

Within the pluralistic American-Jewish society we encounter an extra-ordinarily wide range of attitudes towards Judaism. Their bearing upon the writings of contemporary Jewish novelists is examined in this essay by Dr. Dan Vogel, Professor of English and Dean of Stern College for Women. The author is a member of our Editorial Board and contributed "Koheleth and the Modern Temper" to the Fall 1959 issue of TRADITION.

THE MODERN NOVEL — MIRROR OF THE AMERICAN-JEWISH MIND

Aside from considerations of story, characterization, and style, a novel is a document of its times. It records not only the actions and reactions of its characters, but it reflects as well the thinking, the aspirations, and the mood of the author and of the society in which it is rooted.

The American Jewish novel is the offspring of the marriage of the Jewish community with American society, and, as in every marriage, each partner comes with his own unique cumulative consciousness. The American society has long forgotten its persecuted origins, and now proudly lives according to its self-reliant pragmatic power. It is the product of the successful conquests of the frontier, wherever that frontier may have been found — on the western plains or in Wall Street. Its untrammelled prosperity has given her people a mythology that has been recorded by motion picture, popular song, and television — a mythology of happy endings, conspicuous wealth, fashionable conduct, and the certainty that Love Conquers All.

The psyche of the Jewish community is fashioned by the clash five decades ago of an Eastern European insulated life with the expansive, free-thinking New World; by a generation

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of the 1930's lost for a long time to Jewish identity; by the smug satisfaction of overcoming its uniqueness and of assimilating with its American surroundings; and, lastly, by the shock of the destruction of 6,000,000 Jews in Europe. This, then, is the climate in which recent American-Jewish literature has been written.

George Clay (*Reporter*, CXXXIX [1957], 43) pointed out that the authors of recent fiction in this genre "involve their characters . . . indiscriminately in problems and experiences that are Jewish and those that are not Jewish at all. In fact, it is arguable that the Jew — not as victim or monster or clown, but quite simply, as representative American — has finally arrived." No doubt this assertion is true, but only to an extent. Love, success, money, identity, which are the themes of modern American fiction, are certainly not limited to a particular group. Yet it is additionally true that, unlike any other compendium of characters and happenings, the American Jewish novel cannot escape putting the authority of Judaism on trial.

Each of the five authors I shall discuss (Michael Blankfort, Herman Wouk, Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth, and Jerome Weidman) contains the dual cultural legacy of Americanism and Judaism. As individuals with insight, they are able to feel and to gauge the experience of their Jewish brethren. Their books (*The Strong Hand*, *Marjorie Morningstar*, *The Magic Barrel*, *Goodbye, Columbus*, and *The Enemy Camp*) represent the complexity of American-Jewish life with their views ranging from complete acceptance of Jewish authority to rebellion not only against authority, but against identity with things Jewish.

The authoritative yoke of Judaism can be accepted in the first instance by pure faith — an unalterable conviction in the truth and legality of Judaism. To one so convinced, the Sinaitic revelation was purposefully miraculous and eternal in its influence, and all things flow from this inviolable contract between God and every Jewish generation. In Poland, in Hungary, in the Russian Pale, without the education or opportunity to be confronted with comparisons, a Jew did not find it difficult to accept totally the legal authority of Judaism. In America, how-

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ever, such an acceptance is a free choice of values from among other values and distractions. What happens in America when a man accepts the strong hand of the complete authority of Orthodox Judaism is the burden of Michael Blankfort's story.

It is the story of Rabbi Leo Berdick who refused to marry Katy Waterman because she was the *agunah* of a World War II pilot presumed dead. Blankfort relates the delicately burgeoning love of this young Yeshiva University-trained rabbi and a woman-of-the-world, whose Jewishness is seemingly past and forgotten. He describes the beauty of the recognition that they are in love, the desperation of their futile attempts to find a way out from under the yoke of the law of the *agunah*, the sorrow of the rabbi's father and of his talmudic master when they cannot discover cause for a dispensation, and the agony of the ultimate and irrevocable separation. It is a strong ending, not because of death or other *deus ex machina*, but because of a choice made by two American-made figures in the story. Thus Blankfort rejected the major myths of America: Love does not conquer all, and virtue is not requited by a happy ending. There are no dispensations, there is no escape, there is no compensation. Blankfort does not even allow his reader to hope that the love-bereft rabbi shall appear ever after to his flock in the stock role of a Pagliacci, this time in a pulpit; no, he leaves the rabbinate to devote himself to Talmudic study. This is the law; so be it.

