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NO: 40 and 41 June / December 2000
KDN PP 4013 / 8 / 2000 / 2001

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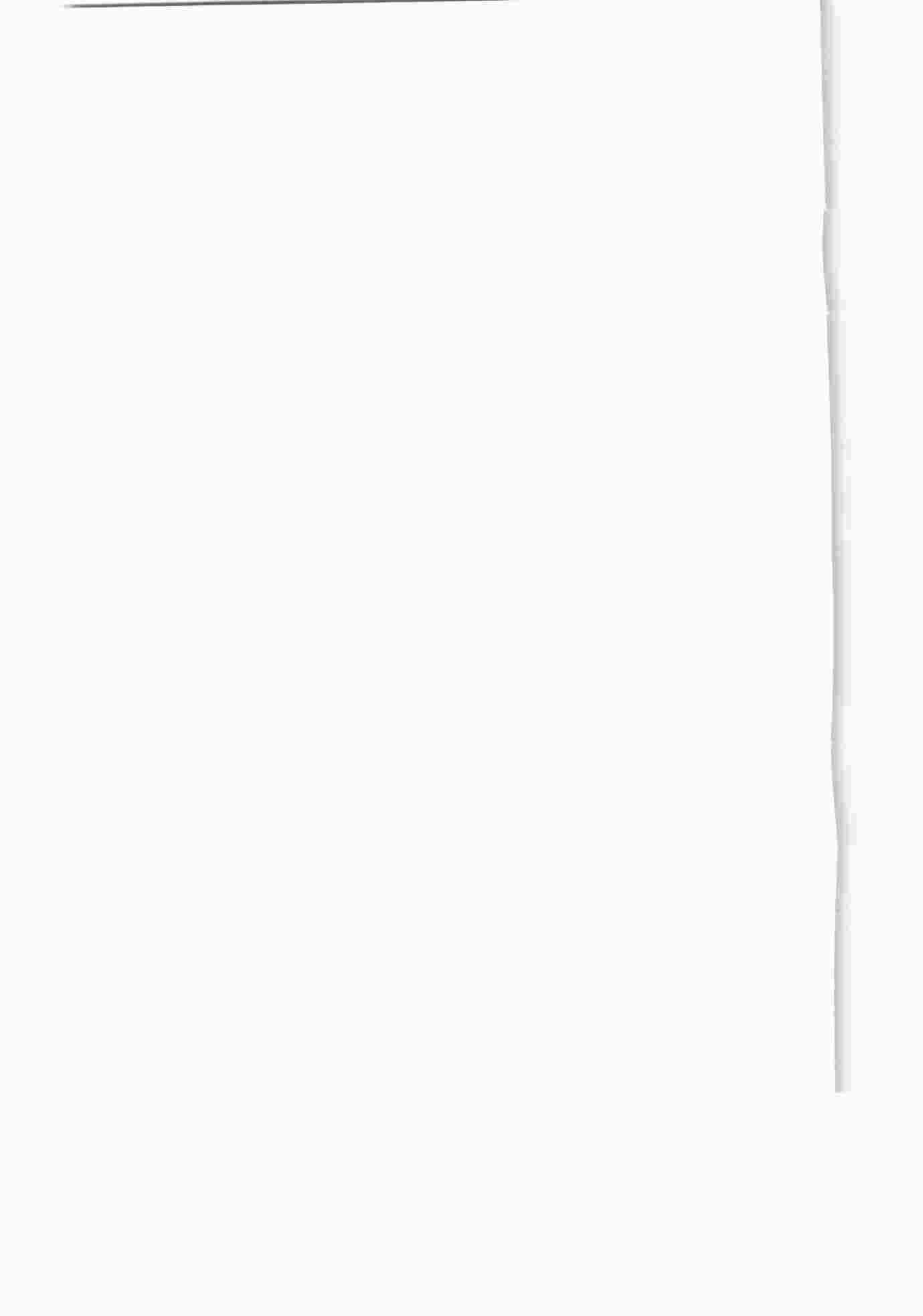

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No. 40, June and No. 41, December 2000

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ISSN 0127 046X
KDN PP4013/8/2001

