturday Review, 23 August 1969, p.40.

⁴⁴ Jerome Charyn, Eisenhower, My Eisenhower (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1971), p.178. All further references to this work appear in the text.

⁴⁵ There are both futuristic and retrospective impulses here. The historical moment recalled is melded with a projection of a fictive system dominated by authoritarian forces--a widespread assumption in versions of the future found in science fiction.

⁴⁶ Jerome Charyn, The Tar Baby (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1973), p.9. All further references to this work appear in the text.

⁴⁷ Joel Chandler Harris, Uncle Remus and his Legends of the Old Plantation (London: David Bogue, 1881), p.6.

⁴⁸ David Pears, Wittgenstein (London: Fontana-Collins, 1971), p.13.

⁴⁹ Benno is described as being "on the periphery of the Famed Vienna Circle of Philosophers..."(p.16).

Given the accumulation of reference, it may not be too speculative to suggest that this is an obscure pointer to Friedrich Waismann who met Wittgenstein in 1927. However this note is precisely indicative of the kind of "scholarship" parodied in the novel.

⁵⁰ David Pole, The Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein (London: Athlone Press, 1963), p.2.

⁵¹ Margaret's narration, then, serves a function comparable, in some respects, to Dilsey's in Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury.

Conclusion: Versions of the Jewish Experience

In the cultural debate of Jewish-American consciousness in the 1960's and 1970's there are a number of clear tendencies. There is, for example, a persistent and relatively simplistic view that a distinct ethnic literature can no longer be identified. The processes of assimilation and acculturation are either complete or virtually so. That view seems to be the guiding principle behind, for example, Allen Guttman's projection of the future of a distinct Jewish-American literature:

Paradoxically the survival in America of a significant and identifiably Jewish literature depends upon the unlikely conversion to Judaism of a stiff-necked, intractable, irreverent, attractive generation that no longer chooses to be chosen.¹

That widely held view, often deriving from orthodox religious belief, assumes that a loss of religious faith is accompanied by a parallel alienation from Jewish concerns. It assumes that Jewish consciousness can be defined only in a reaffirmation of traditional values.

Cynthia Ozick, working from similar assumptions, proposes and identifies a re-invigoration of Jewish-American culture. In an obscure but passionate statement, "America: Toward Yavneh,"² she argues that a failure to identify with specific Jewish issues leads to aridity and sterility. From that position, citing Norma Rosen and Hortense Calisher as examples of her case, she has worked toward a fiction based on a synthesis of Jewish and American sensibilities, going so far as to imagine the evolution of a Jewish-American language or a vaguely realised New-Yiddish. Her preoccupation with a Jewish language is explicitly stated in the preface to Bloodshed and Three Novellas: "It occurs to me that if only I had been able to write "Usurpation" in a Jewish language--Hebrew or Yiddish...--it would have been understood instantly."³ Neither Ozick's fiction, nor her critical writing, indicates

the collapse of Jewish-American culture.

Alvin Rosenfeld, with greater clarity, identifies a comparable phenomenon in a style that he describes as a mixture of the literary and urban Jewish idiom.⁴ He finds this particularly apparent in Saul Bellow's fiction. The radical implication of Rosenfeld's argument is that the Jewish content may be seen as a stylistic manifestation, a characteristic tone of voice rather than a commitment to particular Jewish themes.

There are further explicit moments of Jewish affirmation in, for example, the fictions of Hugh Nissenson or Robert Kotlowitz. Their procedure is less obscurely concerned with the construction of a rather nebulous "language." For them, Jewish identification is an act of direct retrospection, a procedure they share with the Jerome Charyn of Once Upon a Droschky, Chaim Potok, the Malamud of The Assistant and many others. The retrospective act takes Kotlowitz into the landscape of Isaac Singer and his title, Somewhere Else, is an explicit expression of historical intention. His "other place" is the location of geographical and historical community: "What else is there to say about these Polish Jews? They thought they would go on forever in their small town."⁵ The intention is comparable to Nissenson's in "The American" although he focuses on the more recent immigrant experience: "Hester Street, number 225. The house where my cousin Shulim and his parents lived has long since been torn down."⁶ With those procedures, Jewish sensibility becomes an act of retrospective identification, much like Daniel Bell's position: "For me, therefore, to be a Jew is to be part of a community woven by memory...."⁷

