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## **Jews In The Mirror: From Hatred To Reconciliation In American-Jewish Fiction.**

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JEW IN THE MIRROR: FROM HATRED TO RECONCILIATION  
IN AMERICAN-JEWISH FICTION

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An Essay

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English  
University of the Pacific

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In partial fulfillment of  
The requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Arts

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by

Joseph D. Gallo

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Isaac Rosenfeld's short novel The Colony<sup>1</sup> is an Orwellian allegory which on a significant level explores the range of attitudes expressed by contemporary Jews toward themselves and other Jews. Set in an exotic fictional country on the Indian subcontinent, the narrative pits the intellectual Satya, successor to a prophet-like leader, against the machinations of a controlling technology given to efficiency and the waging of modern war. During a rally at which he urges his audience to passively "despise and disobey," Satya is seized and imprisoned, whereupon his true ordeal begins. He is accosted by foes even more formidable than his jailors: his people and himself. Initially lauded by his companions for his vision and patriotism, Satya is by devolving stages doubted, then suspected, then vilified, and finally beaten to the brink of senselessness by his fellow prisoners. The divisiveness which the regime wished to incite among the colonials is complete, for the victims come to admire their tormenters in proportion to their own self-disparagement, signalled by their pummeling of the man they originally exalted.

While Rosenfeld's parable examines the relationship of any colonial people to a mother country, it is filled with particular correspondences to significant persons or events in Jewish history. In the narrative, Satya plays "Aaron" to his predecessor's Moses. The native participants at the political rally are seized and shipped to prison in closed vans, an act reminiscent of the Nazi "relocations" that emptied Europe of its Jewry. The colonials are required to wear identifying clothing at all times, and they are enjoined by the establishment to restrict their activities to certain sectors. In forcing the natives to discount their religious past

in deference to the socialist future, the conquerers rob the natives of their cultural continuity and identity. More subtly, Rosenfeld--who once called Jews "experts in alienation"<sup>2</sup>--traces the sources of cultural self-revulsion to "the affinity of the oppressed for the oppressor" and the subsequent imitation of the oppressor to the detriment of the victim's own self-regard.

What the parable ultimately commends--more than the political or cultural correspondences it projects--is important to this study. For if the humanity of his companions degenerates, Satya's own humanity undergoes an evolution under their blows until "his pain and pity were identical" and he can think only of saving his own attackers. His empathetic identification with them is complete. Satya--the detached man of thought--has undergone a fusion of head and heart. He reaches the physical/spiritual condition at which "suffering alone constituted his hold upon life." In keeping with the substance of parable, Satya gains himself in losing a world. Falling physically, he rises spiritually. Receiving hatred, he returns compassion.

In mirroring the larger Jewish experience of our time, The Colony is not a reproduction but a representation, a likeness cast back at the looker altered by its symbolism. It reflects in particular the phenomenon of Jewishness directed against itself, the troubling paradox of Semitic anti-Semitism. Arriving by gradations at the theme of affirmation so important to its author, the parable ascends from hatred through resentment to partial acceptance which, under the conditions of crisis, eventuates in rapprochement. Such a movement toward reconciliation has been noted in many of today's important novels,<sup>3</sup> but it has not to my knowledge yet been traced by

critics in a representative sampling of post-war short fiction by American-Jewish authors. Irvin Faust's "Jake Bluffstein and Adolph Hitler," Leo Litwak's "The Solitary Life of Man," Bernard Malamud's "The Last Mohican," Philip Roth's "Defender of the Faith" and, ultimately, "Eli, the Fanatic" form together a progression in which such an ascent to rapprochement can be discerned in modern American-Jewish short fiction. The stories--like the parable which undergirds this study--all deal with or touch upon World War II, a synecdoche for the extremity of the political condition of Jews in this century. These authors write solidly out of a tradition, placing particular emphasis upon the importance of history to a Jew. Yet their universal strength, like Rosenfeld's, lies in their consistently pushing matters past Jewishness to the concerns that move all people: alienation and self-acceptance, dividedness and integrity, occasionally vengeance, sometimes empathy and forgiveness--the curative power of compassion.

The polarities of compassion/hatred as contrasting but coordinate emotions are established by a line from Satya's speech in which he urges his followers to beware of wasting passion upon the enemy: "Hatred is a form of cooperation, a form of recognition, the opposite of love but just as binding." Both one's love and his hatred, Satya implies, can be put to use by a clever opponent to alienate and undermine the oppressed. Hatred, in fact, grants to the regime a recognition which passive indifference never does, a recognition which can amount at times to a kind of perverse admiration. Unacknowledged at first, this sensation can develop into respect for one's enemy, who is strong and persuasive, and a corresponding disaffection for one's own people, who seem by comparison

weak and impotent. The disdain directed against compatriots, however, inevitably results in self-disdain which leaves one even more susceptible to the appeal of the opposition, for they are not like oneself or one's people. Judged in this light, the protagonist of Irvin Faust's "Jake Bluffstein and Adolph Hitler" gives aid and comfort to the enemy; he becomes a Jewish anti-Semite, the most committed kind of self-oppressor.

Faust's story traces the strange phenomenon by which the hater comes by gradual stages to resemble the object of his hatred. The narrative picks up the protagonist--a middle-aged New York garment manufacturer--at a point of crisis. The "change of life" he fears he is undergoing is, in fact, more spiritual than physiological. Once "the pro, the coldfish operator, ...old Seventh Avenue Jake," Bluffstein is now oddly agitated and memory ridden. He begins to dredge up the detritus of the past--recollections of failures and accomplishments, sporting and international events. Much of what he recalls is topically banal, the correlative for a lifetime more given to overt action than to reflection. Significantly, he suffers in retrospect over having begotten a mongoloid son--to him, the sign of some indefinable defect. He identifies paternally with his late brother's son Sy, a war hero "with the face of an Aryan, who had crossed at Remagen and swept all over Bavaria" with the conquering army. Ironically, Jake's feelings for Sy recall a Hitler who dreamed of a Germanic youth as fierce as animals. Yet Jake himself has lost kin at Belsen, and he recalls with a mixture of dread and satisfaction his own departure from a boyhood European ghetto just one move ahead of conscription into the Emperor's army. Bluffstein has known the harsh claims of history.