Yet Blankfort does not delineate his rabbi as a martyr: it hurts, this law of the *agunah*, and the rabbi cannot fully and realistically accept its application to modern times, though he is committed to obeying it. Nevertheless, he counsels his friend who is novelizing his love story,

Try to understand that he [the rabbi] hasn't given up. Rather, he's trying with all his heart and soul to learn all he can from his teachers . . . Some day he may find the courage of his ancestors to change what needs to be changed — to pour old good wine in new bottles. Who knows but one day the old Sanhedrin, the Council of Seventy, may be reconstituted with the authority to study anew the workings of our legal code.

Until then, however, painful as it may be, the strong hand of the Law rests heavily and conclusively upon him.

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As if this challenge of the superficial American mythology were not enough, Blankfort set his novel in the very centers of preachment of these myths: a Hollywood movie studio, the home of avant-garde "free-thinking" pinkos, the rich sophisticated area of Central Park West, the gaudy facade of the magazine business. Over against these we are given glimpses of a quiet Williamsburg in Brooklyn, the peaceful home of the scholarly Berdicks, and the sanctified precincts of a synagogue on Kol Nidre night. It is the latter world which emerges victorious, and each character who enters it either deepens his Jewishness or rediscovers it.

Now, unlike a problem of conversion or intermarriage, which are popularly identifiable as catastrophic, the law of the *agunah* is nowadays frequently dismissed as an ancient and obscure law, seemingly outmoded in this day and age and country. Yet it is this law which Michael Blankfort chose to symbolize a greater theme and a greater conflict. *The Strong Hand*, then, reveals that, in America, Jews can, if they so wish, order their lives in conformity with Jewish authority. People like Rabbi Leo Berdick do exist, and their minority status does not decree their passing from the American scene. They are ready to have their lives revolve around laws that are extensions of the cardinal points of their faith: there is one God, Whose prophet was Moses, and these are His laws. And into His hands they commend their lives, their liberty of conduct, and their pursuit of happiness.

The second mode of acceptance of the authority of Judaism is fashioned by the social environment of the individual Jew. Again, in Eastern Europe, the young Jew beset by theological or religious doubts was forced into conformity by the external pressure of the ghettoed, single-practice society around him. The attraction of conformity was for him more powerful than the acceptance of legality. But in the diversified society of America, the young Jew could choose not to conform to his ancient faith, for around him were many Jews who no longer followed, and many non-Jews who practiced a fashionable emancipation from prejudice. Herman Wouk in *Marjorie Morningstar* recounts

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the conflict of competing acceptances and the arrival at a value-judgment by a young, vibrant American Jewish girl.

What makes this a Jewish novel? Certainly, the Jews in *Marjorie Morningstar* are much closer than those in *The Strong Hand* to the "representative American," as George Clay had found him. In this book, there is no rabbi who may be bothered by a professional as well as a spiritual commitment; there is no problem of Talmudic interpretation of an ancient regulation. Yet there are uniquenesses that set this novel apart.

There is, first, the wholesome atmosphere of a middle-class Jewish home conditioned by Marjorie's parents' European heritage. However, it is a world not of Judaism, but of being Jewish — the final legacy of the Jewishly uneducated whose conduct is based on memory, not on law. Wouk seems genuinely aggrieved that American Jewry descended this low. Therefore, it seems to me, he describes the *Seder* as a noisome routine and the bar-mitzvah party as a rite of gluttony. The emphasis of Judaism has been misplaced, and as a result Marjorie travels a path of thorns and nettles.

