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## THE IMAGE OF THE JEW IN OUR FICTION

### I

Mr. Rosedale stood scanning her with interest and approval. He was a plump rosy man of the blond Jewish type, with smart London clothes fitting him like upholstery, and small sidelong eyes which gave him the air of appraising people as if they were bric-a-brac. . . . He had his race's accuracy in the appraisal of values, and to be seen walking in the company of Miss Lily Bart would have been money in his pocket, as he might have phrased it. . . . Mr. Simon Rosedale was a man who made it his business to know everything about everyone, whose idea of showing himself to be at home in society was to display an inconvenient familiarity with the habits of those with whom he wished to be thought intimate. . . . Rosedale, with that mixture of artistic sensibility and business astuteness which characterizes his race, had instantly gravitated toward Miss Bart. She understood his motives, for her own course was guided by as nice calculations. Training and experience had taught her to be hospitable to newcomers, since the most unpromising might be useful later on, and there were plenty of available *oubliettes* to swallow them if they were not. But some intuitive repugnance, getting the better of years of social discipline, had made her push Mr. Rosedale into his *oubliette* without a trial. . . . Hitherto Lily had been undisturbed by scruples. In her little set Mr. Rosedale had been pronounced "impossible." . . . Even Mrs. Trenor, whose taste for variety had led her into some hazardous experiments, . . . declared that he was the same little Jew who had been served up and rejected at the social board a dozen times within her memory. . . . Mr. Rosedale, it will be seen, was thus far not a factor to be feared — unless one put one's self in his power. And this was precisely what Miss Bart had done.

This image of a Jew was projected by Edith Wharton shortly after the turn of the century in her novel of New York society, *The House of Mirth*.

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Two decades later, Ernest Hemingway projected his image of a Jew in the opening pages of *The Sun Also Rises*:

Robert Cohn was once middleweight boxing champion of Princeton. Do not think that I am very much impressed by that as a boxing title but it meant a lot to Cohn. He cared nothing for boxing, in fact he disliked it, but he learned it painfully and thoroughly to counteract the feeling of inferiority and shyness he had felt on being treated as a Jew at Princeton. There was a certain inner comfort in knowing he could knock down anybody who was snooty to him, although, being very shy and a thoroughly nice boy, he never fought except in the gym. He was Spider Kelly's star pupil. . . . He was so good that Spider promptly overmatched him and got his nose permanently flattened. This increased Cohn's distaste for boxing, but it gave him a certain satisfaction of some strange sort, and it certainly improved his nose. In his last year at Princeton he read too much and took to wearing spectacles.

There is no resemblance between the two writers — genteel, aristocratic Mrs. Wharton and he-man Hemingway — except for their common and frankly unreasonable gentile contempt for the Jews they were portraying. And there is no resemblance between the images of those two Jews — suave Simon Rosedale and nervous Robert Cohn — except for their common aspiration: to leave their Jewish origins behind and to be received without discrimination in the gentile world — Rosedale by New York's Victorian high society at the turn of the century, and Cohn by the bohemian expatriates of Paris in the mid-twenties. Neither one succeeded in that aspiration, although each had left far behind him every vestige of the Jewish past (except for part of his name); but each did achieve a certain dubious satisfaction in the course of this failure: Rosedale in getting to the point where he could turn down a desperate proposal of marriage from aristocratic but compromised Lily Bart; and Cohn in having got into bed with Lady Ashley, the Astarte of those loose-living lovers of "death in the afternoon," when they all went to Spain for the bull-fight, — Jake Barnes, the narrator, and his friend Bill, and Robert Cohn and Brett Ashley and her fiancé Mike.

But Cohn paid well for the favors of Lady Ashley in the insults he suffered from Mike, although Mike was well aware

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of her constant promiscuity. And Mike's drunken remarks to and about Robert Cohn, as well as the image of Cohn, are probably the most explicitly and brutally anti-Semitic in all our fiction. For example:

"It's no life being a steer," Robert Cohn said.

"Don't you think so?" Mike said. "I would have thought you'd love being a steer, Robert."

"What do you mean, Mike?"

"They lead such a quiet life. They never say anything and they're always hanging about so."

We were embarrassed. Bill laughed. Robert Cohn was angry. Mike went on talking.

"I should think you'd love it. You'd never have to say a word. Come on, Robert. Do say something. Don't just sit there."

"I said something, Mike. Don't you remember? About the steers." . .

"Come off it, Michael. You're drunk," Brett said.

"I'm not drunk. I'm quite serious. Is Robert Cohn going to follow Brett around like a steer all the time? . . . Why don't you say something, Robert? Don't sit there looking like a bloody funeral. What if Brett did sleep with you? She's slept with lots of better people than you."

"Shut up," Cohn said. He stood up. "Shut up, Mike."

"Oh, don't stand up and act as though you were going to hit me. . . . Don't you know when you're not wanted? I know when I'm not wanted. Why don't you know when you're not wanted? . . ."

"Shut up. You're drunk."

"Perhaps I am drunk. Why aren't you drunk? Why don't you ever get drunk, Robert? . . ."

"Come on, Robert," Bill said. . . . Bill went off with Cohn. Cohn's face was sallow. Mike went on talking. . . .

"No, listen, Jake. Brett's gone off with men. But they weren't ever Jews, and they didn't come and hang around afterward."

A couple of pages later, Hemingway expressed the reaction of Jake Barnes, the narrator, to this exhibition of flagrant anti-Semitism:

I wished Mike would not behave so terribly to Cohn, though. Mike was a bad drunk. Cohn was never drunk. Mike was unpleasant after a certain point. I liked to see him hurt Cohn. I wished he would not do it, though, because afterward it made me disgusted at myself. That was morality; things that made you disgusted afterward.

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This latent sense of “morality” — this suppressed disapproval of what Mrs. Wharton delicately termed “intuitive repugnance” toward the Jew in *Lily Bart* — seems to have come to life in the thirties, perhaps as an effect of that very disgusting real-life behavior of those anti-Semites in Germany; for the image of the Jew projected by gentile writers in our fiction thereafter, even when it is anti-Semitic, is compassionate and understanding, much as is Shakespeare’s image of the Jew Shylock. For example, in James Jones’ *From Here To Eternity* (published in 1951 but dealing with Army life just before Pearl Harbor) the image of the Jew, Isaac Nathan Bloom, is projected, not as the author Wharton saw Simon Rosedale, or as Hemingway’s gentile characters saw Robert Cohn, but as Isaac Bloom sees himself:

He was Isaac Nathan Bloom. And Isaac Nathan Bloom was a Jew. It did not make any difference that he had made corporal and become a noncom. It did not make any difference that he had won the Regimental middleweight division and become a Schofield Class I fighter. He was still Isaac Nathan Bloom. And Isaac Nathan Bloom was still a Jew. It did not matter that he was up next in line for sergeant. . . . It did not matter that he was the Regimental white hope for the Schofield Division’s middleweight crown. . . . Because after all that, he would still be Isaac Nathan Bloom. And Isaac Nathan Bloom would still be a Jew.