Gradually, a sense of nameless urgency and anxiety penetrates this largely harmless nostalgia. Some of Bluffstein's recollections take on a militant quality. They reveal a strange division within him. He recalls a 1937 incident in Paris in which a Jew named Hershel Grynzpan killed an SS colonel. The recollection of that turnabout fills Jake with exultation, but in retrospectively honoring the assassin Jake unconsciously projects onto him the virtues of the very organization attacked: "He should have been an SS himself, he had the guts of a burglar." The story slowly reveals that--while Jake is self-conscious about being a "good Jew"--his respect lies with the aggressors, the offenders, the takers and shapers. Brash and combative, Bluffstein is put off by the attitude he sees prevalent in his people--an acquiescence in the face of monumental historical sufferings. He reflects sarcastically upon the Grynzpan incident:

That wasn't the act of a Jew, murder. God forbid they should hit the police blotters! That was their trouble. More murders they needed instead of wailing. Blood oaths and parades and fires. This they needed instead of thinking. Why shouldn't a Jew have the pleasure of a little persecution? Of a Grynzpan popping the colonel. A Reichstag fire. Ahh the fire. Bluffstein surrendered to the excitement, the terror and awe of those wild first days, the signs of madness to come. The whole world tantalized when every so often the mysterious door cracked open and the blackness shot out and jumped back.

The excitement of witnessing triumphs moves Bluffstein more than does the knowledge of the results of those triumphs.

Gradually, alterations begin occurring in Jake's personality. Always contemptuous of weakness, he becomes less patient with his wife, who has never ceased sorrowing over the son they lost. His particular contempt, however, is reserved for three refugees who attend the synagogue, moaning crazily into the service. Jake is



watching them "when the idea shot into his head and just like that, so natural he didn't even wonder, he said to himself, no wonder they got the business, and all of a sudden he felt the shivers bursting around inside him." His wife, his late brother Abie, the refugees all reflect as individuals what has sickened him about his whole people--their forbearance and passivity over a chronicle riddled with persecutions and pogroms, forced servitude or conscription, and finally the culminating barbarity: the Nazis' systematic annihilation of European Jewry. Yet much as he loathes the Nazis for what they have done, Jake admires the style with which they have done it. He is not conscious that it answers to an instinct in him. The characteristics of the enemy--even when they happen to reside in a Jew--assume for him an honorific quality, evidenced by his fascination with his conquering nephew's Aryan face. It occurs to him that God favored the murderers rather than the murdered: "Gott Mitt Uns...GOTT MITT MURDERERS." Who were really the chosen people? If it was truly the Jews, what were they chosen for? At home, Jake charges his wife with accusations similar to those Hitler used to justify his acts of war and genocide: "People like you started the war. You know that? You Sarah Margolis started the war. With your sighing." Looking at the three refugees worshipping conspicuously in the synagogue, Jake begins to think with perverse approval of Hitler's notions about establishing racial purity.

Jake's odyssey into history--and into his own tortured psyche--begins among the newspaper files in the public library. He is seeking in these documents the course of action he feels his own hard integrity requires. After the accounts of the Communist purges have bored him ("No zing, no thom"), he turns to the rise of the

Nazis. It affects him like a sudorific:

He plunged into the old days like they were a Turkish bath. He turned pages as if he were reading Berlin Diary again, or Rommel, and the magic headlines jumped out at him: 'Meginot Line Breached,' 'Seyss-Inquhart Forms Cabinet' 'Dolfus,' 'Anschluss,' 'Rhineland.' Gott, 'Hershel Grynzpan!' He charged backward to the time when the whole shooting match teetered deliciously on the edge.

He begins to yield to the same murderous suspicions that anti-Semites planted to arouse hatred in the '30's.

Then he asked himself the sneaky little questions he had never listened to. The sharp little knives. Was it maybe Rosenfeld after all, and not Roosevelt? Or at least maybe an international deal? Was Father Coughlin all wrong?

He accepts the Nazi rationale.

Were the Protocols all phony? If--listen good now--if there were no Jews, would there have been a war?

Bluffstein commences to engage in private rituals. When he sweats out impurities in a steam room, he is symbolically purging himself of the weaknesses and thought-emasculated philosophies of the Jews. He wrecks his offices one night--a Jew's establishment--in an uncomprehending flash of self-reflexive hatred. When he has a rare evening of sex with Sarah, he imagines himself as a kind of storm trooper, raping the conquered. In his increasing muddlement, he free-associates, and the results are some madly incongruous couplings. Hitler and Father Coughlin, John Dillinger and Hershel Grynzpan, daring burglars who brodie off of ledges, Sonny Wise-carver making every housewife in her own bed--all coalesce heroically in Jake's consciousness. He begins to indulge in wish projections, fantasies he has always aspired to but spurned out of the moral covenants of an exacting faith. Like a Nazi, Bluffstein begins to see the world in simplistic terms, and "everything came clear." One recognizes, of course, that Bluffstein's "clarity" cannot comprehend and accommodate the ambivalence, irony, and

complexity of experience. His is the single-mindedness and obsessiveness of madness. His identification with the aggressors of history is complete when he whips out a marking chalk one night and slashes JUDE across the window of a refugee's butcher shop. Bluffstein, not the butcher, is the real refugee. Like the prisoners in the Rosenfeld parable, he has turned upon his own kind. Sickened by history, Bluffstein has responded by committing an atrocity against himself.