There are related, but alternative, sources of identification. At least part of Chaim Potok's sense of Jewishness derives from a belief in, and commitment to, the rational logic and justice he sees as implicit in religious practice and faith:

I would rather live in what I take to be a meaningful world and be staggered by moments of apparent absurdity than in an absurd

world and be troubled by instances of meaning. I would rather try to discover some light in the patches of darkness than extend the darkness to wherever there is no light.

The notion that the universe is intrinsically meaningful is, for me, a provisional absolute.⁸

In Hortense Calisher's The New Yorkers there is a comparable, if more fragile, expression of continuity with the idea of order and Jewish justice:

He wanted to judge--yes, in the courts, and yes, in the highest one. And he wanted to do it so that in those far, ancestral courts or heavens which even Jews like him--third or fourth generation assimilated reform Jews--still listened to, he might be judged.⁹ ..

These positions, and those discussed throughout this thesis, make it clear that it is too simplistic to speak of the eradication of Jewish-American literature. The evidence of the persistence of a related sensibility is pervasive. Critical assertions periodically announce the death of the Jewish novel but, like the more general discussions of the death of the novel, they prematurely mourn or celebrate the funeral. The relevant periodical literature is further proof of the range and depth of the preoccupation with the relationship between Jewish, American and contemporary identity.

In 1961, two symposia established the perimeters of the debate.¹⁰ In Commentary, the younger intellectuals tended to express a largely alienated view. Barbara Probst Solomon evoked a paradox that was to run through many of the statements: "I feel like a Jew, but I cannot act like a Jew."¹¹ In Judaism, the symposium was essentially a re-affirmation of unqualified commitment. However, both sets of discussions implicitly realised the need to clarify, identify and to relate Jewish consciousness to the contemporary American environment. That need and that activity

continue to occupy the Jewish-American literary community and is, clearly, further direct evidence of the persistence of a conscious Jewish element in the current literary and cultural situation.¹²

There is, then, considerable evidence, not least in the preceding chapters, to indicate that a discernible Jewish-American culture continues to exist. There is also, and the same evidence applies, a distinct indication that this culture is neither single nor simple. There is no longer a representative version of the Jewish-American community expressed in literary form. In the 1960's and 1970's, out of the complex synthesis of pressures identified throughout this thesis, a wide spectrum of possibilities has emerged. Versions of the Jewish-American experience, not a single coherent portrait, are apparent. In the fluid complexity of the cultural situation, there is a sense in which the Jew in these novels is invented and repeatedly re-invented; no easy social model is available, nor is there an identifiable set of archetypal characteristics.

In the early years of this century it was possible to identify a few novels that seemed to represent the central characteristics of the community experience. It is obviously an over-simplification to talk of a single novel as representative, but there is a sense in which Abraham Cahan's The Rise of David Levinsky (1917) reflects the essence of a widely felt and widely expressed community experience.¹³ Dan Vogel has argued that Cahan's novel

formulated the first two archetypal characteristics of American-Jewish literature: the theme of the consequences of the collision of old world Orthodoxy with new world materialistic emancipation, and the anti-hero as the central character of this drama.¹⁴

That may be overstating the case. However, Vogel is correct to identify the centrality of that novel in its capacity to represent a mainstream experience in the transformation of the community.

That such a representative novel is no longer identifiable is an inevitable consequence of dispersal and diversification. An aspect of that process is identified by Norman Podhoretz, the movement of Jewish intellectuals into the centre of cultural life: "One of the longest journeys in the world is the journey from Brooklyn to Manhattan--or at least certain neighbourhoods in Brooklyn to certain parts of Manhattan."¹⁵ In short, the Jewish-American community has been massively transformed economically, geographically, politically and culturally until its visibility as a separate ethnic unit has become problematic. There is no single representative novel or stance because there is no single community or convenient archetype through which a collective experience can be expressed.