THE JEW IN AMERICA: THE DIALOGUE OF BECOMING IN THE FICTION OF ABRAHAM CAHAN

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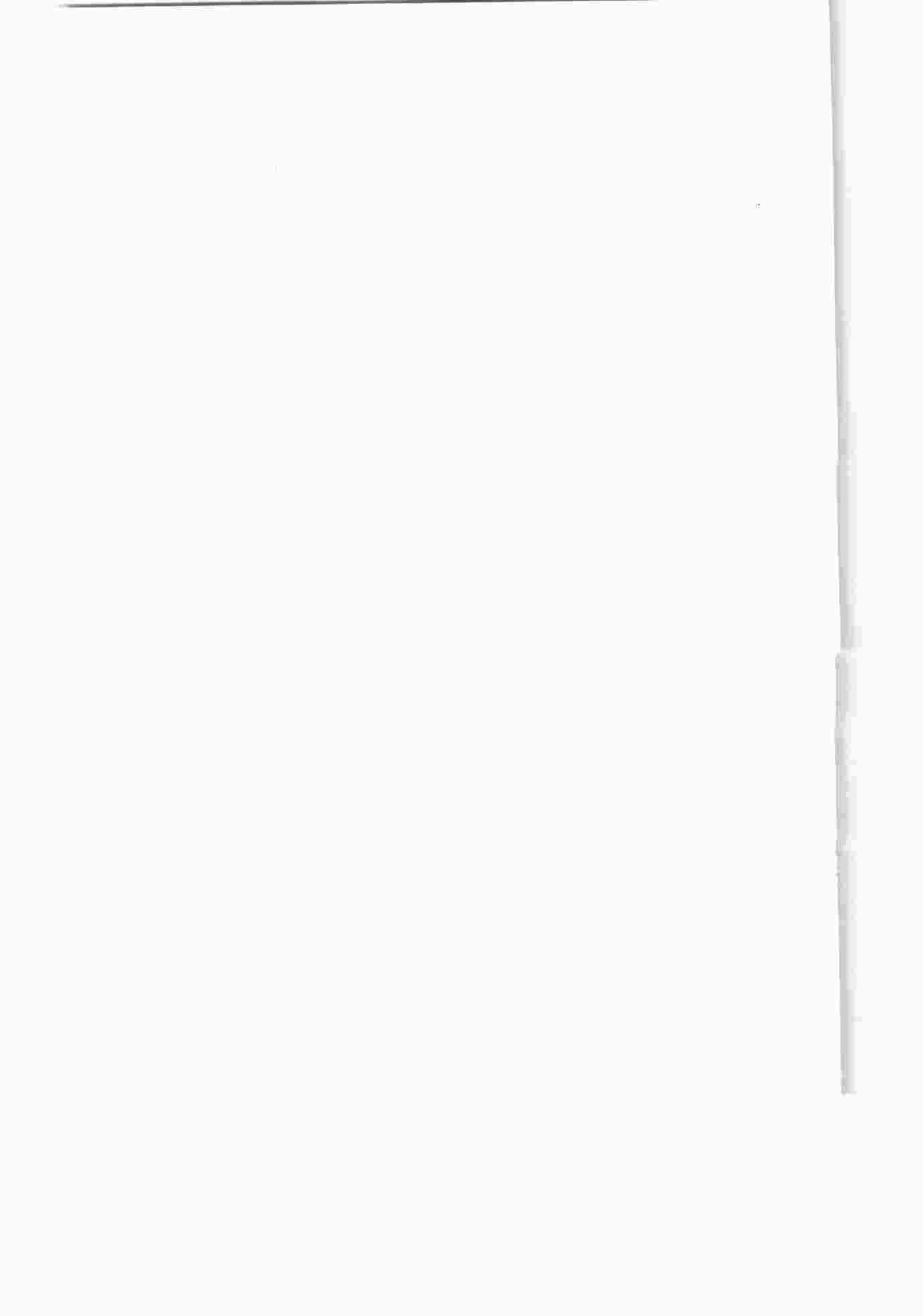

FOREWORD

ENTERING THE DIALOGUE ON THE POSTMODERN SELF

> ...as our century becomes old, we note that writers who express the awareness of more than one culture have become an increasingly common phenomenon. Today it is not at all rare to find a writer to whom the multicultural situation is not only a subject matter but a mode of perception as well. Without it he would cease to be creative.[1]

Almost without contest, the twentieth century can claim witness to the rise of ethnic consciousness. The greater social and geographic mobility of modern times has meant the dispersion of races and cultures all over the world. In this age it has become pointless to consider the existence of several cultures and races in any one place as unique to that province. The planet as a whole has become multiracial and multicultural though we may, at the same time, be contained, even prefer to be contained, within the boundaries that separate us as peoples and nations.

Heterogeneity, rather than render the modern, indeed, postmodern, individual schizophrenic, allows her to connect with other individuals at crucial points. She has acquired a new way of apprehending the world, through the multifaceted lens of our dialogue-oriented times. Malaysian writer Lloyd Fernando, writing in the late 70's, proposes a redefinition of culture based on the common finding that all men are one: "Cautiously I advance this as

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[1] Indian writer Meenakshi Mukherjee commenting in the late 70's on the multiplicity of vision that is the strength of the modern novelist (Narasimhaiah 86).

a principle epitomising everything we say and do nowadays. We search for unity, homogeneity, while being confronted by the reality of heterogeneity" (329). The point in this century that at least attempts to applaud democracy is not that people are different, but that each person is unique. Each is a necessary chapter in the story of mankind.

Belief in the sovereignty of the Self, as Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin makes clear, presupposes belief in the sovereignty of the Other, the Other being, from another point of view, a Self. The very real friction, often fierce animosity, between peoples that exists today because of race or religion is simply a matter of choice. If peoples remain segregated in outward ambition and attitude, it could be they have yet to engage in meaningful encounter with their Other/s. But this is a world that keeps on shrinking, while the possibility of encountering varied perspectives is growing. A monologic point of view in these times seems impossible, except as the result of desire to monopolise power. For every encounter leads to dialogue, overt or covert, and every dialogue changes the Selfs engaged, as Bakhtin argues, even if only to an insignificant degree. Bakhtin's thesis, as we examine in detail in the first chapter of this dissertation, is that dialogue inevitably adds to the consciousnesses of the participants. As Tzvetan Todorov puts it in Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle (1984), Bakhtin's theories provide a "new interpretation of culture" (x). Bakhtin's reflections on the novel as a genre, for instance, reveal the human being to be "irreducibly heterogeneous: it is human 'being' that exists only in dialogue" (xi). Seen within the context of the rise of ethnicity, this is certainly true.

Still, it remains a widely-arguable point just how 'independent' minorities are, and how eurocentric world views can be. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, in their study of 'post-colonial' writings and theories of literature, state, "the centre ... imposes its criteria as universal, and dictates an order the terms of

which the cultural margins must always see themselves as disorder and chaos" (Walder 303). The designation 'post-colonial' itself implies an initially western shift in attitude that would seem to dictate that what comes after colonialism is not independence first, but continued attachment to a former colonial perspective. Author and political journalist Nayantara Sahgal, speaking at the Silver Jubilee conference of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies held at University of Kent in 1989, felt it pertinent, only eight years ago, to question this new '-ism':

> I am a little dazzled, and more than a little intimidated, by all the scholarship I have heard propounded in the last few days. I have also wondered when 'post-colonial' is supposed to end. First we were colonials, and now we seem to be post-colonials. So is 'colonial' the new Anno Domini from which events are to be everlastingly measured? (Rutherford 30)

The 'post-colonial' label seems an ideology that only blurs identity. It must drag in the relation to a colonial past, although that colonial definition may have been rejected for independence a long time ago. Nayantara Sahgal, to complete the above quote, speaks of India's colonial past as just another layer of knowlegde and memory that has gone into forming Indian identity, a yet unfinished expression of being. India's colonial past is not an absolute to her:

> My own awareness as a writer reaches back to x-thousand B.C., at the very end of which timeless time the British came, and stayed, and left. And now they've gone, and their residue is simply one more layer added to the layer upon layer of Indian consciousness. Just one more (30).