Bluffstein's final metamorphosis into the very thing he hated and feared takes place in the sanctuary itself. Caught and taken away to a mental hospital, Bluffstein escapes to "raid" the synagogue while the service is in session. There, in front of the congregation, Bluffstein fantasizes that he is Hitler,<sup>4</sup> a messianic Fuhrer come to deliver the Jews from bondage. But Bluffstein's is no healing dispensation. Like the rough beast in Yeats's poem "The Second Coming," Bluffstein "slouches toward Bethlehem to be born." His is a perverted odyssey, an interior journey into madness which ends with Bluffstein unable to re-emerge. It is not the journey toward sympathetic identification with his past, but instead a kind of war against history. It is not affirmation; it is Armageddon. No grace attends it. History for Bluffstein is a nightmare from which he cannot awaken. And to the extent that he cannot effect a constructive reconciliation with the communal past, Bluffstein is irrevocably alienated from history and from himself.

The movement from Bluffstein's self-reflexive extremism to a pained and grudging tolerance of Jewishness is enacted in Leo E. Litwak's "The Solitary Life of Man." In this story, a combat-weary infantry sergeant--an American Jew who might well be the counterpart

of Bluffstein's nephew Sy--has the problem of identity thrust upon him in Germany, the heart of the enemy camp. Melford Kuhn, holder of a Silver Star, is a fierce loner who prides himself upon being one thing alone: "the most effective platoon sergeant in the company." To Kuhn, all tactical officers are foolish theorists, members of a "spic-and-span hazing crew with a boyscout ardor for protocol and a sophomoric concern for reputation." While he himself might stand accused of the latter charge, Kuhn shares with his comrades-in-arms the foot soldier's loathing for those who are "so little experienced in the passion that proved integrity, the fear of death." Yet in many ways Kuhn is different--even alienated--from his platoon.

The banter of the GIs irritated him. He considered their ability to forget hazards a kind of amnesia, fortunate if one could settle for something less than truth.

And "truth" for Kuhn is the limited and visceral reality of violence and danger: the flesh-shearing potential of bullets, the vulnerability of armament, the trajectory of shells.

A city man, Kuhn is not at home in German forests. Unlike Rodansky, the company womanizer, Kuhn has no ability to forget, to snatch restoration from intervals of respite. He lives only to command the company and to triumph over sentiment, both in their own way ironically requiring of a kind of amnesia. He has succeeded as a soldier despite--rather than because of--his natural predilections.

Kuhn had not so far failed himself. He had not lost himself in the solvent of dread. He had made trembling legs advance. He had made his panicked hands obey him. He had refused to be overwhelmed by fatigue. Whatever beliefs he possessed he was sure of, since they had endured. Yet his victories had not released him from oppression. He was more and more oppressed. He didn't know the extent of his endurance. He feared that moment when his courage would fail him and he would act badly.

Like a Hemingway hero, he never contemplates the future and has cut himself off from his past for emotional protection from the war, it would seem.

Not country, not family, not buddies, but only he himself was relevant. And as his focus narrowed, he became more taciturn, less concerned with the vanities which depended on a wider community.

Yet it is gradually suggested that motives other than combat-preparedness have prompted Kuhn to insulate himself.

Intimations of a past intrude themselves into his solitary life through the presence of Solomon, a gentle rear-echelon supply sergeant old enough to be Kuhn's father. Kuhn despises Solomon for his creased uniform and his noncombatant status. He loathes Solomon's occasionally remaining at the front out of compassion for the plight of the G.I. What infuriates Kuhn even more is Solomon's choosing danger over comfort and safety. When Solomon openly pities a dying German youth whom Rodansky shoots in panic during sentry duty, Kuhn banishes the supply sergeant to the rear. Rodansky's reaction to Solomon's grief for the enemy is significant:

'I shot, you old bastard, not you! You bastard! We fight your wars and then you come around and preach!'

It was clear that he meant the 'you' generically. Solomon revealed his identity with every shrug, with every anecdote, with his intonation, with his liberal use of such notions as Pity and Justice, with his faithful attendance at Saturday services.

What bothers Kuhn about Solomon is the possibility that a certain unacknowledged link exists between the two of them which the troops might somehow identify. He fears contamination by being in any way associated with the pacifistic supply sergeant, whom he regards as "a caricature of a soldier." Kuhn does not want anyone fighting his wars for him, even by association. Thus in ordering Solomon to

the rear, Kuhn is banishing from himself what Solomon represents about Jews: helplessness, sycophancy, foolish passivity, the tendency to moralize. At one point, Kuhn jerks his arm from Solomon's grasp and snarls, "Don't touch me, you Jerk!" It is in profoundly more than a physical sense that Kuhn fears the approach of Solomon. So while Kuhn never reveals his own Jewish identity--and indeed is not regarded by his troops as a Jew--he is completely unsettled by Solomon's self-conscious presence. Duty becomes for Kuhn increasingly an obsession that shields him from all associations.

In the aftermath of the shooting incident, Kuhn becomes more authoritarian, a reaction to his growing alienation from both his buddies and from whatever he fears he and Solomon might share in common. Already having professed his disdain for higher authority, he nevertheless comes to emulate its tactics--like the prisoners who beat Satya in the parable, taking it out on those they care most for. He relies upon adherence to the letter of the law to avoid having to deal with more disturbing self-possibilities. A passage on the advance of the army stands as a correlative for Kuhn's own isolating movement inward:

As the truck bore them across a German valley, he scanned the sky for aircraft. He studied the roadside for cover. He planned his escape from the truck. The sky was too clear, the land too hilly, the opportunity for ambushade unsettling. He didn't rely on the scouting jeeps to discover snipers. He only trusted his own vision.

On a naturalistic level, the passage marks a soldier's vigilant reaction to potential danger in open country. Psychologically, the passage reveals Kuhn's fear of invasion by other, more subtle, imperatives. Kuhn is becoming suspicious that perhaps his "vision" is untrustworthy, for spiritually he is headed into territory no patrol has penetrated. It is small wonder that he would welcome a

"return to manageable passions."

Kuhn's discomfiture is intensified when his platoon is assigned to guard a group of recently liberated Hungarian Jewesses who have been used by the Germans as prostitutes. Presented to one of them by Solomon, who identifies Kuhn as "the Jewish sergeant he had told her about," the protagonist is forced to see the ugly reality of what some Jews have endured.