The nascence of Jewish-American literature, its emergence into maturity from regional immaturity, is a product of diversification. There is nothing, of course, to suggest that this is an overnight or sudden process but, from 1960, the maturity of this literature has become visible. No single model offers a representative vision and this is, in itself, evidence of maturity; no single version of the Jewish experience can sound an authentically representative note. The emphasis in the preceding chapters is, therefore, on versions of the Jewish-American experience, the variety and diversity of responses to the situation of being simultaneously Jewish, American and a contemporary man.

While the preceding chapters are, on one level, expressions of this diversity, they also illustrate a clear sense of continuity with the past and common characteristics. The situation of the American Jew in the contemporary world is interpreted and re-interpreted. The notion of what constitutes "American," and what constitutes "contemporary" is repeatedly modified against notions of "Judaism." Despite the absence of a single, clear pattern, it is possible to identify a persistent sense of Jewish identity that serves to distinguish the category of Jewish-American literature. Transformation of community does not obscure a sense of shared consciousness.

Nathan Glazer and other sociologists have traced the forces that have transformed the community and that is a well-documented area of continuing research. Some of the sociological trends are directly visible in the fiction of this period. Bellow's Humboldt's Gift, a considerable portion of Leslie Fiedler's fiction, and Wallace Markfield's To An Early Grave, all directly reflect the emergence of the Jewish intellectual into the mainstream of American cultural life. They also reveal the troubled uneasiness that accompanies that process. Philip Roth's The Breast with its curious "prequel," The Professor of Desire, responds to a similar phenomenon: the Jewish contribution to, and intimate relationship with, the study of literature.

A major change is the suburbanisation of the community and its prosperity and this is satirised in Bruce Jay Friedman's Stern and Roth's Goodbye Columbus. It is also an oblique undercurrent in Charyn's fable Eisenhower, My Eisenhower. Saul Bellow emphasised the impact of suburbanisation and prosperity in his review of Goodbye Columbus:

For in the past what could money buy that can compare with the houses, the sinks, the garbage disposals, the Jags, the minks, the plastic surgery.... To what can we compare this change? Nothing like it has ever hit the world; nothing in history has so quickly and radically transformed any group of Jews.¹⁶

In The Immigrant Jews of New York, Irving Howe has traced the decline of Jewish radicalism in America and that loss of faith permeates Fiedler's work. It also supplies the comic momentum behind Wallace Markfield's Teitelbaum's Window. The innocence of Mike Gold's Jews Without Money has evaporated in the complex air of change.

A vast number of articles have accumulated on the role of Jews in popular culture and comedy.¹⁷ These discussions have tended to focus around the development of Hollywood and the style of contemporary humour. Markfield uses the image of Lenny Bruce in You Could Live if They Let You,

and Bellow's play The Last Analysis occupies the same ground. The tone of voice in Portnoy's Complaint also clearly owes something to Jewish comic narration. Throughout the period this literature has tended to raise the status of comedy and to emphasise its capacity to become a sharp moral weapon. Lenny Bruce, Mort Sahl et al. have been seen as important figures in the cultural environment, and Bellow clearly responds to that situation in the assertion, made in The Last Analysis, that "Farce follows horror into darkness."¹⁸

The impact of the establishment of the State of Israel is also apparent throughout the periodical literature and, if not explicitly as in Chaim Potok, at least as an undercurrent in the fiction. It is a political fact to which American Jews have felt the need to respond in one way or another. It has, for example, broken the silence of Henry Roth: "Here was regeneration, tenable, feasible, rational--not in the direction of grandfather's medieval orthodoxy, but in the direction of a renascent Judaism, a new state."¹⁹ It is another of those factors of change that have acted to transform Jewish-American culture.