Admittedly, history cannot be disregarded or ignored, and however it came about, European dominance ***is*** a historical fact. However, history itself is not as fixed a thing as it may have seemed at one time. Historian and philosopher Michel Foucault's extensive work on re-interpreting history suggests strongly that history finally "has no 'meaning'" except "in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles, of strategies and tactics" (Power/Knowledge 114). Foucault asserts that the interpretation of history has become more important than the actual past events themselves, and that the interpretation given to those events comes from the entity presently in power. This entity shapes out of historical events a meaning that safeguards its own continuity. Foucault sees the history that "bears and determines us" as expressed "in the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning," (114) where 'meaning' derives from the interaction of all components of power (political, juridical, religious, educational etc.) controlled by the establishment. It is ideology then, ascribed by power discourses, that decides human relations. The study of 'post-colonial' literatures also, just as any other 'organised' body is able to, and inevitably does, creates its own set of ideologies.

The story of ethnicity, captured in the various new literatures and in immigrant writings, celebrates the vital differences that distinguish a people and give them their unique voice. This can only mean of course, it is at the same time the story of the similarities that bind the human race, however alien races may seem to be to one another. Paul Sharrad, a teacher of 'post-colonial' literatures at Wollongong University, refers to the "emerging multicultural personality" as a "fluid area of exchange" rather than "a self conceptualised as some core objectified ego to be discovered, defined, developed and protected at all costs" (Rutherford 60). This seems a perspicacious evaluation of the

postmodern Self, a self that draws all others to it just as it draws unto all others.

The history of the Jewish people would appal the prophets of heterogeneity, as despite the many Jewish diaspora, the Jews were largely not allowed to **be**, much less dialogue with their Other/s. It may be argued that the Jews chose to live apart within a community tightly bound by particular rules, customs and laws. But this is, or should be, the unquestioned prerogative of every community. The Jews, however, were persecuted for what they chose to believe. Often, they were forced to live within specified boundaries, apart from non-Jewish communities. Though there might be business transactions between the Jews and non-Jews, the Jews were largely believed to be inferior to and by non-Jews, who associated the Jews with the devil. There was, therefore, little of value for the non-Jews to learn or adopt from the Jews. It was only after Hitler's atrocities against the Jews of Europe during World War II were made public that the non-Jewish world has fallen over itself to accept the Jew as a legitimate Other.[2] However, constant persecution of the Jews, at its peak during, for instance, the crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the Polish massacres, the Russian pogroms and Hitler's evil reign, was a binding reason for the Jews to maintain a tightly communal lifestyle, and to distrust and reject non-Jewish ways. Despite the long history of Jewish existence,[3] then, Jewish-non-Jewish dialogue is really a process

[2] There are still whole regions where anti-semitism remains a way of life, and Jews may face varying degrees of prejudice even in 'havens' such as the United States of America where the goddess of liberty supposedly reigns.

[3] A History of the Jewish People (ben-sasson ed. 1976) traces the existence of the Jews back to the second millennium BCE when ancient Israel's "national image and historical activity" became "crystallized" within the

only recently begun. It is no wonder the Jew, when finally allowed the freedom to explore his own Self, and choose for himself his Other, changed so dramatically in the 'free world'. This is evident in the Americanisation of the East European Jewish immigrant, which is so adequately captured in the Jewish fiction of Abraham Cahan.

It seems ironic however that when the Jew is finally acknowledged his right to be himself, he has become as postmodern as everybody else. The religion, folkways, mores and many aspects of Jewish culture his ancestors were murdered for down the centuries have become largely vestigial for the postmodern Jew. Historian Henry Feingold ponders on this in his exploration of what he terms throughout his essays the Jewish American "survival dilemma":

> ... after World War II ... a strong sense of Jewish identity began to wane. Ultimately, survivalists may conclude that the greatest irony in the American Jewish experience was that the acculturation process that finally created the commonalities upon which a community might be built also contained the seeds for the dissolution of group identity. Today, it is readily apparent that the process of dissolving the distinctive elements of American Jewry is well advanced. There seems no way of halting it, except by consciously convincing American Jews that there is something in their cultural heritage worth preserving (59).

Feingold notes that the Jew, having become a product of his time, "view[s] the world," as the postmodern individual does,

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"bond" between the people and their "spiritual mission" as a people set apart to uphold the "supreme religious ideal" (3).

"through a secular prism" (14).[4] He argues: "The new secular[5] persons, who placed themselves in the center of the universe and who were convinced that modern science would allow humankind to control it, could not take the supernatural character of religion seriously" (17). As for Jewish Americans, Feingold opines that "[n]o American subculture has been more receptive to secularism than American Jewry," (14) and states that "in survey after survey, [American Jewry] is shown to be America's most irreligious subculture," as "Jews tend more often to consider themselves atheists or agnostics," and are "less likely to be members of a religious congregation or attend religious services" (14-15). Feingold suggests that American Jewry possesses an "overweening desire to be modern and secular, "(15) and this desire "has left its synagogues empty, its rabbis without authority, and its once extensive network of organizations ineffectual" (15).

This, however, is not surprising when we consider the condition of the postmodern individual: to be anything she deems fit. When religion, for instance, has become a quaint socio-cultural habit for many, or when many others choose the Protestant ideal of conscience above ritual, the Jew too may certainly choose to live in his times, in dialogue with his Other/s; as Bakhtin points out, the Jew, being "irreducibly heterogeneous," is "human 'being'" that "exists only in dialogue" (Tzvetan xi).

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[4] Undeniably, the religion of the Jew still plays an important role in any discussion of Jewish identity.