The second uniqueness is the way Wouk relates the downfall of Marjorie as a moral character. The instrument of her moral demise is the apostate spokesman of American pseudo-enlightenment, Noel Airman. Paradoxically, his tirades against conformity include tirades against Marjorie's orthodox Jewish non-conformity in refusing to eat *chazir* and in protecting her chastity.

Sporadically throughout the novel, Wouk threads in the motif of *kashrut* until it becomes quite obvious that this is the symbol of Marjorie's fight against the meretricious offerings of the American way of life. Early in the novel she refuses Chinese food because she fears it contains pork; later she carefully scrapes the bacon off the eggs she eats; finally, as yet another graduated step in the developing symbolic battle, she eats lobster in a restaurant, urged on by Noel Airman, who convinces her that "it's the twentieth century" and therefore acceptable.

Wouk spends four pages in a modern American realistic novel describing how a young Jewish girl in the City of New York came to eat her first lobster. Certainly, this act is inherently

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more important than the superficial gesture. It is the first break, against which the Sages continually warned, for the first deviation leads to more serious ones. Noel Airman, perceptive though diabolical, understands what's involved: When Marjorie shows her dislike of what she has eaten, Noel says, "Well, ham's the symbol, the universal joke about Jews. Pride makes you take a stand on that point." Then Marjorie, impatient with the shelled delicacy, remarks, "I quit. I'll order ham next time."

This is but stage one. Eating of *tarfut*, though reprehensible from a religious point of view is not immoral. Immorality is the next stage of regression. In as purely a symbolic sequence as Wouk can make a realistic seduction scene, Marjorie lies with Noel. After the act, which is, by the way, unpleasant, Marjorie reaches out to light the bedlamp, knocks over a drinking glass, and murmurs, "We're supposed to break a glass, aren't we. Only you should have done it with your heel, I guess." The parody of *chuppah-and-kiddushin* is obvious and tragic, and the chapter closes with another symbol — it so happens that this night there was a lunar eclipse, marking Marjorie Morningstar's darkest moment.

In his antiseptically scientific way, Kurt Lewin has described the enemy within the American Jewish breast: "It is recognized . . . that the members of the lower social strata tend to accept the fashions, values, and ideals of the higher strata. In the case of the [socially] underprivileged group it means that their opinions about themselves are greatly influenced by the low esteem the majority has for them" (*Resolving Social Conflicts*, p. 194). Marjorie succumbs to this inner hunger for social acceptance at whatever cost and thus Herman Wouk metamorphosed this character from a specific fictional figure into a symbol of a Jewish generation in America. It is the generation that fled from its familial morality, from its traditional values, from its Jewish identity and became so wrapped up in its ego-centric race to become like every other American, that it took the death of 6,000,000 Jews to remind them of their ultimate origins and purposes. Thus, Wouk projected his symbol-heroine onto the world-stage of Jewish history in the 1930's. He has her go to Europe to find Noel, but she is diverted by meeting a

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a man involved in clandestine operations to save Jews from the Nazis. The enormity of what is going on against her people finally strikes her, and she regains her identity. She goes home to marry peacefully and Jewishly.

But she realizes her sin only as a result of the death of others, and this motif runs through the novel: Marjorie's life is intertwined with death and Death is her Teacher. It starts small and quietly. We are told that her father, Mr. Morgenstern, joins a Conservative temple for social reasons, but says his *Yahrzeit kaddish* in "a small old orthodox synagogue on a side street, feeling perhaps that this was the only form of worship that really counted either with God or with his father's ghost." The horrific Teacher rises up strikingly in South Wind Camp, as Marjorie and Noel are going across the campus to find a spot for fornication and meet on the way the corpse of her beloved Uncle Samson-Aaron, who had come there to watch over her; and later she realizes "that the death of Samson-Aaron had stopped her from having an affair with Noel Airman; and that nothing else in the world could have stopped it."