Leaning on her elbows, puffing a cigarette, she had seemed a beauty across the room--a dark, slim woman, great eyed, fine featured. But up close the ravage was apparent. The skin was jaundiced, and the face was dry and brittle. The swollen cords of her throat traced her gauntness. Her sprawled legs exhibited the welts of lice bites. There was a sore on her lower lip.

He was so strongly repelled by her that it required a physical effort to remain in her presence. What hadn't she allowed to happen to her? What hadn't she endured in order to avoid death? Dared she claim him as kin? Face him as her equal?

To be identified with someone of so little dignity and stoicism revolts Kuhn to the point of hatred. His nausea is intensified when Solomon requests that the army provide a Passover dinner for the women. Outside, he slams Solomon against a wall and berates him:

'I hate the way you smile, Solomon! I hate the way you wiggle on your belly to get laughs. I hate you for all the asses you've kissed. I hate you for being so stupid!'

But Solomon glimpses the truth behind Kuhn's fury.

'Because I'm a Jew maybe? You hate me because I'm a Jew, Kuhn?'

The incident is a revelation for Kuhn. It holds up a glass in which Kuhn can see his hatred and his lonely self-assertion from a new perspective. He discovers his own self-disgust.

Kuhn felt drugged in the aftermath of violence. He looked at Solomon as if he could see there the reflection of himself, see his brutishness mirrored there, see reflected in the older man's disillusionment his own deterioration.

His sad self-discovery is reminiscent of an entry in Satya's prison diary in the Rosenfeld allegory. "How blind we have all been," Satya writes, reflecting upon his predecessor, Bapu. "I would hate him if I did not hate myself." Kuhn has become anathema, someone from whom the men avert their eyes. Avoiding, he has become avoided. His position among the troops is further revealed to him by Corporal Grove's angry outburst during a patrol:

'You'd think you was General Patton. ...I was the only friend you had in this platoon. With the friends you got, it ain't kraut shrapnel you have to worry about. Sonofabitch. They better section-eight you before you crack wide open.'

His isolation is complete when Rodansky's teenage girl cowers at the very sight of Kuhn.

Coming as it does upon so many revelations, the incident forces Kuhn toward a kind of grudging accommodation to whatever humanity still resides in him.

He was strangely saddened by Rodansky's terror. Was his effort to find release of such pathetic consequence that he could now turn pale at the sight of Kuhn?

He discovers that for him no further action is possible until he assuages within himself an unbearable loneliness and self-pity he has come to realize, the first emotions he has succumbed to in a long while. Re-entering the lager, where Solomon is conducting a Passover sermon, Kuhn sits by the Hungarian, Leona: "He did not reject her hand which gripped his under the table." The D.P. has touched Kuhn in a way the well-intentioned Solomon could not. But it is scarcely an affirmation on Kuhn's part. It is important to note that he does not seek the hand beneath the table; he simply does not reject it. He is a man who has been alone too long to acquiesce readily to fellow feelings. Sensations of attraction and repulsion continue to coalesce in him, and whatever affirmation



he makes is modified by a certain dogged playoff within him of vengeance and guilt. The land of bondage is not confined to Germany alone. Kuhn carries that territory with him wherever he goes. The course of action in the story recalls Muriel Rukeyser's warning contained in the opening of a sonnet from a collection entitled, appropriately, Letter to the Front. It might have been addressed to Kuhn.

To be a Jew in the twentieth century  
Is to be offered a gift. If you refuse,  
Wishing to be invisible, you choose  
Death of the spirit, the stone insanity.  
Accepting, take full life. Full agonies:

For the proud Kuhn, the penalty is self-estrangement. Great agony attends it.

By comparison with Kuhn, the sergeant-hero of Philip Roth's "Defender of the Faith" has a personal past and at least the vestige of a sense of his own Jewishness. Nathan Marx occasionally remembers his pre-war days at Columbia. Marching across Germany, he has had the dignity not to assume the air of a conqueror out of a Jew's vengeful feelings of injured merit. Like Kuhn, however, Marx has had to "anesthetize" himself to fight a war.

I had changed enough in two years not to mind the trembling of the old people, the crying of the very young, the uncertainty and fear in the eyes of the once arrogant. I had been fortunate enough to develop an infantryman's heart, which, like his feet, at first aches and swells but finally grows horny enough for him to travel the weirdest paths without feeling a thing.

While training recruits in Missouri following V.E. Day, Marx finds that the implications of his having killed his feelings extend into some intimate parts of his life. Having "defended the faith" in Europe, he finds by gradual stages that he has not defended it within himself. The agent of his discovery is an exploitative recruit named Sheldon Grossbart who, to a certain extent, plays the

Solomon to Marx's Kuhn by implicating the sergeant, somewhat unwillingly, in their common heritage.

But while Solomon is altruistic, Grossbart--as his name suggests--is utterly self-serving. He uses as decoys two innocents named Fishbein and Halpern, whom he claims need his "help". Together they trade upon Marx's feelings, which are awakening now to the amenities of peacetime. They work a system for illegitimate passes and other privileges such as exemptions from cleaning details for the purpose of attending synagogue, where only Halpern takes the services seriously. Grossbart performs his act with a wink and a gesture, with an intonation suggesting that he and his sergeant are collaborators against the depredations of a Gentile world. When Mark wryly calls the recruit "a regular Messiah," Grossbart's reply--while meant as still another side-nudging duplicity--is thematically significant:

'That's a good one, Sergeant,' he said, smiling. 'But who knows? Who can tell? Maybe you're the Messiah--a little bit. What Mickey says is the Messiah is a collective idea. He went to Yeshiva, Mickey, for a while. He says together we're the Messiah. Me a little bit, you a little bit.'

In aping Halpern's Yeshiva philosophy, Grossbart introduces a notion of collectivity, of tradition, and of responsibility to concerns larger than the individual yet central to the individual's own completed sense of self. It may be in part the very ideal that Marx responds to in making his final decision of the story.