[5] Feingold defines the term 'secularism' as "that desire in modern persons to be free, autonomous individuals, able to achieve self-realization in an open, democratic society in which they participate voluntarily. Their mentality is temporal and scientific; and above all else, secular persons are involved in the 'pursuit of happiness'" (14).

Nevertheless, it does seem a shame, especially now when heterogeneity has strong social as well as political backing, for any ethnic culture to lose its unique characteristics. Envisioning the future of American society as a cultural mosaic "enriched by a variety of elements of different shapes and colors," (8) George Washington University professor Amitai Etzioni hails "American heterogeneity" as being "much greater than that of most democracies, and it keeps rising" (8). Ideally, the American cultural mosaic, he explains,

> depicts a society in which various societies maintain their religious, culinary and cultural particularities, proud of and knowledgeable about their specific traditions, while at the same time they recognize that they are integral parts of a more encompassing whole. The communities are, and see themselves as, constitutive elements of a more encompassing community of communities, a society of which they are parts. Moreover, they have a firm commitment to the shared framework (8).

Etzioni argues that assimilation is not the answer the United States (or any pluralistic nation) seeks: "Assimilation is not the proper remedy for the diversity overload [Americans] face. There is no compelling sociological reason to assimilate Americans into one distinguishable blend" since "unity does not require blending and may indeed thrive on recognition and appreciation of differences as long as they do not sever the shared bonds" (9).

Etzioni of course is not the first to advocate multiculturalism, or cultural pluralism, as the alternative to assimilation after Horace Kallen first proposed "cosmopolitanism" in 1915 (Feingold 54; Fine 45). Kallen's thesis that "America existed as a confederation of culturally-distinct national and ethnic

groups" (Fine 45) not only debunks the melting pot myth, it calls, or at least, yearns, for 'reinstatement' of America as land of the free and home to the downtrodden. The image of America as melting pot and the idealist's haven may have greatly receded, especially in scholarly research,[6] but Crevecoeur's belief in the far-reaching possibilities of dialogue in America still resonate somewhere in the popular imagination, as suggested, for instance, by the continuous flow of economic and political refugees into the United States today.

What Etzioni advocates for the present time seems the most logical and reasonable socio-political agenda for any pluralistic society. Feingold, however, wonders if Kallen's idea was not "chimerical" at the time, since, he argues, "the notion of cultural pluralism" on which "Jewish survivalists [for instance] staked so much" seems not "as viable today as it once did" (54).[7]

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[6] Historian Roger Daniels is only one scholar who, in his engaging study of the history of the United States, argues that much of American dialogue with the waves of Others that flooded the growing American towns and cities in the early years of American history was really a monological rhetoric imposed on those Others (4, 7).

[7] Feingold suggests there "may be some truth" to Philip Gleason's suggestion that "the number of Jewish thinkers attracted to [cultural pluralism]," such as Franz Boas, Mordecai Kaplan and Kurt Lewin "has the earmarks of a Jewish intellectual conspiracy to create space for a Jewish culture" (54). Feingold explains:

> From the outset, Jewish survivaliss (sic) understood the implications of the melting pot model of acculturation and resisted its blandishments. They sensed that it meant that immigrant Jews had to become something other than what they

Multiculturalism, according to Feingold, "from today's vantage," has hardly worked:

> Even the most optimistic observer today cannot help but recognize that the signs of cohesiveness and commitment to group particularity are declining among American Jews. A burgeoning intermarriage rate, weakened family ties, and diminishing religious passion are manifest. The replacement of even an eccentric religious credo by a bland interchangeable civil religion tends to weaken Jewish ethnicity (55).

Feingold concludes: "Few students of the Jewish condition in America would conclude that cultural pluralism has carried the day" (55).

Bakhtin's thesis that change, conscious (that is through choice) and unconscious, is inevitable, is clearly seen in this situation. To a large degree, and for their own individual, unique reasons, the Jewish immigrants strove to change when they entered the United States. Inevitably, they also changed in other ways they did not plan or imagine. The dialogue between the Jew and America has not ceased; both have changed as a result of the encounter, and both will continue to change, as both are dynamic, organic entities. The Self, which Bakhtin defines as "that which through [the] performance [of deeds] answers other selves and the

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> were in order to be successful. All the separate movements in Jewish organizational life, from the Kehillah (local authority) to the Jewish labor movement to the various organizational expressions of American Zionism, were attempts to fortify American Jewry against total melting (54-5).

world from the unique time and place [it] occupies in existence" (Clark/Holquist 64) is not

> a presence wherein is lodged the ultimate privilege of the real, the source of sovereign intention and guarantor of unified meaning. The ... self is never whole, since it can only exist dialogically. It is not a substance or essence in its own right but exists only in a tensile relationship with all that is other and, most important, with other selves (65).

The Self, when it encounters an Other "by which [it] relate[s] [its] uniqueness," (64) appropriates something, consciously and/or unconsciously, from the encounter, just as the Other does also, and in this way both Self and Other are changed. In this sense, dialogue, as Bakhtin delineates it, is regarded as the "primal structure of any particular existence, representing a constant exchange between what is already and what is not yet" (65).

At this moment in history it may be possible for researchers such as Feingold to survey the past, and to conclude that cultural pluralism, or multiculturalism, has "weaken[ed] Jewish ethnicity" (55). The point, however, is that ethnicity is only a relative thing, that even within the same ethnic group there will be an infinite number of definitions of ethnic 'purity' and demands as to the 'required' degree of purity necessary to join the club. It is quite apparent, too, that many other ethnic cultures all over the world have also 'weakened' in that they too have assimilated characteristics of other cultures. As much as ethnicity is a communal expression of being, it is also a unique, individualised, and private one. Since ethnic boundaries will always exist whether they are laid down or not, it is important that they be recognised and instilled. As to how 'pure' they will or can remain, no one can predict, since the moment a culture encounters another, it loses its

'purity,' as it becomes exposed to choices of existence beyond its own until then, limited, experiences. The situation may be seen as yet another re-enactment of that ancient scene set in the pristine garden of innocence into which creepeth the serpent of corruption, or, simply, as the dynamic process of growth and change in action. There is also the greater choice to begin with: to change or not.