Above all, the experience that most haunts the sensibility of the community is the holocaust. That experience creates a set of moral imperatives that impose obligations on the comfortable and successful author. Markfield, as early as 1946, referred to "a dream of death" that "would be with him always...."²⁰ That "dream" persists explicitly in Wallant's The Pawnbroker or Potok's In the Beginning. Implicitly it permeates Cynthia Ozick's consciousness in "Bloodshed." The subject remains potent and it is no easy matter to slough off that cultural memory.²¹

In short, a great deal has happened since Abraham Cahan's The Rise of David Levinsky, and those events and trends have led not to the disintegration of Jewish-American consciousness but to its transformation and diversification. Maturity often brings complications and this literature, in its maturity, has formed many varied shapes.

The theme of, and the justification for, this thesis has been the examination of that mature diversification and the identifiable persistence of Jewish consciousness within that diversification. Previous critical studies have tended to fix myopically on Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud and the earlier novels of Philip Roth with the result that a critical rigidity of perspective has obscured the rich multiplicity of possibilities that emerge out of the synthesis of Jewish, American and contemporary sensibilities.

This study establishes a framework for further discussions that might respond to the persistent notions of Judaism within a context of variety and flexibility. The authors studied in depth here seem to indicate the current perimeters of creative enterprise in this field. Leslie Fiedler's fiction exhibits an extensive involvement with the historical and cultural experience of the Jewish intellectual in the post-war world. He traces shifts and developments in that experience and, in recent fiction, projects the issues arising into the far future. Simultaneously, he exhibits a responsiveness to the critical debates on the shape of fiction, most apparently examining the kind of issues discussed by Robert Alter in Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre. In these endeavours, he moves into the mainstream of contemporary literary concern engaging with what Alter calls

the kind of novel that expresses its seriousness through playfulness, that is acutely aware of itself as a mere structure of words even as it tries to discover ways of going beyond words to the experiences words seek to indicate.²²

Edward Wallant's fiction is vital to this discussion, and to a coherent perspective on the Jewish-American novel, because of the shift in tone and emphasis that occurred in Wallant's career. The early novels affirmed regenerative elements in Jewish sensibility, while the later novels shared that sense of affirmation but employed essentially comic

procedures. That approach to profound spiritual issues emerged as a major characteristic of this literature in the period.²³ Contrasting urban mechanisation with a persistent spiritual energy, Wallant re-invented the possibility of mystic transformation as ambiguous and often comic paradox.²⁴ The comedy served to enforce, not undermine, a profound seriousness at the root of Wallant's work, and that synthesis of the spiritual and the comic is both a recurrent element in Jewish-American fiction and an appropriate mode of perceiving religious issues in the contemporary environment.²⁵

At the other end of the spectrum of Jewish affirmation, Chaim Potok created ethical religious fictions that minimised two contemporary impulses: the erosion of orthodox faith and the experimental approach to literary form. He proposed a profound reconciliation between the contemporary world and Jewish and literary traditionalism. While his approach may be said to be simplistic, that act of reconciliation finds further expression in the more sophisticated work of Cynthia Ozick, Hugh Nissenson or Norma Rosen. They, like Potok, establish an affirmative version of Jewish sensibility and continuity.²⁶ Rosen's Joy to Levine! moves the protagonist toward a sense of resolution, out of a crisis of identity: "A Jew not a Jew, with a longing to be a Jew and not a Jew."²⁷ Rosen's character finds what Potok's characters always possess, a place in the world and a resolution of uncertainty. Potok's work thus signals one direction in the Jewish-American novel and, in contrast to Wallant's work, it proposes a largely rational rather than mystic version of Judaism. Between the two, versions of the Jewish-American experience are visible, and parameters of fictive possibility are defined.

The extensive analysis of Jerome Charyn's fiction concludes this discussion for a number of reasons. The range of his work embodies a widespread tendency to manipulate and experiment with the concepts of Jewish-American contemporary identity that is a primary theme of this thesis, and his inventive exuberance signals the momentum of the future.