That, however, was not enough. It took the death of millions in Europe to redirect this pitiful young Jewess, and her re-identification with Jewish life meant joining a Jewish organization, seeing new meaning in old rituals, and marrying a solid representative of the orthodox Jewish bourgeoisie. Yet, in order to strengthen her rediscovered religiosity, the Teacher visited upon her the death of her brother in Okinawa, and of a "baby boy of hers, the second, that had choked to death in its crib at the age of two months, the doctors never figured out why." Wouk, it seems to me, invokes the inescapable tragedy of the Jewish people on a grand scale: It took not only the death of loved ones, but of one half the people to teach and save the other half, the lost Jewish generation in America.

Bernard Malamud's stories in *The Magic Barrel* portray Jews who did not accept the legal authority of Sinai, whose New York City existence did not constitute a ghetto, and whose proximity to the Gentile world precluded a demand for conformity to Jewish practice. Yet these people are depicted as having accepted the authority of the ancient people by reason of the

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inexorable fact of history and destiny. They saw nothing in American society that forced them to come to terms on whatever was long ago laid down as their characteristic fate. The tragic history of movement and martyrdom, of pain and oppression, is never far from their consciousness. And, therefore, they act with stoic dignity, with compassion, and with tragic bearing. Only one of Malamud's Jewish characters tries to escape, but at the end of his story he discovers what all of Malamud's other Jews knew all along: to escape is impossible. The decision not to try to escape in this land of free movement is a choice of existence, and one gets the idea that these poor people are rich in heart because they decided to remain Jews.

It is interesting to compare Malamud's approach with Philip Roth's in *Goodbye, Columbus*. In both, there is no obvious Jewish conflict. There is no Talmudic law that is the centrifugal force of the story; there is no single symbolic act, like the eating of *chazir*, that is uniquely anti-traditional. Saturday is like any other day, the daily grind is like that of anyone else, the striving to rise above the dust comparable to the attempt of any other group. Both authors have their characters speak American English with Yiddish inflection, syntax, and imagery. Yet Malamud's people breathe the tragic atmosphere of Jewish life and history; Roth's characters are only coincidentally Jewish. Malamud accepts the inescapability of Jews being separate and different; Roth strives mightily to demonstrate that this difference is unreal.

Perhaps the best story to illustrate Malamud's viewpoint is "The Mourners." This brief story tells of Kessler, who lived alone in a tenement flat, and of his landlord Gruber, who is convinced by his janitor to dispossess the dirty old man. But Kessler passively refuses to move. He pays his rent, but the rent is returned, and Gruber begins a campaign of persecution to force him to move. Once Kessler asks Gruber, "What did I do to you? . . . Who hurts a man without reason? Are you Hitler or a Jew?" After some time of threats by the landlord and stoic silence and compromise by Kessler, Gruber in desperation of a thwarted principle has the old man's furniture removed by the City Marshal. Locked out, Kessler sits on the sidewalk

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in the rain until his neighbors break down the door of his erstwhile apartment and put him and furniture together into the bare bedroom. Gruber arrives angry, baffled, frightened in turn, for now Kessler sits on the floor moaning, as if someone were dead. Suddenly, "it struck [Gruber] with a terrible force that the mourner was mourning him: it was *he* who was dead." Then, "after a while, he gazed around the room, it was clean, drenched in daylight and fragrance. Gruber then suffered unbearable remorse for the way he had treated the old man. At last he could stand it no longer. With a cry of shame he tore the sheet off Kessler's bed, and wrapping it around his bulk, sank heavily to the floor and became a mourner."

In this remarkable and unforgettable climax, there are no answers of right or wrong. There is only the weight of tragedy and suffering. The two mourners sit on the ground and the posture of lamentation recalls the sad plight of our history — Job and his comforters, the exiles on the banks of the rivers of Babylon, Treblinka, the Pale, Auschwitz. Suffering is the lot of the Jew and it is ineluctable.