We may perhaps fear the emergence of a bland, androgynous, international individual without any unique culture or special feature to set it off from other individuals, but I believe this unlikely to happen as the Self's drive to be uniquely itself, possibly an offshoot of the survival-of-the-fittest instinct, is too great. George Orwell's 1984 envisioned this scenario, and suggested that the Self's impulse to act out its unique fate is too greatly imprinted in its memory for total erasure. Bakhtin's work strongly suggests that the Self, though it is "never whole," and "can exist only dialogically" (Clark/Holquist 65), is uniquely itself at all times; this is illustrated by the fact that "even when a situation repeats itself among humans, we cannot know absolutely how each of us will respond," since "[e]ach of us has a capacity to be unique" (67). Despite being changed by its encounter with an Other then, the Self remains intrinsically itself. In the same way, although a culture may change drastically after an encounter with an Other, it carries within itself that which sets it apart as being uniquely itself.

What a people really fears then, when it insists on cultural boundaries, may not be how it changes, but that the Other, acting as Big Brother, may ***force*** it to change. As Michel Foucault's work on the history of man suggests, individuals need to feel secure about and in control of their existence to overcome the anxiety brought on by mortality. This security or power may seem achievable only through the subjugation of all variables in order to make them constants that cease to threaten. It may be easier to let

God control the variables, oneself included, but this is not always possible as modern man is still celebrating the death of God.

When fascism, whether in the form of ethnic cleansing or a racial quota system, exists today as a fact in many realms, the fear of annihilation may indeed be a daily trauma for minority cultures. It need hardly be stated that this is especially true for the Jewish people, given their painful history. When a Jewish voice speaks about the loss of ethnic identity, therefore, the world wants to listen carefully. After the Holocaust, who can be certain that everybody will follow the rules of common existence, and in which case, what does it profit a culture to lose even a shred of its identity? A culture must come up with its own safeguards; this seems the best option for all cultures that choose to live together, at least until man chooses to resurrect God.

Amitai Etzioni's call for conscious effort by Americans to live together peacefully would seem to work as well for the macrocosmic whole:

> ... as one envisions the future America, one must concern oneself not merely with the relations among the parts (the various communities) and the whole (the community of communities, the American society), but also with the specific contents of the shared values, habits, institutions, and policies that make up the framework. The American society, indeed, faces the challenging task of recasting the framework from time to time as it seeks to prevent the parts from falling out (9).

This is necessary, Etzioni explains because "A society is held together best when it commands a set of shared values that defines the virtue society seeks to uphold, a strong commitment to shared purposes, and a clear sense of social responsibility" (9). It is important to remember, Etzioni cautions, that

> mutual tolerance and respect do not hang in thin air; they are best anchored by a layered loyalty to an encompassing sense of community that embraces not merely those of one's "own kind" but also those of other kinds that make up the larger societal whole (12).

If life **is** with people[8], as Jewish culture claims, then people must make a commitment to learn to accommodate one another, and to participate in shared "rituals of forgiveness, closeness and closure," as Etzioni submits:

> We need to learn to accept people from other backgrounds as persons rather than merely as members of sociological or statistical categories. We cannot recognize them if identity politics is incessantly promoted. We need rituals of forgiveness, closeness and closure (12).

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[8] This phrase is from the title of Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog's popular study of ***shtetl*** (Jewish village) culture.

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CHAPTER 1

THE JEWISH VOICE IN MODERN DIALOGUE

> As we say on Yom Kippur, *mi yorum umi yishofeyl*-leave it to Him to decide who goes on foot and who gets to ride. The main thing is confidence. A Jew must never, never give up hope. How does he go on hoping, you ask, when he's already died a thousand deaths? But that's the whole point of being a Jew in this world! What does it say in the prayer book? *Atoh bekhartonu*! We're God's chosen people; it's no wonder the whole world envies us.[1]

Abraham Cahan's Jewish fiction analyses the dialogue of becoming that is central to Jewish life in America. It considers the choices the Jew, as a unique, independent Self, makes as a result of his encounter with America. Cahan's work investigates the inevitable changes that the Jew undergoes as he dialogues with America, yet highlights the fundamental uniqueness of the individual Self in spite of these changes.

Cahan, considered the father of modern Jewish American Literature, was the first to give serious consideration to the dialogue between the immigrant Jew and America. Jules Chametzky places Cahan at "the very beginning" of the "development of a significant American Jewish literature," and maintains that Cahan's "imaginative recreation of the effects of immigration" initiated the

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[1] Sholem Aleichem. Tevye the Dairyman and the Railroad Stories. Trans. Hillel Halkin. New York: Random House, 1988.

"impressive ... fictional achievement" continued by later Jewish American writers such as Michael Gold, Henry Roth and Saul Bellow (1977, viii). Chametzky praises Cahan's fiction, especially The Rise of David Levinsky (1917), as providing "a richly articulated treatment of an experience that is a central cultural fact in a nation of immigrants" (viii). David Levinsky, he states, echoing many others such as William Dean Howells, Isaac Rosenfeld, Saul Bellow, Irving Howe, Louis Harap, Sanford Marovitz, Moses Rischin, Daniel Walden and Albert Waldinger, "is a classic of American literature" (viii). Isaac Rosenfeld's account of his initial prejudice against David Levinsky and later enthusiastic affirmation that Cahan "was writing an American novel par excellence in the very center of the Jewish genre" [2] (Solotaroff ed. 274) is by now a familiar story.