He had done it all, a lot of things he did not like because he thought he could change it and prove it did not matter. When he had seen how fighters were respected in the Company, he had become a fighter. Did they think he liked being a fighter? When he had seen how noncoms were looked up to and liked, he had become a noncom. . . . He was not going to leave them one single loophole they could turn to for escape. It wasn’t easy; what he had done was not handed to anyone on a silver platter. But he had stuck to it; because he meant to make them like him, meant to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt to them that there were no such things as Jews.

But in the end it hadn’t made any difference. And he knew it never would make any difference. Instead of liking him, the more honors he gained the more they hated him. Facts didn’t have anything to do with the stubbornness of those minds; they twisted the facts to suit whatever they already believed in the first place. How could you fight a thing like that? . . .

There were two kinds of Jews. There were the Jews . . . who would rather be Gentiles and therefore smiled queasily . . . and [boot-licked]

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. . . every Gentile. And there were the Jews like his old man and his mother, them and their unsalted butter and Kosher meat the Rabbi had to bless before they could eat it, who would rather be Jews than anything else in the world because Jews were God's Chosen People. . . . Those were the only two kinds of Jews there were. Take it or leave it. It was a fine choice to present to a man who wanted only to be accepted as a man, according to his individual virtues and vices, but who could never be that. . . . In all the world Bloom could not think of a single person who liked him for himself, for his own personality. . . . A man might as well be dead.

So Bloom ended his sad soliloquy by putting the muzzle of his rifle in his mouth and pulling the trigger with his toe.

Now Isaac Bloom was neither a rich Jew like Simon Rosedale, nor an educated Jew like Robert Cohn; he was a poor uncultivated Jew. Yet he is represented by James Jones as being in some respects very like them. He shares their aspiration to forget he is a Jew and make himself over in the image of the gentiles by whom he wishes to be accepted and from whom he wishes to be indistinguishable, — an aspiration to which every immigrant was encouraged in the late 19th and early twentieth century by the American ideal of "the melting pot"; although, paradoxically, many immigrants since colonial times, gentile as well as Jewish, had fled to America from the persecutors in Europe of their peculiar cultural identities. But Jews like Simon Rosedale and Robert Cohn and Isaac Bloom, who were eager to lose their Jewish identity in the American melting pot, learned that (like most assimilated Jews in Germany who were to be ruthlessly rooted out by the Nazis) their very assumption of the mores of the gentiles was held against them. Edith Wharton criticized in Simon Rosedale a calculated social opportunism she took for granted and condoned in Lily Bart. Hemingway's promiscuous and pugnacious gentiles could not brook the adoption of those manners by Robert Cohn while criticizing him for his inability to ape their drunkenness. And James Jones' Isaac Bloom discovered that though, like Robert Cohn, he disliked fighting, it had availed him nothing to become a prize-fighter, it did not endear him to the gentiles who adored gentile prize-fighters. This discovery puzzled poor Bloom. Lacking a knowledge of history it could not occur to

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him that perhaps this puzzling phenomenon may have been attributable to the fact that those gentiles had been taught in their impressionable childhood the precepts of a Jew, that "Prince of Peace," who preached against pugnaciousness, and profanity, and whoring, and drunkenness and calculated selfishness, and that therefore the sight of a Jew aping them in the practice of such mores (or even, for that matter, refraining from them) was not a compliment but a tormenting affront. Of course poor Bloom could not hope to please his gentiles, any more than Rosedale or Cohn could please theirs; but intuitively (or perhaps from news of the Nazis which was coming out in his time) Bloom realized that the only Jew who could please such gentiles, the only Jew who really had no Jewish identity for them, was a dead Jew.

And as if that act of Jewish self-annihilation was a symbolic signal to our gentile writers, already stricken by qualms of what Hemingway's Jake Barnes called "morality," thanks to those horribly disgusting Nazis, we have in our fiction since Jones' *From Here To Eternity* no such blatantly anti-Semitic images of the Jew projected by gentile writers as the three outstanding examples (chosen from among others equally distinguished) which have here been considered. And if such an image appeared now, in our current fiction, it would probably be considered by most critics and readers old hat, melodramatic, and in bad taste; indeed the Jew, *per se*, seems to have disappeared from the fiction of our gentile writers, while there has been a burgeoning of novels about Jews by Jewish writers. But the development of the image of the Jew in our fiction projected by Jewish writers is quite another story.

## II

*The Rise of David Levinsky* by Abraham Cahan, which was published in 1917, is the classic story of one of the horde of Jewish immigrants who came to America from Eastern Europe late in the 19th century — later than the forebears of Edith Wharton's Simon Rosedale, who was of west European stock. Rosedale is an English translation of the German Rosenthal, and

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Rosedale's blondiness was further evidence of his origins among those highly assimilated German Jews who were, at the turn of the century, a well-intrenched Jewish aristocracy, living on the upper West Side of Manhattan by the time the likes of David Levinsky arrived from Russia or Poland and landed in the seething slum on the lower East Side. Cahan's story, which is in the form of an autobiography, begins:

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

The thoughtful reader of this vivid and fascinating, though rather crudely written book will find that this last statement is untrue. For this is no Horatio Alger fable of that period, intent on proving that an incorruptible integrity of moral character was and is bound to be crowned by material success in fiercely competitive America. This is a realistic account of how a young orthodox Jew, who, though an orphan and raised in poverty in Europe, had been trained only in the study of Torah and Talmud, and, finding himself here in what looked less like a seething melting pot than a teeming Jewish man-trap, managed by hook or crook to claw his way up and out of the East Side slum to the affluent West Side, leaving behind him in the process all his past learning and his aspiration for a higher education in free America, and forsaking the traditional Jewish morality for the ruthless mores without which he could not have accomplished that miraculous transformation from an enslaved sweatshop worker to an employer exploiting such labor for his own profit. In this process David Levinsky did not forsake all his Jewishness, or even try to. Although he became what he calls "an atheist" he remained a member of a synagogue of immigrants from his native town in Russia, and he considered himself an important and influential member of the American