His work, with that of Philip Roth's is the least finished, the most open-ended of the authors discussed here. He is in the process of producing volume after volume of related fiction that may prove to be the first major American urban epic.²⁸ That endeavour may achieve what John Dos Passos attempted in USA, a panoramic vision of American culture.

Charyn's work is unfinished and unpredictable and it seems appropriate to allow it to conclude an argument that is of necessity in itself unfinished. There cannot be a neat and orderly conclusion because this thesis defines those elements from which a new Jewish-American literature is emerging. The culture changes as we seek to describe it, and our description is part of the process of that change. The newness of this literature is its creative instability, its tendency to adopt new shapes and to synthesise diverse cultural experiences into new forms. A critical fiction, in the style perhaps of Ihab Hassan, would end in mid-sentence reflecting the unfinished nature of our business. I conclude with an awareness of being, if not in mid-sentence, about half-way through a paragraph.

Notes

- ¹ Allen Guttman, The Jewish Writer in America: Assimilation and the Crisis of Identity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.227.
- ² Cynthia Ozick, "America: Toward Yavneh," Judaism, 19, No.3 (Summer 1970), pp.264-282. The term Yavneh refers to the achievement of the condition of Zion in exile.
- ³ Cynthia Ozick, Bloodshed and Three Novellas (London: Secker and Warburg, 1976), p.11.
- ⁴ Alvin Rosenfeld, "Inventing the Jews: Notes on Jewish Autobiography," Midstream, xxi, No.4 (April 1975), pp.54-67.
- ⁵ Robert Kotlowitz, Somewhere Else (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973), p.43.
- ⁶ Hugh Nissenson, "The American," in The American Judaism Reader, ed. Paul Kersh (London, New York, Toronto: Abelard - Schuman, 1967), p.40
- ⁷ Daniel Bell, "Reflections on Jewish Identity," Commentary, 31, No.6 (June 1961), p.474.
- ⁸ Chaim Potok, in The Condition of Jewish Belief: A Symposium Compiled by the Editors of "Commentary" Magazine (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p.178.
- ⁹ Hortense Calisher, The New Yorkers (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), p.9.
- ¹⁰ "Jewishness and the Younger Intellectuals: A Symposium," Commentary, 31, No.4 (April 1961), pp.306-359.
 "My Jewish Affirmation - A Symposium," Judaism, 10, No.4 (Fall 1961), pp.291-352.
- ¹¹ That feeling supplies the vital tension in her novel The Beat of Life (London: Andre Deutsch, 1961). Like Philip Roth and Fiedler, but with greater tragic intensity, she focuses on the nagging sense of guilt felt by American Jews confronting the implications of the Jewish past. She asks the recurrent

question: "how do we get off so easily? Why do we call ourselves Jews?"p.110

¹² The following are a selection of the most significant debates:

"The Meaning of Galut in America Today: A Symposium," Midstream, ix, No.1 (March 1963), pp.3-45. This discussion considered the issue of exile (galut or golus) as a paradox in view of the existence of Israel. Rose Halprin argued that "The concept of galut as involuntary exile is...no longer valid" (p.24). In a dissenting view, Marion Magid saw golus as a spiritual rather than a national concept: "I always knew what golus meant - it was a condition of the soul..."(p.29). Theodore Solotaroff identified a new galut as a choice of isolation and, in a thinly disguised attack on the "Commentary" symposium, Marie Syrkin argued that the younger intellectuals are "alienated from their Jewish antecedents more than from their American environment"(p.45).

In 1974, a symposium suggested that there was an identifiable tendency to focus Jewish consciousness around the State of Israel. "Where Do I Stand Now - A Symposium," Judaism, 23, No.4 (Fall 1974), pp.389-466.