In presenting himself as a "defender of the faith," Grossbart establishes the poles between which the story generates its ironies. To "use" the faith in the way Grossbart does is to betray it. Yet if the opposite of love is not so much hate as indifference, then to forget the faith, as Marx has done, is to deal it the greatest

injury of all. Thus in invoking Judaism--even out of selfish motives--Grossbart has defended it by recalling Marx to its primacy in the life of a conscious Jew. Grossbart's efforts have their results:

I tried to look squarely at what I'd become involved in, and began to wonder if perhaps the struggle with Grossbart wasn't as much my fault as his. What was I that I had to muster generous feelings? ...Out of the many recollections of my childhood...I heard my grandmother's voice: 'What are you making a tsimmes?' My grandmother knew--mercy overrides justice. I should have known it, too. Who was Nathan Marx to be such a penny pincher with kindness? Surely, I thought, the Messiah himself--if He should ever come--won't niggle over nickles and dimes.

Despite his generous sentiments, however, Marx soon reserves the story's greatest irony for himself by adopting Grossbart's very tactics. When the wheedling recruit pulls strings to be sent to safe duty in New Jersey, Marx alters the orders, dispatching him with the rest of the platoon to the unfinished Pacific war. Grossbart has received a kind of justice, true. But it is a strange Messiah who vindictively dispatches the lamb to possible slaughter, and the import of his own act is not lost upon Marx. With Grossbart weeping behind him, Marx stands outside the orderly room and records the story's ultimate scene.

Over in the barracks, in the lighted windows, I could see the boys in their T shirts sitting on their bunks talking about their orders, as they'd been doing for the past two days. With a kind of quiet nervousness, they polished shoes, shined belt buckles, squared away underwear, trying as best they could to accept their fate. Behind me, Grossbart swallowed hard, accepting his. And then, resisting with all my will an impulse to turn and seek pardon for my vindictiveness, I accepted my own.

To the story's credit, the moral quality of the outcome is left ambiguous. By Grossbart's account, Marx has committed an anti-Semitic act. While Marx initially claims it was done "for all

of us," he admits in the final line to an element of vengefulness in his motives. Despite his grandmother's words, he has allowed justice to override mercy and in that sense failed the faith through want of heart. He has used Grossbart--all feeling and self-indulgence--in somewhat the manner that Kuhn used Solomon, dismissing from himself what he disliked most about himself. In Marx's act, and within Marx himself, the "American" wins out over the "Jew". Thus his vengefulness is in part anti-Semitic, but his action is also right because it is democratic, hence American--a playing-off of the American-Jewish theme. Yet in this story, the protagonist ascends from a kind of indifference through partial engagement to a readiness at least to accept the consequences of his own vengefulness. He is willing to give a Jew like Halpern at least his due. If Marx's sensibilities, like Kuhn's, have atrophied from lack of use, he has managed to reclaim some compassion. And, unlike Kuhn, he views his self-duplicity in some perspective. In Marx, feeling and thought qualify and condition one another, just as in the story Marx and Grossbart do. "Me a little bit, you a little bit": Head and heart struggle within the sergeant to a standoff. He has moved from a certain disdain and resentment of Grossbart's implication in his life to a partial affirmation of the feelings Grossbart has awakened in him.

If the two soldiers in the preceding accounts pause short of becoming their brothers' keepers, Malamud's protagonist in "The Last Mohican" advances much of the remaining distance toward rapprochement. A harmless schlemiel who fancies himself an art historian, Arthur Fidelman arrives in Rome to work first-hand on a monumental scholarly work on Giotto, a manuscript of which is

crammed into Fidelman's new pigskin briefcase. He quickly finds himself wandering among the monuments of the past. Rome is history. Across from the station are the remains of Diocletian's baths; the Spanish Steps are but a block away. Fidelman has studied this history and found it simultaneously seductive and repelling:

He had read that here, under his feet, were the ruins of Ancient Rome. It was an inspiring business, he, Arthur Fidelman, after all, born a Bronx boy, walking around in all this history. History was mysterious, the remembrance of things unknown, in a way burdensome, in a way a sensuous experience. It uplifted and depressed.

But to study the past as a dilettante is not necessarily to possess it. History, for Fidelman, is a series of events to be recorded in a notebook under the bad lights of some museum. In such dimness, no miracles can happen. History must be translated into experience, but Fidelman lacks the vision and sensibility to work such alchemy. Nor is he sensitive to matters relative to Jewishness. In fact, like Kuhn, he scarcely regards himself a Jew. He returns a "Shalom," "uttering the word--so far as he recalled--for the first time in his life." As a man, he shows little more understanding. His naivete, like Sergeant Solomon's, is underscored when he remarks pedantically to a refugee that "freedom is a relative term." Secretly flattered by the title "Professor," Fidelman is a person whose identity has been subordinated to his function or vocation. As a critic/historian--with all the affectations a critic/historian is supposed to display--he is a prime candidate for the journey to individuation.

Amid the splendors of the Gentile past, Fidelman experiences the claims of another heritage upon him. The claimant in this instance is a shabby refugee named Shimon Susskind who appeals for help to Fidelman, both as a Jew and as a man. Fidelman's first

glimpse of Susskind occurs after the critic/historian has experienced a strange but "dignified" vision of himself in his mind's eye:

Fidelman experienced the sensation of suddenly seeing himself as he was, to the pinpoint, outside and in, not without bittersweet pleasure. But almost at the same moment, this unexpectedly intense sense of his being faded, and Fidelman became aware that there was an exterior source to the strange, almost tri-dimensional reflection of himself he had felt as well as seen. Behind him, a short distance to the right, he noticed a stranger, the man contemplating Fidelman already acquisitively so as to suggest to the traveler that he had been mirrored (lock, stock, barrel) in the other's gaze for some time, perhaps since he stepped off the train.