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Jewish community, although he bitterly fought the Jewish union organizers of his Jewish workers. Although his business dealings brought him in contact with some gentiles, his conflicts were not with them but with Jews, some of them the German Jewish forebears of the likes of Simon Rosedale, who were being pushed out of the garment industry by the likes of Levinsky. And it never occurred to David Levinsky that he wanted to resemble or be accepted socially by the gentiles he met. He never harbored that aspiration of a Simon Rosedale or a Robert Cohn. Indeed, although he even developed a promiscuous sexual activity in America which those two more sophisticated gentlemen might have envied, David Levinsky, when he met a gentile woman to whom he was attracted so strongly that he considered marrying her, decided against that step primarily because she was not Jewish. There was a strong streak of sentimentality in the nostalgic Jewishness of David Levinsky — a self-salving sentimentality characteristic of ruthless characters — and his false assertion in retrospect that “when I take a look at my inner identity it impresses me as being precisely the same as it was thirty or forty years ago” is part of that soft sentimentality which threads the harsh realistic fabric of his story, in which it is quite obvious how much his inner Jewish identity has been changed in the course of that struggle to rise from desperate insecurity to self-centered survival. Abraham Cahan’s image of this Jew is a masterly portrait, which includes that element of sentimental self-pity and nostalgia and is plainly revealed at the end:

I don’t seem to be able to get accustomed to my luxurious life. I am always more or less conscious of my good clothes, of the high quality of my furniture, of the power I wield over the men in my pay. . . . I can never forget the days of my misery. I cannot escape my old self. My past and my present do not comport well. David, the poor lad swinging over a Talmud volume at the Preacher’s Synagogue, seems to have more in common with my inner identity than David Levinsky, the well-known cloak-manufacturer.

Although the novel is in the form of an autobiography, it is not the autobiography of the author, Abraham Cahan, except



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probably for the first section telling of the European boyhood of David Levinsky and of his early struggle for a livelihood in the new world. And the David Levinsky who developed in that world is an authentic image of some Jews whom Abraham Cahan got to know well in America. But Cahan himself was quite a different sort of Jew. When he arrived from Russia, like Levinsky, in the mid-eighties he was no longer a studious Talmudist but a man of the modern revolutionary world — a thoroughly indoctrinated socialist; and he soon became an influential journalist on the Yiddish newspaper *The Forward*, and was active in the organization of the garment workers' union, which gave the likes of Levinsky so much trouble in their rise to affluence. It is a great pity, therefore, that in picturing Levinsky's struggle with the union Cahan did not project the image of such a Jew as himself who, stemming from the same origins, and having left behind him, like Levinsky, the observance of the same religious rituals, yet had brought with him into the new world that strong sense of social justice which the prophets preached and which the likes of Levinsky discarded.

For James Jones' Isaac Bloom, being an uncultivated Jew (which Levinsky was not), was of course quite wrong in his belief that there are only two kinds of Jews: those who toady to gentiles (like Rosedale and Cohn) and try to be just like them, and those like his parents who keep kosher and maintain other Jewish mores without any inherent spiritual significance: *bauch-Juden* (stomach Jews) the Jews call such Jews. Poor Bloom had no vision of that other element of Jewishness — of the Mosaic and prophetic spirit. Isaac Bloom had never been taught that; but David Levinsky had; and it was this that he had discarded in America, and Abraham Cahan had not.

The inclusion of the image of such a Jew as himself would have made Cahan's book greater and truer. That gentile writers like Wharton, and Hemingway, and Jones should not have presented images of more admirable Jews than Simon Rosedale, and Robert Cohn, and Isaac Bloom, is little cause for wonder. But one cannot help wondering why a Jewish writer like Cahan should not have done so when he had fit prototypes near at hand — not only himself and his many colleagues, but

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men like Gompers and Brandeis who were well known in his time. And it is remarkable that this propensity to present only an unsavory image of the Jew and his life in America was exhibited by the generation of Jewish writers, the children of immigrants like Levinsky, born or raised here, who began publishing novels in the late twenties and early thirties.

A notable exception to that trend was Ludwig Lewisohn's superbly written, and largely autobiographical novel, *The Island Within*, published in 1928, in which Arthur Levy, the son of assimilated German Jews, and himself, to all intents and purposes, a Jew in name only — a successful physician, married to the sophisticated daughter of a Christian minister, and the father of a son named John, discovers that for his spiritual integrity and salvation he must recover the Judaism of his grandparents and make it a vital part of his life as an American, although he has a reasonable argument for total assimilation:

Natural history has much to say of the phenomena of protective mimicry in respect of color; the dead statement of the printed page leaps into life in the desert lands where the eye always reaches to the horizon where there is no escape or shelter. There man builds brief huts of desert-colored mud and thatches them with desert-colored straw; there the camel and the lion are indistinguishable from the sands. . . . Not to be seen; not to be spied out; to merge with nature or a group of creatures like oneself — to disappear as an individual, to be conventional — how profoundly does this universal urge point to the terror that is at the core of all mortal life! . . . War is at the heart of nature, war at the heart of society. To be conspicuous is to be a mark for arrows; the moral quality of the conspicuousness matters little. The arrows fly.

And although his German Jewish vision of East European Jews was akin to that of any gentile anti-Semite, it was the Russian pogroms that shook him into reluctant awareness of his abiding inner Jewishness:

As if there weren't other plague spots on Tsarist Russia outside of her treatment of the Jews. But wasn't her treatment of the Jews a matter that not only a Jew, but any decent and humane man, might well take into account? Jews. . . Jews. . . Jews. . . He loathed the very word. And as for the Jews from Russia. . . . He had seen them on

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Grand Street and Norfolk Street and once in a Yiddish theater. . . . Utter aliens to himself, these people — repulsive, in fact: dirty, sunk in superstition, loud, Oriental without being picturesque, jabbering in a mongrel jargon, smelling of garlic. . . . Why he should take their part, why he, in considering Russia, should instinctively think of Kichinev — he didn't know . . . he simply didn't know.

Nevertheless, Lewisohn's Arthur Levy became, in a way, an answer to the likes of Wharton's Simon Rosedale and Hemingway's Robert Cohn, also Jews in name only, who aspired to acceptance in the society of gentiles; although Arthur Levy was not troubled, like Rosedale and Cohn, by social discrimination, for he and his gentile wife were quite at home in that admirably democratic and civilized society of liberal intellectual America. It was the discovery of the Jewish island within himself which disturbed Arthur Levy and returned him to Judaism. And in consideration of the strong Biblical influence in Puritan America, Judaism should not be as alien to Americanism as some gentiles think it is. And Lewisohn's *The Island Within* was acclaimed by critics and readers, and had twelve printings in the first three months of its publication.