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[2] Many Jewish American writers insist that they write from the perspective of their whole Selfs rather than from the viewpoint of their specific Jewishness. While their works are firmly anchored in "Jewish life and feeling," they link this Jewishness to a "quest for the universal" (Fried ed. 72). Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud and Philip Roth, for instance, "writers considered ... prototypical [in Jewish American Literature]," have all "explicitly refused the label of 'Jewish writer'" (Hilfer 75). For Bellow, the label 'Jewish writer' is "vulgar, unnecessarily parochializing and utterly without value" (Harap 1987, 102). Bellow's explanation is worth quoting in full for its wit as much as for the point it makes:

> Suppose you have an uncle in the wooden handle business and the wooden handle business went out of date and was broke. And you got stuck with a big inventory of wooden handles. Well, you would want to go around and attach wooden handles to as many things as possible. I'm just an unfortunate creature who gets a lot of these handles attached to him. The whole Jewish writer business is sheer invention - by the media, by critics and by 'scholars.' It never even passes my mind. I'm well aware of being Jewish and also of being American and of being a writer. But I'm

William Dean Howells, in 1895, was the first major American writer to recognise Cahan's satirical style and praise the power of Cahan's writing, which he felt expertly held the reader "between a laugh and a heartache" (quoted in Kirk and Kirk 41). Like Howells, Cahan, schooled in the tradition of the Russian masters such as Turgenev and Tolstoy, was committed to realism in his fiction, which he defined along the standards of the redoubtable Russians. He believed that while writers such as Henry James and Howells exemplified the ideals of this tradition, the majority of American writers were writing "fluff" and pandering to popular taste in order to increase sales (Current Opinion 206).[3] Cahan's conception of art is based on "truth as it is mirrored by art" (Walden 1990, 10). The "sole end" of art is "*not* to afford pleasure," or capture the beautiful, because "the word [is] not as important as the content" (10). Rather, Cahan argues, the aim of good writing is to reproduce "the thrill of truth" (6).[4] Indeed,

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also a hockey fan, a fact which nobody ever mentions (Pinsker 1992, xi).

[3] Cahan went to American Literature in order to understand the mind and spirit of the nation, as he indicates: "I remember thirty-five years ago, when I came to this country, I turned to its literature. ... Boston was the real center of culture - an American Athens. But then Athens moved to New York, the great world market. And literature became a market commodity, commercialized" (Current Opinion, 206).

[4] Ronald Sanders submits that Cahan's philosophy of realism owed to the fact that Cahan had few, if any, literary ambitions when he first began to write, his focus then being solely on promoting socialism among the Jewish immigrants (1969, 182). Sanders conjectures that Cahan started writing probably "just because the practical side of his life had become so full" that "his

Cahan's stories are 'eye-witness accounts' of how the Jew changed in America.

However, his writing found only a small readership in a market that devoured works of romance rather than realism. Arising out of the pain and struggle of the Jewish immigrants, Cahan's themes offered no glamour and little adventure. His protagonist is often the common, beaten Jewish immigrant trying desperately to make sense of what is happening to him. In fact, Cahan's realism met with protests of anti-Semitism from Jewish Americans who alleged that he portrayed Jews in a "vile" light by creating characters like the pathetic Rouvke Arbel in "A Providential Match" (1895) and David Levinsky, the opportunistic and ruthless enterpreneur (Harap 1974, 507). Daniel Walden ventures that Cahan does cross the line from caricature to "bad taste" in "A Providential Match," (1990, 14), and Louis Harap suggests that Cahan, writing his first short story in English, "had yet to achieve a tone" that "would carry his fiction beyond the thin line that separates the anti-Semitic from the naturalistic" (495). Cahan's use of realism, however, did have its defenders; The Bookman, for example, strongly criticised the narrow-mindedness of "some ... Jewish newspapers" which denounced Jewish writers for depicting ghetto life in a "frankly realistic manner" (507).

Cahan's writing is undeniably rooted in the Yiddish tradition of ***menschlikeit*** and ***yiddishkeit***,[5] established in Yiddish literature

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inner, contemplative side, stimulated by all this activity," began to "yearn for expression" (188).

[5] Howe defines ***menschlikeit*** (from ***mensch***, meaning 'man') as "a readiness to live for ideals beyond the clamor of self, a sense of plebeian fraternity, an ability to forge a community of moral order even while remaining subject to a society of social disorder, and a persuasion that human existence is a deeply serious matter for which all of us are finally accountable," (645); ***yiddishkeit***,

by 'the grandfather of Yiddish Literature,' Sholom Jacob Abramovitz (1836-1917), who used the pen-name Mendele Mokher S'forim (Mendele the Bookseller). According to Irving Howe, Cahan introduced into American Literature the typically Yiddish tone of "self-criticism and satire" seen, for instance, in the works of Mendele Mokher S'forim and Shalom Rabinowitz (1859-1916), the writer known as Sholom Aleichem (this is actually a traditional Jewish greeting of peace) (1989 rpt, 596).[6] Cahan's work also acknowledges the importance of Yiddish culture in the lives of the East European immigrants, and shows how in many ways, Jewish Americans remain intrinsically motivated by all things Yiddish. Indeed, his protagonists such as Levinsky, Asriel Stroon in "The Imported Bridegroom," (1898) and Aaron Zalkin in "The Daughter of Reb Avrom Leib," (1900) believe that only a full return to the Yiddish milieu will bring them inner peace. Cahan's very method of ironic comment, his use of wit and humour, and his narrative position as insider-observer all derive from the Yiddish tradition.

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meanwhile, refers to "that phase of Jewish history during the past two centuries ... marked by the prevalence of Yiddish as the language of the east European Jews and ... by the growth among them of a culture resting mainly on that language" (16). Howe adds that although ***yiddishkeit*** no longer refers strictly to traditional Orthodoxy, it "retains strong ties to the religious past" and is "by no means" secular, but instead, "refers to a way of life, a shared experience, which goes beyond opinion or ideology" (16).

[6] The tradition of Jewish self-criticism and satire seems to me rooted in the earliest Jewish writings such as the Old Testament, which is replete with the Self's knowledge of its own fallibility and its attempts to attain purity.