In a much simpler story, Malamud stresses the universality of his basic theme. Henry Levin, in "The Lady of the Lake," changes his name to an unstigmatic Henry Freeman (a free man) and travels to Italy in an obvious attempt to escape his Jewish birth. There he meets a beautiful girl, Isabella del Dongo, of a family in obvious financial decline. Presently, she asks him, "Are you American?" and he answers, "Yes"; then she hesitantly asks, "Are you, perhaps, Jewish?"

Freeman suppressed a groan. Though secretly shocked by the question, it was not, in a way, unexpected. Yet he did not look Jewish, could pass as not — had. So without batting an eyelash, he said, no, he wasn't.

The acquaintance soon develops into a courtship, and at the moment he was about to ask her to marry him, she asks again, "Are you a Jew?" And he answers angrily, "How many no's make never? Why do you persist with such foolish questions?"

Isabella then shows him the tattooed numbers of Buchenwald on her breast and tells him, "I can't marry you. We are Jews.

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My past is meaningful to me. I treasure what I suffered for." Freeman, who hid his Jewishness not because of suffering, but for convenience, is filled with guilt and remorse, but it is too late.

The ending of the story is a turnabout irony and abrupt in the O. Henry manner, but as in O. Henry's stories, the very irony is a comment on the theme of inescapability. The historical authority of the Jew cannot be evaded. It is part of Jewish existence in America, as everywhere, and Malamud has shown it so. It is complex, made of guilt, pity, pride, and suffering, of compassion and knowledge that one is fated to be a Jew.

Thus far we have examined three positive approaches to authority of Judaism in America — acceptance of the Law, acceptance of the social milieu of Jewishness, acceptance of the destiny of the Jew. For Philip Roth, however, the weight of Jewish authority is a yoke that must be shrugged off. *Goodbye, Columbus* is an attempt to portray the Jew as pure, unhindered, duplicated American. Two of his stories obviously represent this intention. "Goodbye, Columbus," the title story, and "Epstein" are tales of teen-age and middle-age promiscuity, sordid stories of what is evidently happening all about us, and these practitioners happen to be Jews. However, neither the conflict of the plot nor the denouement have anything to do with the fact that the chief characters are Jews. The problem is not a Jewish, nor a Jewish-American problem.

In the first story, a Jewish boy and girl conduct a sexual liaison frequently and secretly, but they are found out and break up not because they have violated a Jewish moral law, but because they acted stupidly. At one point in the story, but completely irrelevant to the plot, is a conversation telling the reader that the fashionably amoral young man attends an Orthodox synagogue on the *Yomim Noraim*. If one were to eliminate this entire passage, the story would flow as it did before without a hiatus in the narrative or a change of atmosphere. Similarly, in "Epstein," the man for whom the story is named suffers a heart-attack just when he is about to start an adulterous relationship, but the climactic irony of the tale is not dependent upon his name or ancestry.

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The only theme that can place these stories in the genre of American-Jewish literature is the theme that Judaism in America is a monument to dead ideas, that it has no application to American mores, that it is no brake upon the conduct of Jews in America, and that few modern American Jews pay any true attention to it. I believe that this is actually the case even in those stories where Roth does recognize that the Jew in America is not born with a *tabula rasa*, but has millenia of experience within him. In each of these stories, in less or more obvious ways, the Jewish past confronts the American present, and in no case does the Jewish experience prevail.

In a story called "The Conversion of the Jews," a boy, mistreated by his Talmud Torah rabbi, becomes hysterical, dashes to the roof of the building and threatens suicide unless everyone below — mother, rabbi, firemen with safety nets, all — acknowledge on their knees the basic Christian credo. In order to save the lad, this ritual is enacted: the boy thinking he has won a victory, the others unbelieving in the pronouncement. Now, I cannot believe that Roth divorced himself so totally from Jewish history as to put into the boy's mouth, without some purpose, an abhorrent demand that had caused uncounted Jewish martyrdoms. Nor do I think that Roth is trying to show that Orthodox Judaism, in the person of the rabbi, drives its young to neurotic straits; Roth is too experienced not to know other kinds of rabbis. Furthermore, I do not read the story in any way literally as "The Conversion of the Jews" to another formal faith. Rather it is a story of the conversion of one Jew out of the world of being different into the world of being the same as everyone else. The poor boy could not do less in his immaturity than to use as his lever of escape the most extreme, diametrical opposite to all that was being taught to him. To Roth, then, there is no middle way, no co-existence nor symbiosis within a Jew in the American society.