But its admirable image of the Jew returned from German assimilation had no apparent influence on Jewish writers who were the sons of East European immigrants and who published in the early thirties novels which were essentially autobiographical memoirs of their traumatic childhood, the like of which Lewisohn's Arthur Levy had not suffered, in that East Side slum out of which Cahan's David Levinsky had clawed his way, but where their less fortunate or less ruthless parents had remained trapped; although by the time those novels were written their authors had themselves somehow managed to escape from that trap. Typical of such novels were *Jews Without Money* by Michael Gold (1932), and *Call It Sleep* by Henry Roth (1934). These two are particularly interesting to consider because they tell virtually the same story from the points of view of two psychologically different personalities. Both are the experiences of young boys, the sons of East European immigrants raised mostly by an adoring Jewish mother, living in dire poverty in a teeming East Side tenement. But Michael Gold's Mikey was a

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husky youngster who could give as good as he took, and was toughened and even entertained by his sordid environment, which is described with the utmost crassness and brutality; while Henry Roth's David was a frail, supersensitive, neurotic child living a continuous, unmitigated nightmare, which is rendered by Roth with the virtuosity of an artist who has known the dreadful depths of childhood insecurity. In both books the boys inevitably come into conflict with rowdy Jew-hating gentile children who live on the fringes of their ghetto; but their most traumatic experiences occur within their own environment, from their contacts with adult Jews, their fathers, their teachers, their neighbors, all apparently warped and embittered, or corrupted and brutalized by the desperate struggle for survival in that trap into which their once hopeful immigration had lured them. Only the boys' mothers are exempt from scorn and condemnation; and it is not because they are learned Jewesses, since they exhibit no Jewish knowledge to speak of, but only that classic concern of Jewish motherhood celebrated in the Biblical "woman of valor" (Proverbs 31:10-31). Otherwise, no single person, child or adult, in either book is lovable. The total image of the Jew in both books is anything but admirable, or even hopeful of Jewish salvation; and the resolution at the end of each book is consistent with the maimed psychology of its boyish prototype: In Gold's book, brash Mikey finds his hope in enlistment in the revolutionary labor movement; and in Roth's book, David, close to psychosis, has an apocalyptic experience which mystically suggests some saving grace for his personal future. In neither case is there any indication of salvation in Jewishness. Even in the land of the free the Jews as a people could not hope for survival.

In the early thirties, when the present writer was publishing his first novels, he was troubled by the image of the Jew presented in such books, which seemed to him grossly misrepresentative in the light of his own experience. He was the first born American child of his immigrant father who, like Cahan's Levinsky, had been a Talmudic scholar and was hardly prepared for the struggle for survival on the East Side, which he entered with a handicap greater than that of Levinsky, a single

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man. The writer's father had a wife and two young children when he arrived here in the year before the dreadful panic of 1893. Nevertheless, he too made his way upward, from sweatshop worker to owner of his own modest sweatshop where he sweated alongside his help and managed to wring out of that steamy, grinding effort enough to carry his growing family uptown, first to the *ordentlich* middle-class German-Jewish neighborhood on Avenue A, and then moved to practically suburban Harlem, along with Townsend Harris Hall of the City College, which the writer, then a high-school boy, was attending. His father did not get to the affluent upper West Side, probably because, unlike Levinsky, he would not, no matter how bitter the struggle, sacrifice his Judaism. The present writer woke every morning to the murmur of his father's praying by a window facing eastward, arrayed in phylacteries and prayer shawl, which, after *bar-mitzvah*, the boy also did before going off to school; and he accompanied his father to the synagogue every Sabbath and Jewish holiday which his father observed religiously, in the true sense of that word. And his father still studied Torah and Talmud on such restful days, and would discuss them with the boy in the light of the scientific courses he was pursuing. And on the eve of the Sabbath and of the holidays the boy would come from school to find their home redolent of the special savor of such days created by his mother in accordance with ancient Jewish tradition, which his parents had practised within the pales of Jewish settlements under hateful anti-Semitic governments in Europe from which they had fled to the land of the free in the hope of having the liberty to practise and preserve those precious traditions in peace. And listening to his father and mother and their immigrant relatives and friends talking of how they had lived their Jewish lives and preserved those Jewish mores and values under the most ignominious oppressive conditions, along with the Judaism inculcated in him by his father's teaching, gave the present writer an image of the Jew which served to inform and fortify his Jewishness in the face of such evidences of anti-Semitism as became apparent to him as a boy even here in the land of the free. Like Henry Roth's David he was a sensitive little boy who dreaded

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the barbaric bullying "Micks" who lived on the East River fringe of his Avenue A neighborhood. A couple of them made his first day at school memorable by waylaying him on his way home and, shouting "Sheeney," snatching from his head the handsome new cap his father had made him for that occasion. And like Michael Gold's little Mikey he suffered the persecution of a gentile school-teacher (not fat like Mikey's but skinny and green-eyed he still recalls after sixty-five years) who took fiendish delight in washing the mouths of Jewish children who talked out of turn with soap she knew very well was not kosher. (He also remembers his childish satisfaction at the sight of the mourning wreath which decorated her desk the day after the SS Slocum disaster, when an excursion boat loaded with Sunday School children and teachers burned and sank in the East River.) But, thanks to his parents, such experiences did not leave him with the fearful contempt for Judaism and Jewishness, and the self-hatred which characterized much of the Jewish image projected in the fiction of his own generation of Jewish writers in the early thirties. He was therefore prompted, almost in protest, to project in his third novel, *Hear, Ye Sons*, his own image of the Jew. And because it seemed to him that what ailed those Jewish writers of his generation was the lack of information, literally, of those essential elements of Judaism that have so remarkably maintained the Jewish spirit through centuries of persecution and suffering, he presented, in a prologue, the picture of a thoroughly Americanized Jewish family, like his own, in which the immigrant parents have attained economic security, and the grown-up children have found their respectable places, as have so many offspring of immigrants, in various activities of American life, industrial, technological, academic, artistic, and sociological — despite discriminations which are still practised to some extent. In the body of that book, the present writer gave the reminiscences of the father of the family: of his early life in an East-European pale of settlement, which was based mainly on those accounts the writer had heard from his parents and their generation, reinforced by his own observations of what remained of that mode of life, in travels through the area from which his parents had come. His

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gentile publishers were loath to print the book which put so different a face on the current fictional image of the Jew; but they had no reason to regret it when he persuaded them to do so; and the writer himself was pleasantly surprised by the response of critics and plain readers. He begs to be believed that he says this not out of personal vanity but to support an important point he wishes to make regarding the nature of the image of the Jew in our present fiction. *Hear, Ye Sons*, published in 1934, was reviewed with unanimous enthusiasm by both gentile and Jewish critics as a revelation of the admirable and invaluable Jewish ethos, which had become an important element in American culture. It was reprinted three times in the first month of its publication, and letters came from immigrant Jews all over the country assuring the writer that he had written not merely the story of his own forebears but of a whole generation of Jews. The book was hailed as a classic in its field, and was republished in the Modern Library.