An escapee from several dire locations in Eastern Europe, Susskind is a survivor, a luftmensch<sup>5</sup> who has prevailed through wit and guile. He insinuates himself into Fidelman's life, implying that a subtle kinship exists between them, begging for money and, finally, for the very suit on Fidelman's back. When the exasperated historian demands, "Am I responsible for you then, Susskind?" the refugee's immediate reply is, "Who else?" with its dual implication that Fidelman is responsible to no one else and that Fidelman alone is responsible. Here a sort of perverse exchange takes place. After Fidelman disowns this troublesome brother, the refugee steals the precious briefcase--a symbol for those priorities out of which Fidelman rejects him--and disappears. Now it is Fidelman's turn to be a refugee, his legacy from his doppelganger. Fidelman's chapter on Giotto is so intimately connected to his present sense of identity that he cannot reconcile himself to its absence, which "was like a spell cast over him." He wanders and suffers. The reader, too, equates the chapter with Fidelman's personal history but realizes, with humorous irony, that it does not add up to much. Fidelman has been looking in the wrong mirror. He finds it difficult to

proceed onto the next chapter of his life without at least experiencing some understanding of the first.

Fidelman realizes what he has been by gradually becoming aware of what he has failed to be: a Jew with a Jew's responsiveness to the terrors of collective history. When he learns in an unheated synagogue that Susskind sometimes prays for the dead at Cimitero Verano, the critic/historian steps back into a terrible epoch. Adjacent to the decorated graves of the goyim are the humble tombstones of Fidelman's own people; Italy, too, is a Diaspora:

Many were burial places, he read on the stained stones, of those who, for one reason or another, had died in the late large war, including an empty place, it said under the six-pointed star engraved upon a marble slab that lay on the ground, for "My beloved father/Betrayed by the damned Fascists/Murdered at Auschwitz by the barbarous Nazis/  
O Crime Orribile."

His earlier reflection that "history is the remembrance of things unknown" now takes on new meaning for Fidelman. Rome is not only a monument. It is also a burial ground, a cemetery in which it is increasingly difficult for Fidelman to ignore the pull of strange obligations upon him. He is experiencing a bitter inheritance. In the next step of his journey he locates and furtively enters Susskind's tomb-of-a-dwelling in the ghetto. There he further recognizes what a Jew endures:

The place was not more than an ice-box someone probably had lent the refugee to come in out of the rain. Alas, Fidelman sighed. Back in the pensione, it took a hot water bottle two hours to thaw him out; but from the visit he never fully recovered.

He has finally felt viscerally the terrible cold Susskind complained about. Fidelman's response to his own implication in Susskind's torment is intuitive rather than intellectual. He is on the verge of self-reclamation, as his final dream reveals.

Rather than serving as an honored resting place, the cemetery in Fidelman's dream functions symbolically as a repository for dead ideas--Fidelman's. Out of an empty grave rises "Virgilio" Susskind, who beckons for Fidelman to follow. The underworld into which they descend together is Fidelman's own unconscious. "Have you read Tolstoy?" asks the ghost, implying that experiencing Tolstoy requires both understanding and empathy. Fidelman is silent when Susskind asks cryptically, "Why is art?" The answer that the dream-Susskind seeks--and the dreaming Fidelman comes to see--is that art records man's passions rather than simply chronicling his achievements. Then Fidelman lies down on the marble floor of a synagogue and gazes upwards. There among the frescoes on the ceiling he is granted his vision:

The fresco therein revealed this saint in fading blue, the sky flowing from his head, handing an old knight in a thin red robe his gold cloak. Nearby stood a humble horse and two stone hills.

Giotto. San Francesco dona le vesti al cavaliere povero. (St. Francis gives his clothing to a poor traveler)

The vision recalls Susskind's earlier remark to Fidelman, "Who doesn't know Giotto?" Fidelman doesn't--at least, not with his feelings. When Fidelman awakes running, there can be no doubt that he has finally "understood" Giotto. It remains for him to emulate St. Francis, who figures as a symbol of compassion in other works by Malamud.

To practice the act of true charity, Fidelman must wend his way once more into the labyrinth of the ghetto to find his minotaur. But Fidelman's joy in giving Susskind the suit is undercut by the revelation that in exchange the refugee has burned the chapter and saved only the empty pigskin briefcase to return to his benefactor.



Fidelman is furious:

'You bastard, you burned my chapter.'  
 'Have mercy,' cried Susskind, 'I did you a favor.'  
 'I'll do you one and cut your throat.'  
 'The words were there but the spirit was missing.'

Susskind is right. Fidelman must be divested of more than just his clothing. Recognizing this with "triumphant insight," the critic/historian shouts his forgiveness, but the fleeing Susskind--a refugee to the end--disappears into the ghetto. In the spirit of Rosh Hashanah, during which a Jew seeks from and offers to others forgiveness through the confession of his faults, Fidelman accepts the revelation that his "research" was insubstantial. Fidelman--now the man of faith in keeping with his name--is left with the emptied briefcase, the container into which he will put the substance of his new life. He does not need the lost chapter. He no longer studies the past; he lives it. In finding the "missing spirit," he undergoes the transformation of man to mensch.<sup>6</sup>

In "The Last Mohican" and "Eli, the Fanatic," notably the latter, the actions of the protagonists take place within the parameters of a particularly Jewish sense of history. To the Jew, history represents the moral evolution of a people, their collective impulse toward the ideal of the whole person through the development of a "whole" people. On an individual level, each man ideally strives for moral rectitude. Life teaches the seeker how to live qualitatively and humanely. History stresses his relationship to the larger ethnic and religious community, which in its turn seeks self-integration over centuries rather than years. Thus, the individual lifetime is viewed and valued--given greater comprehensiveness--in the context of the life of the evolving culture. Since Judaism represents an unbroken tradition stretching

back some six millenia, it takes on the peculiar validity of that which has endured as a viable ethic in a time-traduced world.