Two Jews are the protagonist and antagonist of a fine story called "The Defender of the Faith." Again the title of the story is ironical, because the defender of the faith (or at least the most obvious candidate for the title) is hypocritical and egocentric. He uses his ancestry and his Jewish upbringing

as tools to obtain undeserved privileges in the Army, undeserved because it becomes quite evident that he believes in nothing that he claims is his faith. His antagonist is his sergeant, an anti-Jewish war hero, whose initial response to the requests of the trainee is negative. But the shrewd trainee carefully evokes in the sergeant feelings of guilt for siding with the *goyim* against his own blood, for persecuting not only one of his own but one more devout than he, for acting like the murderers of their brethren in Europe. He evokes, too, vague memories of a Jewish boyhood in the Bronx, and the sergeant gives in, until the hypocrisy is so blatant that he turns about and punishes the trainee.

We applaud the sergeant for giving this character his comeuppance, not because the problem has anything to do with Jewishness, but because we are always glad to see the smart “operator” get the same treatment as his fellows. Roth is not being anti-Semitic, for he is not telling a Jewish story. Hypocrisy and back-stabbing are practiced by too many, and this hypocrite happened to be a Jew. In his attempt to align and identify Jews and Americans, Roth drops the truth where it may fall, and if it falls on a Jew, well, the community is American enough to admit it and absorb it with equanimity. One can read the story in such a way that the true defender of the faith is the sergeant, for he defends the American faith — justice and fair play.

“Eli, the Fanatic” is another story of confrontation, this time told in a plot that pits a white protestant Jewish suburban group against a chassidic yeshivah that has moved into its midst. The ultimate target of his group is the removal of the yeshivah; the immediate goal is the elimination from in front of their eyes of the European-dressed young chassid, the yeshivah’s errand-boy, who represents all that they have escaped when they came to the suburbs. Eli Peck, a lawyer living in the town, has undertaken to achieve both goals.

But Eli has his own problems: he has a history of mental breakdown and psychiatric care; he has a wife who is over-psychological and is in addition capitalizing on her advanced state of pregnancy; he has, above all, a sensitive nature. During the course of his visits to the head of the yeshivah, he learns of

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the horrors the young chassid experienced in Europe and of the uneradicable fears the little pupils always have at the surface of their consciousness. He is bathed in guilt. He procrastinates a legal fight, he tries to argue, but his arguing only increases his discomfort. He sends his very best suit of clothes to the errand-boy to induce him to change from his *kaftan* and velvet hat, and the lad accepts it and leaves his old black outfit on Eli's doorstep in return. In an agony of guilt, Eli dons the black suit, and in his mental extremity forces himself to walk in the streets in those places where he will unavoidably be seen. His last stop is the maternity ward to see his son. There his Jewish friend — the instigator of the original legal action against the yeshivah — alerts the interns to this new breakdown of his pal Eli Peck, and poor Eli is carted away.

This is the closest that Philip Roth comes to recognizing the authority of Jewish experience. There is no doubt that Eli's regression is due to a feeling of guilt that he is persecutor of his persecuted people. Nonetheless, the story still lacks the ineffable presence of inevitability. The story is particularized; it is a fictionalization of a sociologist's study of a suburban problem and of a psychologist's case history of a neurotic. Eli Peck does not emerge as a symbol of a Jewish protestant's conversion back to orthodoxy, or to acceptance of the authority of Jewish history. American suburbia has shucked off a weakling.