But *Hear, Ye Sons* had no more effect than Lewisohn's *The Island Within* in elevating the image of the Jew projected by Jewish writers in the novels that came after it, like Jerome Weidman's *I Can Get It For You Wholesale* (1937) and Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run?* (1940) (a question which had been better answered in Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky*). In their titles alone, he who runs may read their denigrating stories. And in 1946 Jo Sinclair won the Harper's Prize with her serious and well-written novel, *Wasteland*, about Jake Brown, whose dread of anti-Semitism had festered, as it does in unfortified Jews, into a paranoid hatred of anything Jewish, including his own family and himself. In James Jones' Isaac Bloom, that self-hatred ended in suicide. In Jo Sinclair's Jake Brown, however, it ended on the psychiatrist's couch where, we are told, he achieved his personal salvation, not like Lewisohn's Arthur Levy by reinforcing his spirit with the knowledge of Judaism and the integration of his Jewishness with his Americanism, but by "adjustment" — that sovereign psychiatric panacea — by adapting himself to living with the fact of his being Jewish as one normally does with any unavoidable handicap. But even this psychiatric resolution is not

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convincing, and hence not hopeful; for behind that superficial resolution lurks an aspiration which still relates Jake Brown to Jews like Simon Rosedale and Robert Cohn and Isaac Bloom. This is revealed in a passage in *Wasteland* in which Jake Brown, after he has donated blood to the Red Cross, considers analytically the symbolism of that act:

This is a double acceptance, a double approval. In this offering of blood [Brown] feels strengthened on two counts, one as an accepted member of society, and two as a member of a family accepted by that same society. Not only has he, an individual, offered himself to a major thing and been accepted, but his family has offered itself to America and been encompassed. Jewish blood, in his mind not too long ago a despised thing, has been accepted and now flows in the mixture of American blood.

Jake Brown seems not to have heard that there were people in Germany who considered that sort of mixture pollution, and it is easy to imagine how short-lived his psychiatric salvation would be if he had the misfortune to run into people in America who also thought so.

In 1948 Norman Mailer published *The Naked And The Dead*, one of the two best books depicting men in modern army life and warfare. The other is, of course, James Jones' *From Here To Eternity*, whose image of the Jew, Isaac Bloom, has been considered. In Mailer's novel there are two Jewish characters: Roth and Goldstein, who are quite unlike each other. Mailer's Roth is more like Jones' Bloom, in that he has no use for his Jewishness and resents it as much as he resents the persecution it gets him from his barbaric colleagues in the army; but he has none of Bloom's strength and driving aspiration to make himself over into an image the gentiles would like. Mailer's Roth is a weakling, physically, and without any spiritual reinforcement whatsoever. And when, on a forced march, he collapses, and is ordered to "Get up, you Jew bastard," with a clout on the head, this is his reaction:

The blow, the word itself, stirred him like an electric charge. Roth felt himself getting to his feet, stumbling forward. It was the first



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time anyone had ever sworn at him that way, and it opened new vistas of failure and defeat. It wasn't bad enough that they judged him for his own faults, his own incapacities; now they included him in all the faults of a religion he didn't believe in, a race which didn't exist. "Hitlerism, race theories," he muttered. He was staggering forward dumbly, trying to absorb the shock. Why did they call him that, why didn't they see it wasn't his fault? . . . Nothing he could do was right, nothing would please them. He seethed, but with more than self-pity now. He understood. He was the butt because there always had to be a butt. A Jew was a punching bag because they could not do without one.

And so, despairing like James Jones' Bloom, Mailer's Roth, when the march brought them to a deep gap in the trail that had to be jumped across, although his comrades all made it, weary fearful Roth fell into the abyss and plunged to his death, in what was less an accident than a Freudian slip. "This was the way they wanted it," was his last thought. But Mailer's Joe Goldstein is a Jew of another stripe. He harbors lively memories of his Jewish past, of his classic Jewish mother who runs a filthy little East Side candy store, in the back of which sits his old grandfather:

drifting in Talmudic halls of thought. (If a man hath a worm on his brain, it may be removed by laying a cabbage leaf near the orifice onto which the worm will crawl.) His grandson, Joey, now seven, comes home from school weeping, a bruise on his face. "Ma, they beat me up, they beat me up, they called me sheenie." "Who did, who was it?" "It was the Italian kids, a whole gang, they beat me up. . . ." The old man laughs to himself, the delicate filtered laughter of the pessimist who is reassured that things have turned out badly. No, this America is not so different. . . . The old man rouses himself to speech, talks in Yiddish. "They beat you because you are a Jew," he says. "Do you know what a Jew is?" "Yes. . . ." The grandfather feels a spasm of warmth for his grandchild. So handsome. So good. He is an old man and he will die soon, and the child is too young to understand him. There is so much wisdom he could give. "It's a difficult question, the meaning of a Jew. It's not a race," he says, "it's not even a religion any more, maybe it will never be a nation." Dimly, he knows he has lost the child already, but he continues talking, musing aloud. "What is it, then?" Yehuda Halevy said, "Israel is the heart of all nations. What attacks the body attacks the heart. . . . It's an interesting problem, but personally I think a

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Jew is a Jew because he suffers. Why? . . . It is so we will last. . . . We have suffered so much that we know how to endure. We will always endure." The boy understands almost nothing of this, but he has heard the words and they engrave a memory which perhaps he will exhume later. . . . Suffer. It is the only word Joey Goldstein absorbs.

It is to Mailer's credit that he introduces in Goldstein's grandfather the image of a Jew with some dignity; but the figure is distorted due to a lack of information, just as the encyclopedic Talmud is misrepresented when it is epitomized in a scrap of primitive medical lore. And while Yehuda Halevy, 12th century Hebrew poet, was right in saying that Israel is the heart — meaning the conscience, of all nations (what Hemingway's Jake Barnes meant by his troubling "morality") Mailer has misconstrued that saying to mean that therefore Jews (not the nations) must suffer, which is an early Christian idea. It is an unJewish idea, which would not occur to Goldstein's grandfather who, knowing his Torah, would know that Moses brought the children of Israel out of their bondage and suffering in Egypt for a good and joyous life in their own land, and not for a life of endless suffering for the sins of others; if Jews suffered it would be for their own transgressions of God's laws. For this was made perfectly plain to Moses when, after the incident of the golden calf, he offered himself as a sacrifice to atone for the sins of his people and was told by God that he could not do this: that only those who sinned could atone for their sins. But it is the privilege of authors to endow their characters with their own misinformation. So Mailer's Joe Goldstein on that forced march stoically suffers agonies to carry back to camp a mortally wounded comrade who, even in delirium, insults and belabors his Jewish savior. But when that heroic effort ended in failure, Joe Goldstein thought (somewhat illogically):

"Israel is the heart of all nations." But the heart could be killed and the body still live. All the suffering of the Jews came to nothing. No sacrifices were paid, no lessons were learned. It was all thrown away, all statistics in the cruel waste of history. All the ghettos, all the soul crippling, all the massacres and pogroms, the gas chambers,

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lime kilns — all of it touched no one, all of it was lost. It was carried and carried and carried, and when it finally grew too heavy it was dropped. That was all there was to it.