The bicentenary offered Judaism another occasion for cultural introspection. "American Jewry: A Bicentennial Survey," Judaism, 25, No.3 (Summer 1976). The entire edition was given over to a survey of the condition of American Jewish life and culture, and the issue of identity was again central to the debate.

¹³ Cahan was editor of the Yiddish newspaper, The Daily Forward. Letters to that paper repeatedly raised issues that Cahan integrated into his fiction. A selection of those letters may be found in Portal to America: The Lower East Side, 1870-1925, ed. Allon Schoener (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1967).

¹⁴ Dan Vogel, "Cahan's Rise of David Levinsky: Archetype of American Jewish Fiction," Judaism, 22, No.3 (Summer 1973), pp.278-279.

¹⁵ Podhoretz, Making It, p.3.

¹⁶ Saul Bellow, "The Swamp of Prosperity," Commentary, 28, No.4 (July 1959), pp.78-79.

¹⁷ The following are among recent discussions of that theme:

Norman Friedman, "Hollywood, The Jewish Experience, and Popular Culture," Judaism, 19, No.4 (Fall 1970), pp.482-487.

Norman Friedman, "Jewish Popular Culture in Contemporary America," Judaism, 24, No.3 (Summer 1975), pp.263-277.

Owen Rachleff, "Jewish Comics," Midstream, xxii, No.4 (April 1976), pp.51-56.

Pearl Bell, "Philip Roth: Sonny Boy or Lenny Bruce," Commentary, 64, No.5 (November 1977), pp.60-63.

An important book in this context is Lenny Bruce's How to Talk Dirty and Influence People (Chicago: Playboy Press, 1972).

There is also a book-length study of the subject: Sig Altman, The Comic Image of The Jew: Explorations of a Pop Culture Phenomenon (Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1971).

¹⁸ Saul Bellow, The Last Analysis (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), p.96.

¹⁹ Henry Roth, "Kaddish," Midstream, xxiii, No.1 (January 1977), p.55.

²⁰ Markfield, "Notes on the Working Day," p.463.

²¹ The potency of that memory can be measured by the responses to the television programme Holocaust, and by reference to "Jewish Values in the Post-Holocaust Future: A Symposium," Judaism, 16, No.3 (Summer 1967), pp.266-299.

²² Robert Alter, Partial Magic, p.ix.

²³ The comedy of religious sensibility that enforces rather than undermines

spiritual perspectives is not limited to Jewish fiction in America. It is found in Muriel Spark's fiction in England and in the work of Peter De Vries in America. That kind of comedy is found explicitly in John Updike's A Month of Sundays and implicitly throughout his work, a point that emerged in Updike's lecture on The Coup, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 20 March 1979.