The ultimate in the process of attempting to drown Jewishness in Americanistic living is the apostasy of Jerome Weidman in *The Enemy Camp*. Certainly he cannot conceive of the authority of Jewish Law, nor of a Jewish social authority. He is unwilling to accept even the modicum of Jewish existence that Philip Roth compromises with. It is not nearly so much a glorification of the great American pursuit of meretricious happiness, or a belief in survival through assimilation, as a document of fear of Jews and Jewishness.

The plot of *The Enemy Camp* revolves around the problem of intermarriage, which is more definable than the problem of *Marjorie Morningstar*, which is built around the pitiful vague grasping of Marjorie for her place in the social sun. In Weid-

man's novel, George Hurst, reared by his Aunt Tessie and sometimes under the influence of Uncle Zisha, desires to marry a very nice and understanding Gentile girl. Reared in his Aunt Tessie's household, George was given but one tenet of Judaism to live by: fear the "goyim" and stay clear of them, for they are in the enemy camp. He is not told why they are in the enemy camp; no history of his people is accorded him, and the fights he has on the East Side do not seem to be seriously racial.

Indeed, one of the ways Weidman's strange attitude toward the Jewish experience in America is discerned is his peculiar portrayal of the lower East Side in the early decades of this century. There is no synagogue mentioned, no *cheder*, no Sabbath, no holy-day, all of which receive mention in the other four fictional documents I have discussed. Weidman has clearly oversimplified, because of his bias, the life of the Jew, so that he could destroy, without too much trouble, the one argument left for clannishness — racial dislike.

Weidman's discomfort with his own people becomes unveiled most clearly in his characterization of the Jew in his novel. Aunt Tessie is Jewish only by virtue of her paranoid fear of the "goyim"; Uncle Zisha is recognizable as a member of the tribe only because of his stock Yiddishic speech; George Hurst shows the effect of Aunt Tessie's teaching and that is the extent of it; Daniel Shaw and Dora Dienst are stock products of the East Side jungle, playing out the myths of the Goddess Success and Love Conquers All. Each of these figures is essential to the story and therefore I cannot quarrel either with their inclusion or characterization. There is one other Jew depicted in *The Enemy Camp* whose presence in the novel is entirely gratuitous. He is Old Man Saydl and this is Weidman's description of him:

He looked like a scarecrow that somebody had started to make by throwing a bundle of dirty brown rags at a pair of crossed sticks and then had forgotten to do anything more about it. From these rags, in the place where other people had a face, hung long white wisps of beard. From nowhere behind this beard came a low, whining moan that made George think of the way he felt when some kid in school scraped his fingernails down the blackboard.

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Day after day, winter and summer, he moved through the neighborhood like a trickle of spilled mud, inching his way forward, staring at the ground, rattling his tin cup, collecting a slow but endless stream of pennies . . .

The authors of literary ancestors of Old Man Saydl — Barra-bas, Shylock, Fagin — were all defended from the charge of anti-Semitism by reason of their creator's ignorance or of the importance of the caricature to the story. Neither of these arguments applies to Weidman. He is downright dishonest though he writes in the genre of realistic truth. Weidman was writing of the same world as Blankfort, Wouk, Malamud, and Roth, yet each was able, irrespective of point of view of the American-Jewish experience, to find a few good, clean, religious Jews. Weidman refused to look for cleanliness.

It is no wonder, then, that the very telling of the story of *The Enemy Camp* suffers from the bankrupt vision of its author. He, too, tries to focus the tale into a centrifugal image or act — like Rabbi Berdick's law of the *agunah*, Marjorie's eating of *tarfut*, the mourners' posture of tragedy, and Eli Peck's wearing of the *kaftan*. But in place of a central symbol of power like these, Weidman symbolizes the trauma of intermarriage in the drinking of a cup of coffee. This is the ludicrously epical ritual that troubles George Hurst in his marriage to Mary Sherrod. Weidman tells us with authorial gravity, "The truth of the matter was that [George] found it impossible to enjoy coffee under any circumstances. [It was an] undoubtedly silly belief that it was a vice, which Aunt Tessie had implanted in the mind of a child . . ." So this drinking of the coffee is the symbol of George's cutting the umbilical cord from the source of his Judaism, Aunt Tessie. Married to Mary, however, George finds that he is straddled on the horns of this deep dilemma: "In some way that he did not understand, however, he would have felt disloyal to Mary if he did not drink at least one cup with his breakfast and, more important, go through the pretense of enjoying it." When finally he expresses the secret fear that his wife hates Jews, his emotional release is signalled by the sentence, "He could stop pretending he liked coffee." (A few pages later, George returns to Mary and they live happily ever after.)