And there Mailer's Joe Goldstein left his Jewishness, as despairing of Jewish salvation as his mate Roth had been. What Joe Goldstein's grandfather had not told him is that, although Israel may indeed be the heart of all nations, only Jews like Halevy knew this. The nations did not; and when they were troubled about Israel they were more likely to think of it as a tumor, and cut it out.

It is not surprising that such pessimistic images of the Jew as Roth and Goldstein should have been projected by Norman Mailer who did not generally identify himself as a Jew. But Herman Wouk, who has published a book proclaiming his orthodox Jewishness, gave us in *Marjorie Morningstar* (1955) an image of Jewry which is not merely pessimistic but so grotesque that, had a gentile written it, it would be called an anti-Semitic caricature.

Wouk's principals in an all-Jewish cast are pretty, silly Marjorie Morningstar (née Morgenstern) who longs to become a Broadway star and is infatuated with blond, black-turtlenecked Noel Airman (né Saul Ehrmann) whose vaulting ambition is to become a second Noel Coward. Their well-to-do fathers had got to America somewhat later than Cahan's David Levinsky, and they had been raised, not on the lower East Side but on the upper West Side; and Airman had gone even a step further and left that affluent pale of settlement between Riverside Drive and Central Park West for the mixed bohemian community of Greenwich Village. In the summers Marjorie and Noel and their friends, all comfortably supported by their parents, played out their artistic pretensions by putting on shows in the borsht-circuit hotels in the Catskill Mountains. The round of their young lives, summer and winter, was as Jewishly circumscribed as were those of Michael Gold's Mikey and Henry Roth's David, trapped in their East Side tenements. But Marjorie Morningstar and her friends had not suffered a traumatic East Side childhood. They had been well-fed and clothed, and housed luxuriously; they went to dancing classes and rode horseback in the

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Park; and they attended Hunter College or Columbia; and if their prosperous parents were mildly observant Jews, they had even got a smattering of Judaism at the Temple until, after a pretentious *bar-mitzvah*, they took flight from all that and devoted themselves to their equally pretentious aspirations. And Herman Wouk's image of these young Jews, heirs of the generation of David Levinsky who had sold his spiritual birthright for their material welfare, is the most thoroughly vulgar representation of Jews in our fiction. Like *The Rise of David Levinsky* it lacks the contrast and balance which the image of some respectable Jews would contribute: there is not one in all Wouk's five hundred and sixty-five swarming pages. Even the Jewish mother, exempted from corruption in the sordid stories of Michael Gold and Henry Roth, has here become that silly caricature, the anxious Yiddishe Momma. *Marjorie Morningstar* also lacks the vitality and significance of Levinsky's struggle and the bitter irony underlying even his sentimentality. And Wouk's book is larded with sentimentality; but it is the condoning sentimentality of the author for his own vulgar creation, which deprives it of the possibly therapeutic function of satire. Only once does Wouk permit himself and us a moment of truth, of clear insight into his own vision of Jewry, which is basically as pessimistic as Mailer's. It is toward the end of the book, when Marjorie finally becomes convinced that she will never be a star, and that Noel, her "Greek god," is an incorrigible heel, and she resigns herself to marriage with a solid, prosperous lawyer, that the author gives us a glimpse of that depressing vision; but he puts it in the mind of Marjorie, where one would least expect to find it. Just as Norman Mailer put into the mind of Joe Goldstein and his grandfather gratuitous visions of Jewry which the author harbored, so Herman Wouk endows Marjorie Morningstar, advancing toward the marriage canopy, with this uncharacteristic vision:

But in an instant, as though green gelatins had been slid one by one in front of every light in the ballroom, she saw the scene differently. She saw a tawdry mockery of sacred things, a bourgeois riot of expense, with a special touch of Jewish sentimentality.

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As Marjorie Morningstar had, until that instant, never been given to the consideration of sacred things, her vision can only be apocalyptic, and a god-send to the author; for thus neatly his erring character is shriven, and he is himself absolved. For is he not also a Jew? — then his own sentimentality is Jewish, and his own vulgarity as condonable as that of his characters.

The best thing that can be said for the Jews in *Marjorie Morningstar* is that while, like David Levinsky, they are no credit to Jewry, they are also not bent on losing their Jewish identity, like Simon Rosedale and Robert Cohn and Isaac Bloom. But since *Marjorie Morningstar*, the fictional image of the Jew seems to have suffered a regression.

### III

From the nadir of *Marjorie Morningstar* it would seem that the image of the Jew in our fiction had only one direction in which it could go. And in the late fifties and early sixties there was another burgeoning of books about Jews by Jewish writers which were indeed promising. They are for the most part excellently written, and have attracted widespread critical and popular interest. The Jews projected in their stories mostly represent an advance in cultural status as far beyond the West Side characters in Wouk's *Marjorie Morningstar* as those were advanced in economic and social status beyond the East Side characters of Michael Gold and Henry Roth. Some of these Jews, in their evolution, have moved from the big city to suburbia, and their Jewishness is as vestigial and unfunctional as the coccyx each bears behind him. Two distinguished examples who are essentially representative will be considered.

The protagonists of Saul Bellow's *Herzog* and Bernard Malamud's *A New Life* are both intellectuals, both are university teachers, living completely in the gentile intellectual world; and since both books were published in 1961 by the two outstanding Jewish writers of the new dispensation, it is as enlightening to compare the images of the Jews projected in those two books as it was in the case of Michael Gold and Henry Roth, since Bellow and Malamud are as different in their temperaments.

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Here, Bellow is the more introverted and Malamud the extrovert.

But first it might be well to consider briefly a particular theme sounded by Malamud in his earlier work, which has been played with by others of the new Jewish writers and was first sounded by Norman Mailer's Joe Goldstein in *The Naked and The Dead*: the image of the Jew as the man of suffering who turns the other cheek. Sholom Asch, who had, before Mailer, tried to promulgate the idea that all Jews are Christians, came to grief with his own people, and apparently got nowhere with gentiles either. In Malamud's *The Assistant*, published in 1957, Morris Bober, the Jewish grocery storekeeper, suffers the persistent attachment of the gentile Frank Alpine, who had beaten and robbed him and seduced his daughter, with an almost masochistic tolerance, which is certainly not Jewish. And, we are told, Frank is finally converted, and is even circumcized! Malamud has improved on Judah Halevy's dictum with his own sententious saying: "All men are Jews." But to this one is tempted to say, as Jake Barnes says to Brett Ashley at the end of *The Sun Also Rises*, when she says something sentimental: "Isn't it pretty to think so?" For to a pragmatic observer of things as they are in our world this sounds like some of Herman Wouk's "Jewish sentimentality," or perhaps it is just wishful thinking, to which Malamud seems to be addicted, judging from his later novel *A New Life*.