It is this very sense of Judaic and historical identity which Philip Roth's nervous hero in "Eli, the Fanatic" has managed over a lifetime to forget. Caught in a present devoid of enduring values, Eli Peck can only sense that something is badly wrong with his life. He suffers emotional breakdowns and has qualms about the task he has been hired as a lawyer to perform--to evict a group of conservative Hassidic refugees from an old mansion in Woodenton. The town's reasons for wishing the newcomers displaced are impeccable; in operating a school within city limits, the Yeshivah have violated a zoning law. But Eli knows the difference between good reasons and real ones. While talking with Leo Tzuref, the enigmatic spokesman for the Yeshivah, Eli recognizes that the Jewish citizens of Woodenton fear the newcomers for what they represent: visible reminders of a shared and roiled past. To facilitate their accommodation in a Gentile society which until recently was closed to them, Woodenton's civic Jews have allowed themselves to become indistinguishable from their neighbors. Their act results from that peculiar "affinity of the oppressed for the oppressor" deplored by Satya in the parable. Aping the priorities of the establishment, Eli's clients have concealed their heritage. Their ensuing guilt is betrayed by their "legal" efforts to banish from themselves whatever the presence of the strangely-garbed intruders might signify about Jews to Woodenton's Gentile majority. In attempting to perform his commission, Eli is obliged to confront his people's history on several levels, each of them crucial to the development of his conception of himself and each of them relevant--Roth implies--to the privileges and penalties of being consciously a Jew in the Twentieth Century.

The recent European past is represented by a strange "green-horn" who stirs up the citizens by wandering around town in black Talmudic clothing. Eli learns that the greenie has been the victim of a Nazi experimental operation which has emasculated him and rendered him mute, a condition ironically suggestive of the terrible silence that initially made his victimization possible. "No news reached Woodenton?" Tzuref asks dryly when Eli disclaims any knowledge of the recent plight of the D.P.s. History has not spoken to Eli. When he requests that the greenie change into "more appropriate" clothing as a compromise to appease the town, Tzuref's written reply is fittingly terse: "The suit the gentleman wears is all he's got." But Eli fails to understand that Hitler's brutal dispensation has reduced the greenie to absolute fundamentals: the clothes on his back--the outer vestments symbolic of an inward state. It is the very suit--left in exchange on his doorstep--that Eli will eventually accept from his strange double as a token of past suffering--the price of wholeness. Paradoxically, though the greenie has been rent by the implements of genocide, he is whole--faith distilled to essentiality. Eli, for all his material advantages, lacks completeness. Like his clients, he is in the camp of the oppressor until he chooses to identify with the oppressed. To the extent that he becomes a party to the oppression of Jews, he is unwittingly an oppressor to himself. He must re-connect the broken circuit with his heritage. His action in the story advances him to a moral position at the opposite pole from Bluffstein's, for Eli comes to feel empathy with the victims rather than with the perpetrators.

This shift in allegiance begins to occur as Tzuref ushers Eli into the patriarchal, or prophetic, past. Figuratively and literally,

Tzuref is waiting for Eli as the story opens:

Leo Tzuref stepped out from back of a white column to welcome Eli Peck. Eli jumped back, surprised; then they shook hands and Tzuref gestured him into the sagging old mansion.

The darkness of the conference room, illuminated only by Tzuref's ceremonial candle, stands as a correlative for the venerable mystery of the faith. Tzuref speaks for its antiquity. When Eli advances the cliché that they are living in the 20th Century with its complexities and compromises, Tzuref replies, "For the goyim maybe. For me the Fifty-eighth." Eli's subsequent exit "down the dark tomb of a corridor to the door" suggests a movement backwards in time. But Eli reverses the movement when in the next scene he hurries away from mystery towards the familiar lights of Woodenton. The darkness of the faith both attracts and repels him. He has not yet accepted the paradox that he must move backwards temporally to move forwards spiritually. He cannot see Tzuref as an agent of vision, of insight. Tzuref's small candle--the correlative for his function as purveyor of sight--can scarcely compete with the modern glare of Woodenton--distracting glitter rather than brightness. The children who whirl in a ceremonial dance and who flee at Eli's entrance, the pillars and tomb-like corridors of the mansion all stand as analogues for the hero's ancestral consciousness.

Eli's ultimate acceptance of the black suit and his symbolic assumption of the burdens it represents signal his acquiescence to spiritual priorities. In his own hallway, Eli sees himself beneath another man's hat:

He opened the door to the hall closet and looked at himself in the full-length mirror. The hat gave him bags under the eyes. Or perhaps he had not slept well. He pushed the brim lower until a shadow touched his lips. Now the bags under his eyes had inflated to become his face. Before the mirror he unbuttoned his shirt, unzipped his trousers, and then, shedding

his clothes, he studied what he was. What a silly disappointment to see yourself naked in a hat. Especially in that hat. He sighed, but could not rid himself of the great weakness that suddenly set on his muscles and joints, beneath the terrible weight of the stranger's strange hat.

Or is it finally his own hat--with its implications of identity--that weighs so heavily on him? Stripped naked of his comforting suburban illusions, Eli glimpses in the mirror the stranger who has always hidden within him. But his passion is scarcely over. Wearing the badge of a Jew, he strikes out at high noon for the mansion, where the greenie points him back toward Woodenton, that crucible in which Eli must complete his affirmation. He walks the streets in self-testimony:

And he felt eyes, every eye on Coach House Road. He saw headlights screech to within an inch of him, and stop. He saw mouths; first the bottom jaw slides forward, then the tongue hits the teeth, the lips explode, a little thunder in the throat, and they've said it: Eli Peck, Eli Peck. He began to walk slowly, shifting his weight down and forward with each syllable: E-li-Peck-E-li-Peck-E-li-Peck. Heavily he trod, and as his neighbors uttered each syllable of his name, he felt each syllable shaking all his bones. He knew who he was down to his marrow--they were telling him. Eli Peck. He wanted to say it a thousand times, a million times, he would walk forever in that black suit, as adults whispered of his strangeness and children made "Shame...shame" with their fingers.

Eli's "conversion" coincides with the birth of his son, to whom the father threatens to bequeath a cut-down version of the black suit, thus insuring the perpetuation of the faith. Caught and given a sedative at the hospital, Eli is dragged away for the literal completion of the tranquillization that began figuratively in the suburbs.