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The bankrupt perspective of Jerome Weidman is not confined to symbolism, where the uninitiated might miss the message. It is blatantly expressed, in a horrendous speech of Uncle Zisha complete with the most superficial kind of home-spun philosophy made kosher and portentous by his Yiddishic inflections. George had come to his Aunt Tessie and Uncle Zisha to ask their advice about marrying the Gentile Mary Sherrod. Aunt Tessie, of course, who equates Jewishness with fear of the enemy "goyim," wishes him dead first. But Uncle Zisha, the conventional fat and homely-wise Jewish uncle, cries out, shocked:

Don't listen to her! . . . She was always afraid. She was always hiding in corners from the world. She's still afraid. She's still hiding. Let her. Let her hide. You be different. Don't make a hole for yourself and creep into it. Don't make yourself a private ghetto. Do what your heart says, not your religion. To be a man is more important than to be a Jew.

George says, "Thanks. I'm going to marry her." Aunt Tessie, horrified, faints, and looking down upon her, George realizes that she has become, like Old Man Saydl, "a bundle of . . . sticks."

This speech, it seems to me, is an expression of self-hatred. Certainly, no rational view can make mutually exclusive a Jew and humanity, religion and the heart. I believe further that Weidman's writing of this passage is an expression of his feeling of self-guilt, for the American-Jewish consanguinity has produced Jews who are men and men who are Jews, and Weidman's refusal to admit this led him to the extreme expression of the speech quoted.

Nonetheless, *The Enemy Camp* is an authentic document of a segment of the American Jewish community and Jerome Weidman its skilled spokesman. Thus, the larger question is, what is the nature of the enemy encamped within the breast of this community so that it could produce such a book and such a man as Jerome Weidman? His call for assimilation is not a call for co-existence, but a cry for dissolution. His portrayal of the offspring of the Hurst-Sherrod union shows that he does not envision America as a melting pot, but as a laundry,

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and we all ought to be washed-out, pressed-out undistinguished handkerchiefs.

Regardless of viewpoint, each of these novels does express a living attitude. Each expresses a dissimilar approach, but there is a common denominator among them and it deserves to be pointed out.

It has sometimes been said that Judaism flourishes only in adversity. When it is attacked as a faith, or its adherents as Jews, the ranks close and a defiant counter-action begins. What is significant in the novels and tales discussed here is this: though they were written in a society that always was far from the madding pogroms and death camps, Judaism as a force remains to be reckoned with. None of these stories deals with anti-Semitism or with anti-social acts. The heroism required, when it was required, was the heroism of the mind and heart. The subtle, powerful *shekhinah* of Judaism exerts its presence. To one author this presence is acceptable; to another, it is an object of rebellion. To all, however, it cannot be ignored.

To put it another way: in every story — whether directly dealing with a Jewish problem, or merely an innocuous tale with Jewish characters — the presence of the Jew places his faith or ancestry on trial. The verdict, as it is predestined by the author, may go against Judaism or Jewishness. But the most important point is that it was considered important enough to write about and to bring to trial.

As long as this is true, for every Weidman there will be a Wouk, for every Roth, there will be a Malamud, for in truth the Jew will never be the conformed "representative American." His history is different; his tragedy is different; his martyrdom is different; his experience, in whatever country under whatever benign conditions, is different. These are meaningful to the individual Jew, and therefore he will be different. And, ultimately, because he is different and nevertheless American, he will always find his author from among his own tribe, and his place in American fiction.