By the time he wrote *A New Life* Malamud appears to have discarded that image of the Jew as the long suffering man of sorrows, for Seymour Levin in *A New Life* is frankly bent on having himself as good a time as possible in his new life among the gentiles, with very few qualms about the suffering of others who attach themselves to him. And although his fictional running mate in 1961, Bellow's Solomon Herzog, is a man who suffers a great deal in the course of his story, neither is he uncomplaining in his reaction to his suffering.

Bellow's *Herzog* is a remarkable *tour de force* of dense writing: of vivid visual imagery and fragments of philosophy, at times profoundly thoughtful and at others pedantically encyclopedic, so inextricably mixed and rapidly ladled out that the

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reader is overwhelmed into accepting this as a significant coherent life pattern rather than a fermented compost of abstracts from a mess of modern living which he is fed faster than it can be digested. Malamud's *A New Life* is also vivid but quite uncomplicated, lightly and blithely written, humorous and witty, with an almost pagan charm, at times approaching naïveté. But although the books are quite dissimilar, Bellow's Moses Herzog and Malamud's Seymour Levin are academic intellectuals whose intellectuality has not damped their virility; and it is in their numerous relationships with women that Herzog and Levin exhibit a similarity of character which is best expressed in the Yiddish *shlemiel*. Both are easily as promiscuously active sexually as any of the gentiles in their environment; but that is no new feature in the image of the Jew in our fiction, whether written by gentile or Jew. Away back, Cahan's David Levinsky found plenty of time for such activity in the midst of clawing his way up from the lower East Side, and he even used a couple of his women as helpful means to that end; and we have observed how Hemingway's Robert Cohn got himself into trouble because of his infatuated pursuit of Lady Ashley; but apparently he did get some satisfaction also out of it. Whereas Bellow's Herzog, that highly educated *shlemiel*, seemed to derive no lasting satisfaction from the series of wives and mistresses, gentile and Jewish, he took, only to fall an unhappy victim of their stronger wills. One of them even cuckolded him with his best friend and divorced him, depriving him of his two children; and for all his learning and philosophy and experience, Herzog remains to the end a hopeless, pathetic *shlemiel*. Malamud's Levin was a *shlemiel* of another sort. A well-educated *shlemiel*, though not as high-powered a brain as Herzog, Levin was beset by a sexual drive in the service of which, like a James Jones character, he would shuck his shorts on the slightest provocation and in the most unlikely places. A newly-appointed faculty member — in a job he wanted very much to hold, he had the temerity to have an affair with one of his students; and he tried to fornicate with one of the female faculty in an office he shared with another professor! Only a *shlemiel* would attempt anything like that. Of course he was in-

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errupted, and narrowly escaped a ruinous scandal; but that did not deter him from other equally foolish escapades. For, like Herzog, Levin was more often seduced than seducer. And he ended up by letting himself be seduced by the strong-minded gentile wife of the colleague who had befriended him, and (as if to balance the cuckolding of Herzog) she persuaded Levin to marry her and go off with her and her two children. That the *shlemiel* exists among Jews is obvious from the fact that there is such a word in Yiddish. But it can be taken for granted, although the coincidence in the case of these two heroes is striking, that neither Bellow writing *Herzog* nor Malamud writing *A New Life* had in mind to present the image of the Jew as *shlemiel*.

Seriously considered, Moses Herzog is recognizably Jewish for just two reasons: His name, and his memories of his Jewish family. But so detached from that family and its Jewishness had he become that, if you removed those memories of his Jewish background from the book, Moses Herzog would be a Jew in name only; and if you changed his first name, say, to John, it could correctly be said that *Herzog* is the brilliantly revealed state of mind of some of our mid-twentieth century intellectuals, gentile or Jewish, who are far more confused and lost than that "lost generation" of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. So lost and confused is Bellow's Herzog that he doubts his own sanity. The book's opening sentence is:

"If I am out of my mind, it's all right with me," thought Moses Herzog.

And toward the end, three hundred and eighty pages later he repeats:

But if I am out of my mind, it's all right with me.

And Herzog's lostness (and the *shlemiel* may be defined as a man who has lost his good common sense) may be due to the fact that, like many of our intellectuals, gentile as well as Jewish, in embarking on the sea of worldwide culture (and Herzog's knowledge of languages and literatures and histories



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and philosophies is worldwide) he has detached and discarded the one rudder each man must have behind him to steady him on his spiritual course (as Lewisohn's Arthur Levy discovered): his own primary culture and tradition — in the case of Herzog, his Jewishness. "Continuity with the past is not a duty," said Justice Holmes, "only a necessity." At one point in the course of Herzog's story he was uncomfortably reminded by his gentile mistress that detachment from the Jewish past is not easy to achieve even in the most assimilated intellectual world:

Ramona often said, "You're not a true, puritanical American. You have a talent for sensuality. Your mouth gives you away." Herzog could not help putting his fingers to his lips when it was mentioned. But then he laughed the whole thing off. What remained to bother him was that she did not recognize him as an American. That hurt! What else was he? In the Service his mates had also considered him a foreigner. The Chicagoans questioned him suspiciously. "What's on State and Lake? How far west is Austin Avenue?" Most of them seemed to come from the suburbs. Moses knew the city much better than they, but even this was turned against him. "Ah, you just memorized everything. You're a spy. That proves. One of them smart Jews. . ."

One is reminded of poor unintellectual Isaac Bloom among his army mates in Jones' *From Here To Eternity*. It would appear that for all his assimilation Bellow's brilliant Herzog and Jones' dumb Bloom are brothers under the skin; and that Bellow's image of the Jew is still patterned basically on the one laid down by gentile writers in the first third of this century and no longer being projected by them.