But Eli's "madness" seems more breakthrough than breakdown. It is not Bluffstein's madness, the "stone insanity" rued by the poetess. It is madness with flair and style. It is an option, a half-comic expression of conviction in the teeth of a culture whose

"sanity" is simply a tactic for preserving the status-quo. As such, it is cleansing and salvational, the testimony to self through the compassion for one's brothers. The lawyer finally understands with his feelings what Tzuref means when he says, "The heart, Mr. Peck, the heart is law! God!" When Eli weeps for everything the greenie lost between 1938 and 1945, he also weeps for himself--and even for Woodenton. Like Satya's, Eli's pain and pity are identical.

Nor is it simply an idealized past--an escapist device--that Eli opts for. The last lines of the story express its quality:

The drug calmed his soul, but did not touch it down  
where the blackness had reached.

The quality of this transformation is ultimately associated with darkness, but it is not the darkness of ignorance, superstition, or blind conformity. It is the gravity and majesty--the essential dread-invoking mystery--of the Heilsgeschichte, the redemptive history of the Jews. It is the mystery of the Ark of the Covenant into which one is forbidden to gaze. Yet at the heart of this darkness, there is light--the true place, the goal of the wanderer. Under the terms of Eli's new dispensation, blackness must dominate light--must penetrate light to its source. What light remains is not the brash glare of Woodenton--the pastless present, with its myth of "assimilation". It is the luminescence of Tzuref's ritual candle, which does not dispel or expose the surrounding mystery but simply provides a tiny point of reference: the still point at the center.

In his repatriation with tradition, then, Eli comes to recognize the continuous presence of the past. He is no longer a "colonial" in twentieth century Woodenton. Collective history becomes for him

not simply a sequence of occurrences but a continuum. Eli identifies emotionally with his mighty progenitors. Under his black hat, he participates in the passion of his namesake Elijah. Relived in this light, prophetic event is transformed into universalizing experience.

It is this universality, finally, which establishes the enduring quality of the literature explored by this study and marks the experience of its protagonists as valuable. These fictional heroes confront the problems implicit in rejecting and/or escaping Jewishness, and a few of them experience the greater wholeness implicit in acceptance and rapprochement. But in each story, as in the Rosenfeld allegory, the larger concerns range beyond ethnic, historical, or religious considerations to a pervasive humanism that charges these writings with power.

The ultimate appeal of a Nathan Marx or an Eli, then, transcends their identity simply as Jews who help to trace a pattern in the accommodation of a people to itself and its traditions. They are more important as men who explore the prerogatives of the self. In a world which would impose its own image upon the individual and require that he reflect it, these protagonists endure the penalties exacted of the person who seeks wholeness, emphasizing the pointedness of Satya's perception in the parable when he says, "Woe to them who live fully." Accepting these risks, they present us with an image of the individual's potentiality for self-transformation through an expansion of his honesty, humor, and compassion. And if, by their agency, we are temporarily reacquainted with the priorities and necessities of our own lives, it is perhaps because they cast

back at us--now and again, after long absence--the reflection of  
our own forgotten face.



## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>The Colony first appeared in the winter 1945 Partisan Review, where it won an award as the outstanding piece of fiction published in the periodical for that year. It is also included in Rosenfeld's collected short fiction Alpha and Omega, Viking, 1966.

The stories used in this study come from the following sources: "Jake Bluffstein and Adolph Hitler" originally appeared in the fall 1962 edition of The Carleton Miscellany and was reprinted in Roar Lion Roar, Random House, 1964. Leo Litwak's "The Solitary Life of Man" appears in The Single Voice, an anthology of contemporary fiction edited by Jerome Charyn and produced by Macmillan-Collier, 1969. Philip Roth's "Defender of the Faith" was first published in the March 1959 edition of The New Yorker and reprinted in Roth's collection Goodbye, Columbus, Houghton Mifflin, 1959. Bernard Malamud's "The Last Mohican" appears in slightly different forms in three collections, all by Farrar-Straus: The Magic Barrel, 1958; Idiots First, 1963; and Pictures of Fidelman, 1969. Roth's "Eli, the Fanatic" was first published in the April 1959 Commentary and was included in the collection Goodbye, Columbus.

<sup>2</sup>Isaac Rosenfeld, "David Levinsky: The Jew as American Millionaire," An Age of Enormity: Life and Writings in the Thirties and Forties, ed. Theodore Solotaroff (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1962).

<sup>3</sup>The problem of Jewish reconciliation to Jewishness has been treated with great power in many novels--Mailer's The Naked and the Dead, Bellow's Mr. Sammler's Planet, Malamud's The Assistant, Chaim Potok's The Chosen, to name a few. The succinctness and compression of short fiction, however, renders it more appropriate to a paper of this scope.

<sup>4</sup>The radical juxtapositioning of the names in the story's title emphasizes simultaneously the antipathy yet strange affinity existing between Hitler and Bluffstein. The latter's name is wonderfully symbolic, with its first syllable stressing the hero's bluntness, unconventionality, and bluster and its second syllable underscoring his Jewishness.

<sup>5</sup>"A luftmensch," writes Stanley Trachtenberg, "makes his living out of air; his office is a phone booth, his records in his hat. He is the larcenist, the marginal man, shrewdly figuring the angle--winning, losing, owning nothing for longer than it takes to trade. Often shabby, packing his sidewalk suitcase as the police round the corner, he skips to another neighborhood, a new location. To contend with the uncertainty of his situation, he relies chiefly on disguising his identity. Through disguise, as in dream, play, or wit, he can rebel against the limitations of reality he must begin by acknowledging, obtain the gratification he appears to renounce. Thus he maintains his limitless possibilities in a limiting world of fact by postponing final self definition. "Saul Bellow's Luftmenschen: The Compromise with Reality," Critique, Vol. IX, No. 3, November 27, 1967.

<sup>6</sup>It is interesting and perhaps significant that in Pictures of Fidelman--a kind of picaresque novel in which "Last Mohican" is the first chapter--the hero has no further experiences with Jews. Malamud seems to begin high and work downward in Pictures, a descent which may relate to Fidelman's growing cognizance that he is no artist or thinker.