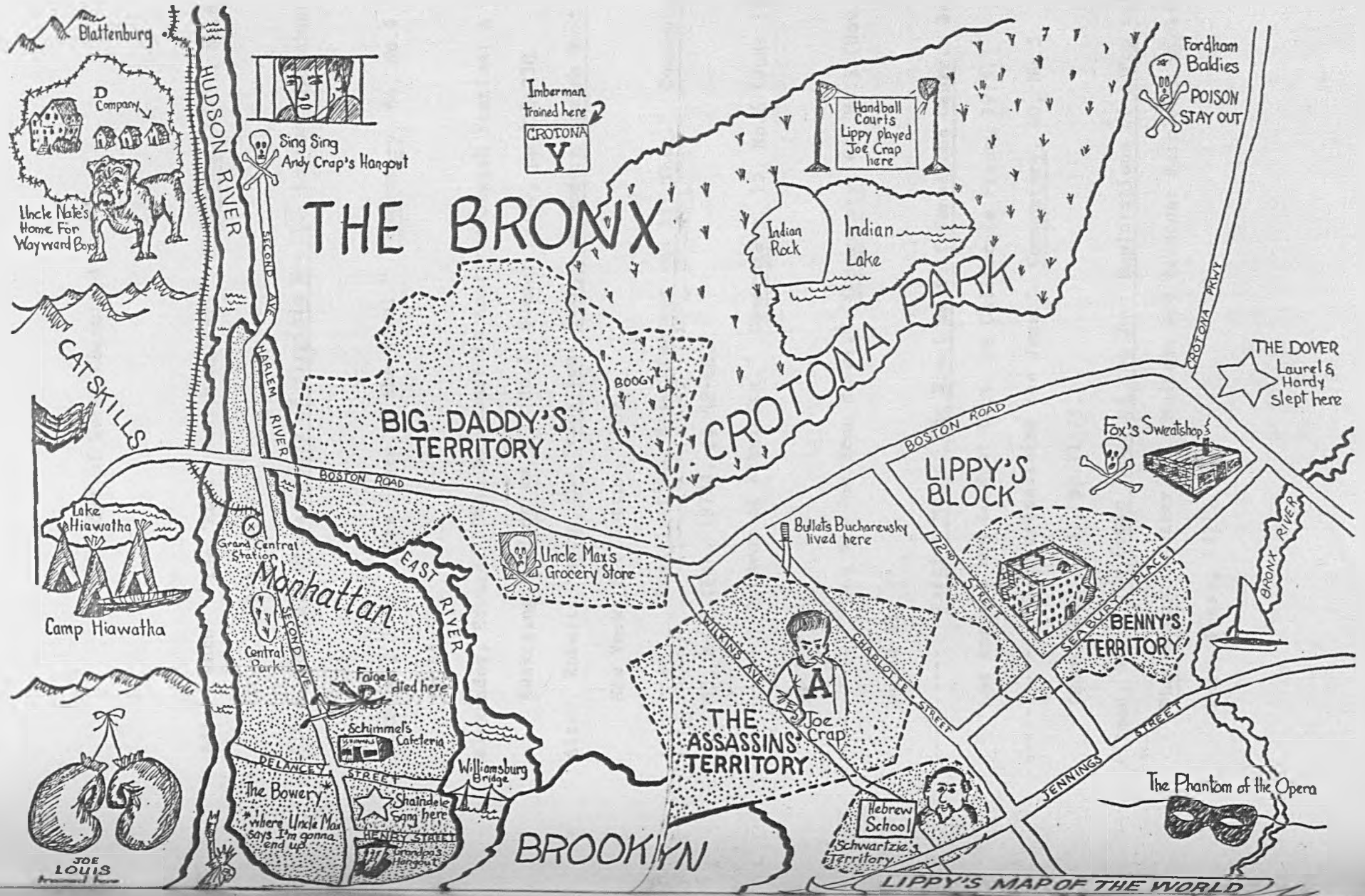
²⁴ That kind of paradox is apparent throughout the fiction of Jay Neugeboren, and is most explicitly formulated in Sam's Legacy (1973). The figure of the gambler under simultaneous pressure from love and debts is reminiscent of Norman Moonbloom. Like Moonbloom, Sam's function is metaphorical; his role as fugitive reveals the failure of retreat. Like Moonbloom, he cannot avoid the pressure of love.

²⁵ Richard Fein makes a similar point in "Homage to Edward Lewis Wallant," Midstream, xv, No.5 (May 1969), pp.70-75: "In this century the Jew as savior can only be comic or ironic..."(p.73).

²⁶ Ruth Wisse identifies this characteristic in Ozick, Rosen and Nissenson in "American Jewish Writing, Act II," Commentary, 61, No.6 (June 1976), pp.40-45. She argues that a new kind of affirmative Jewish-American novel is becoming visible, and it attempts "to draw directly from Jewish sources and out of Jewish culture an image of an alternative civilization"(p.41).

²⁷ Norma Stahl Rosen, Joy to Levine! (London: Michael Joseph, 1962), p.116.

²⁸ There are four volumes that, like Friedman's The Dick, exploit the metaphorical possibilities of the detective in the urban environment: Blue Eyes (1975), The Education of Patrick Silver (1976), Marilyn the Wild (1976), Secret Isaac (1978).



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