Cahan, however, also introduced the distinctive note of the modern voice into this tradition. He writes about the acquiring of a broader, more inquiring and cosmopolitan attitude to life as well as the inevitability of urbanisation, industrialisation and commercialisation in a fast-changing, progressive world. His protagonists are identifiably individualistic; they are not satisfied with answers to life provided by their community, but are driven to experience life for themselves, and so strike out in search of knowledge and experience. They are attracted to the new and unfamiliar, daring to put aside former beliefs and attitudes. They pass from innocence to knowledge, from purity to corruption, and must live with the changes in themselves, for they had chosen to change.

Cahan also explores the 'other side of the American experience'. Unlike Mary Antin, for instance, who portrayed assimilation in solely glowing terms in The Promised Land (1911), Cahan, despite his own advocation of assimilation as a journalist and a social reformer, was willing to consider in his stories that Americanisation was disintegrating the Jewish milieu. In fact, according to Howe, Cahan "sensed and sometimes stated" the "overarching paradox of Yiddish culture in America," that "the sooner it began to realize its visions, the sooner it would destroy them" (524).

Cahan focuses on the conflicts, frustration, guilt and bitterness that change can bring; disillusionment that America has failed to live up to its promises;[7] yearning for the older, more

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[7] In considering the immigrants' disillusionment with America, Walden states that "competing with the myth of Columbus' Land" was "the reality, the anti-Semitism, the failures, the disillusionment." On Columbus Day, for instance, some would curse Columbus with the traditional Yiddish "*A klug tsu Columbus*!" ("A curse on Columbus!"). Columbus may have

familiar orientation; spiritual impoverishment in the face of materialism and commercialism; the responsibilities that come with the freedom and privilege of choice; and the break-up of former relationships.[8] Referring to this skilful merging of the modern and the traditional in Cahan's stories, Walden proposes that Cahan's fiction "tested modernity in terms of an urban vision of human freedom," and reminds us that "tradition is recursive, a dominant presence within and despite the overwhelming power of the modern" (1990, 8).

Cahan then, is the first to deal with the "uneasy coming together of the American and the Jewish," which Bonnie K. Lyons identifies as a major theme of Jewish American Literature (Fried ed. 63). The duality of Jewishness and Americanness which Cahan pioneered, according to Jules Chametzky, is a theme that has come to absorb "every consciously Jewish writer" of this century (1977, viii). It is not at all surprising that the theme of identity, which

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discovered America, but according to Harry Roskolenko, his mother would add, "But so had my father, born in 1860, coming four hundred years after Columbus. And all my father could say, when asked about Columbus Day, was 'I will not get paid for this *yontev* (holiday). A double *klug tsu Columbus!*'" (quoted in Walden 1984, 9).

[8] Howe posits that Cahan understood the inner conflicts of the Jewish immigrants because of his own ambiguity towards assimilation (1989 rpt 525). According to Ronald Sanders, Cahan's lack of fulfilment led him to assume the pose of the "smiling public man" who had seemingly lived out "an American success story," but whose personal life and attitude seemed to suggest otherwise (1969, 391). Cahan was even ambiguous about his stand on Jewish immigrants, although he worked tirelessly for their betterment (Harap 492; Howe 508).

seems an especially American preoccupation in that the very idea of 'New World' invites reinterpretation of the individual's identity and Self, was also a Jewish preoccupation. The Jew, for centuries the archetypal outsider, found in expansive America the psychic space to explore and examine his identity as Jew, and his place within the larger American context. As to be expected, the duality of his identity, his Jewishness in response to his Americanness and vice versa, became one of his main focus points. The Jewish American preoccupation with identity even culminated in a 'Jewish decade' in American Literature, which saw the emergence of a significant number of "highly talented and original writers" and a "support group" of "gifted critics" in New York (Hilfer 76).[9]

The identity of a Jewish character, Sanford Marovitz maintains, is "determinable not alone through self-knowledge" but "through his or her relation to *home*," that is to "the United States or any small part of it" (Fried ed 315). In Cahan's fiction, the 'greenhorn' encounters his 'rebirth' in America with a mixture of frustration, bewilderment and dissatisfaction that forces him to reformulate his identity, adding to his Self the consciousness of his American experience. He is constantly aware of both his Self and the Other, and realises that to achieve wholeness of being, he must reconcile both strands of his consciousness. It is really in imitation of Cahan's Jewish Americans that a Bellovian or Malamudian character questions himself and his external reality in order to understand his whole Self as modern man, better.

Cahan's fiction acknowledges the complexity of Jewish American identity. While the psycho-emotional pressures of

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[9] Hilfer notes that the Jewish decade was inevitable due to, firstly, the horrors of World War II and, secondly, "heart was in [at the time], responsibility was in, and Jews were specialists in both" (75).

immigration and assimilation may be traumatic for any individual, they are perhaps even more so for the Jew. The Jew has been Outsider for too long to effortlessly discard his sense of alienation from mainstream society. Conforming to the expectations of non-Jewish society through conversion to Christianity and living as a non-Jew is, of course, not the answer. Firstly, the intrinsic uniqueness of a Self which distinguishes it from all other Selfs cannot be changed; this follows that the Jewish Self remains essentially Jewish despite the changes it experiences as a result of dialogue with an Other. To 'become' non-Jewish, then, to deny an essential element of Jewish identity, results only in fragmenting the Jewish Self. Secondly, history documents that becoming Christian or living a non-Jewish life did not always protect the Jew from persecution when mainstream society needed a scapegoat.[10]

The Jew comes into dialogue with America (or any other new environment) bearing the burden of his unique history of

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[10] Many 14th and 15th century Spanish Jews, for instance, were forcefully Christianised or readily converted to escape persecution and death, but faced Christian suspicion that they practised Judaism in secret (a reasonable possibility). Such suspicion led to open antagonism against 'Marranos' (Spanish for 'swine', to refer to New Christians) and climaxed in the Spanish Inquisition. The Inquisition, which used torture as a means of learning the 'truth,' aimed to trap New Christians who "secretly remained faithful to Judaism or who did not behave as ... devout Christian[s]" (ben-Sasson ed 588). Although the antagonism against New Christians was partly religiously motivated, it was also due to jealousy against New Christians who could now legally participate in mainstream society. The clashes between Christians and New Christians which led to the Inquisition then, were also fuelled by a "strong economic and social undercurrent" (586).

constant persecution by the non-Jewish Other. No other community has been persecuted throughout the centuries simply on the basis of identity as the Jews have been. The Jew, finding himself on the defensive, is forced to continuously justify his identity, his culture and his religion, and becomes focused on his own Self rather than on the world around him. At the same time, the only new perspective of himself that he gains from the Other's unique view of him is that of enemy and despoiler. As 'Christ-killer,' an identity attached to him by the Christian world ever since the split between the Church and all things Jewish in the Dark Ages, he is forced to see himself not as God's chosen, his own avowed identity, but as God's enemy, the devil.