And if we are to believe Malamud's *A New Life*, that image is no longer valid; and the prospect of a new life for the Jew has indeed been announced and ushered in by that diverting book, which is remarkable and unique because of one fact: that in all the three hundred and thirty pages of this detailed description of the inner and outer life of Seymour (né Samuel) Levin during the year 1950 on the faculty of a university in Oregon, not once does he ever recall the fact that he is a Jew or has had anything to do with Jews — and this, despite his having been

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born and raised in New York City (whether on the East Side or the West Side or in Brooklyn is not indicated) and having graduated from New York University and having taught in a New York City High School! And the single occasion on which he is reminded by anyone else that he is a Jew is when the married gentile woman who gets him to go off with her and her children tells him that she helped her husband pick him for his job on the faculty when she saw the photograph on his application, which had reminded her of a Jewish boy in her class at college who had been kind to her. And that is the only time the word Jew in any form is mentioned in the whole of this story about a man named Levin. It would appear then, if Malamud's image of the Jew in *A New Life* is to be taken seriously, that Seymour Levin had finally and happily achieved that aspiration so persistently, painfully and vainly sought by Wharton's Simon Rosedale and Hemingway's Robert Cohn, and Jones' Isaac Bloom — of complete and perfect acceptance without discrimination or even reminder by his gentile environment; and it would appear, if we are to believe Malamud, that there are Jews like Seymour Levin who, despite their birth and background, have actually managed to become Jews in name only, so completely and perfectly have they detached themselves from their Jewish past that no troublesome reminder of it ever rises within themselves, a triumph of suppression in the unconscious which even Freud would have considered remarkable. In this respect Malamud's Levin is advanced beyond Bellow's Herzog who, for all his assimilation, was still plagued by Jewish memories. And alongside Malamud's Levin, who is described in the opening sentence of *A New Life* as "formerly a drunkard," Hemingway's Cohn who "never got drunk" looks positively primitive and unsophisticated. It is true that in the field of sex Levin remains a lecherous *shlemiel*, but that is a characterization which is no more Jewish than gentile, and does not mar Levin's record of being the first Jew in our fiction who is actually Jewish in name only.

Are we to take this fiction of Malamud's seriously? *A New Life* is written in a lively naturalistic style which suggests that it is meant to be taken as realism, as a plausible image of an

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assimilated American Jew in our time. And yet, alongside his immediately contemporary Moses Herzog, who is as assimilated as Seymour Levin but still harbors vestiges of his Jewishness and is still bothered by gentiles who spot those vestiges, Levin, who is 100% *Judenrein* inside and out, seems like the incredible fantasy of one of those Jews like Rosedale and Cohn and Bloom, wishfully dreaming of the impossible achievement of their obsessive aspiration. Plainly put, Malamud's Levin, like Herzog, like Rosedale and Cohn and Bloom, just didn't want to be a Jew.

Although Malamud's latest novel *The Fixer* is not about an American Jew but about a Russian Jew, an absorbing *roman à clef* based on the Beiliss "ritual murder" case in 1913, it is interesting to note that the protagonist is represented as a man who is trying to escape his Jewish identity. At one point in his dreadful imprisonment he thinks:

From birth a black horse had followed him, a Jewish nightmare. What was being a Jew but an everlasting curse? He was sick of their history, destiny, blood guilt. . .

At the beginning of his embarkation on the escape from his native Jewish *shtetl* in the pale of settlement, while being rowed across the Dnieper River, he decided to rid himself of the tell-tale prayer shawl and phylacteries which a Jew always carried with him when travelling. As Malamud describes that incident:

His bag of prayer-things fell with a plop into the Dnieper and sank like lead.

Now this may sound like finicky criticism, but the small bag containing the phylacteries and the *talit* would not sink "like lead" — if it sank at all. And this kind of an error, slight as it seems, points symbolically to misinformation, like Mailer's idea of the Talmud, or to complete ignorance, which may account for much of the misrepresentation of the Jew and Judaism in our current fiction.

How pervasive this kind of ignorance may be in our literary world was indicated in the November 1966 issue of *Com-*

*mentary* in an article ("The Vacancies of August") about the Greek Islands, in which it was stated that there, in the fifth century under the aegis of Athena, "law and reason were invented, for the first time something beyond the despotic passions of murderous fathers and murderous sons, and along with these, all our ideas of justice, of truth. If it hadn't happened here, would it ever have happened at all? We might have had forever only one kind of despotism or another, of blood or of love, and beyond this only our goofy dreams of despotic or lovesick gods. We might never have had, out beyond us, the structure of reason that will always be there now, the same for one man as for another." It is shocking to think that there was no one on the editorial staff of that esteemed Jewish journal to tell the writer of that statement that, many centuries before those Greeks got such advanced ideas, Moses, under the aegis of the One God of Israel, was promulgating the idea that even God the Creator of us and our universe is lawful, and was teaching, among many other laws, "Thou shalt not commit murder"; and that our other prophets went around harping on justice and the equality of men long before Homer smote his lyre singing the capriciousness of the gods and the murderousness of men! And if the editors of a journal like *Commentary* are so lacking in essential Jewish information it is not surprising that equally ignorant Jewish writers in our time portray the Jew mainly as being engaged in jettisoning his Jewishness as nonessential or bothersome baggage.

Not that the Jew who wishes and tries to lose his Jewish identity is a modern phenomenon. In the time of Jesus, when the Romans contemptuously called the Jews "foreskin clippers," there was in Alexandria a large Jewish community, many of whom, like the philosopher Philo, were highly assimilated; and there were among them young Hellenized Jews who, wanting to appear in the Greek games where contestants went naked, would have a painful operation performed to make them look uncircumcized. Now, in our own enlightened times when gentiles have discovered the prophylactic value of Abraham's old mark of the covenant, and when even beards are popular, Malamud's Seymour Levin, who had a beard and was certainly cir-

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cumcized, could probably get by unidentified as a Jew in the locker rooms of our most exclusive country clubs, provided only that his name was not mentioned. And Malamud cannot possibly deny that there are still in America places where just a Jewish name like Levin acts as a bar to acceptance.

Nor can Malamud and Bellow deny that the majority of American Jews, however assimilated, do not wish to lose their Jewish identity and are not hurt, as was Moses Herzog, by the failure of some gentiles to ignore the fact that they are Jews, because, despite their assimilation as Americans, they yet consider their Jewishness a matter of importance and value to themselves. There have always been such assimilated Jews everywhere in the world — there were even in Germany. And Philo in Alexandria in the first century of our era was certainly as assimilated a Jew as is Bellow's Herzog and as widely cultivated a man and philosopher of his time. Yet Philo, while some of his fellow Jews were getting their foreskins altered, was busily writing and lecturing on his many commentaries on the Bible, and he had a considerable following. And today in America there is doubtless a considerable number of Jews, far more than the likes of either Bellow's Herzog or Malamud's Levin, — well-balanced, self-respecting men and women to whom their Jewish heritage is not a psychological handicap, to be discarded if possible, but a spiritual reinforcement — a vital and integral part of their lives as assimilated Americans. But you would never guess that from the image of the Jew now being projected by our Jewish writers. It would appear, in short, that a comprehensive and truly representative image of the Jew in America has yet to be presented in our fiction.