To a large extent, America allowed the Jew to lay aside his fears of anti-Semitism and to view himself as a modern individual who had equal rights and opportunities to a good life in a new country. But, like most other poor immigrants from the Old World, the Jew too found that social and economic conditions in 'New Canaan' were not rosy as he had expected. He found work, but it was long and hard. He often laboured 10 or more hours a day in cramped, airless rooms sewing garments or toiled in mass-production factories for bosses who cared more for their products than for the tired workers. He pushed himself to earn enough money to send for his family to join him, all the while aware that he had not found American streets to be paved with gold or flowing with milk and honey afterall. The slow-paced routine of the Old World ***shtetl*** (town or village) was forever gone; the Jew was now in the 'land of "hurry up!"' and had to quickly match its pace in order to survive. The former lifestyle which revolved around the stability and security of the synagogue was lost.

The Jew, like other immigrants, had to restructure his life in America. He could not spend long hours at the synagogue in study, nor could he always visit the synagogue at the stipulated three times

a day or observe Jewish Law as he used to. This was a serious loss even for the Jew who was not religiously motivated but had kept the Law for social, cultural, or deeper, inexplicably personal reasons. At the same time, the Jew was understandably relieved at the freedom to be himself in America, where anti-Semitism was not a dominant force. As to be expected, he hurriedly explored the possibilities of be-ing, and may have given up more of his Jewishness than he had intended in his rush to take his rightful place within mainstream society.

The situation was essentially complex and conflict-ridden for the Jews, and, each, as unique individuals, responded differently to the dialogue of becoming. While some, like Cahan's Rabbi Eliezer in "Rabbi Eliezer's Christmas," and Michalina in "The Apostate of Chego-Chegg" proceeded with caution and much inner suffering, others like Yekl and David Levinsky pushed ahead in their dialogue with America, quickly exchanging the outward signs of their Jewishness such as their thick beards, sidelocks, ***shtetl*** garments as well as speech, behaviour and thinking for American ways and manners.

Where the Jewish immigrant's experience differs from that of other immigrants then, is in his unique identity as a Jew. He finds that he cannot forget his past or his history because they have shaped his self-identity. Although he may be unsure as to the specific characteristics of his identity as a Jewish American, he is certain at least that he is not Gentile. As such, his collective memory of persecution by the Gentile produces a sense of guilt that he has given up his Jewishness, and he feels as if he has betrayed his community by becoming Other. This indeed is the malediction affecting Cahan's Levinsky, Asriel Stroon, and Aaron Zalkin.

Apart from his history of persecution, the Jew's sense of alienation is due partly to the belief he receives from his culture and community that he lives in spiritual ***galut*** (exile) while awaiting ***ha'***

Mashiach (the Messiah) who will deliver him from the inevitable hardships of life, and restore him to his rightful heritage, ***Eretz Yisrael*** (Land of Israel). As a member of the Chosen People, his role is to wait patiently, humbly and faithfully for God to fulfill His ancient promise. The many Jewish diaspora have taken this idea further to include geographical ***galut*** as well. Alienation and displacement then, are not unfamiliar experiences for the Jew. In a sense, he comes to accept his estrangement, his brooding, melancholy and despondency. While he yearns to rid himself of this condition, he is, paradoxically, most comfortable in it, and clings to this state of being, as Levinsky does, making it difficult to reconcile his Jewishness and his Americanness.

America was perhaps the only place that could give the Jew the sense of belonging that he craved. According to Sacvan Bercovitch, "of all symbols of identity," only America "has united nationality and universality, civic and spiritual selfhood, secular and redemptive history, the country's past and paradise to be, in a single synthetic ideal" (176). The New World was relatively 'untainted,' unlike Europe with its strong, established, prejudice against Jews. America was popularly known as the 'free world,' 'The Promised Land' and 'New Canaan' even among early Christian settlers like the Pilgrims who escaped England because of religious persecution.

The assimilation of the East European Jews seems an inevitable fact, as it is impossible for a people to remain totally untouched by their surroundings unless they live within a fortress built to resist influence from without. Finding itself in contact with another culture, very little can stop the transformation of any culture. Mikhail Bakhtin argues for the inevitability of change once an entity, such as a culture, encounters another, when he argues that the Self, or a culture, is constantly in flux, changing as it does with each new encounter. Every encounter offers the Self a fresh point of view, but as the Self retains its sovereignty at all times, it

chooses how it will (or will not) change after an encounter with an other. As Bakhtin conceives it, the Self exists only in dialogue, that is, a Self is fully alive only when it is in dialogue with an Other.

For the main part, Cahan's fiction does not offer solutions to the 'immigrant problem' neither does it condemn or praise assimilation. What it does is accept the fact of immigration as a very real phenomenon of the times that affected very real individuals who fled to America for one reason or another. The trauma of removal from a familiar, earlier orientation was itself great enough to transform these individuals; Cahan's fiction is a record of that transformation. It portrays the spiritual, psychological and physical plight of the Jewish immigrant in America, and, focusing on the individual's choices and responses, considers her/his actions in the light of these choices and responses. Cahan's writing humanises a weighty moment in history, it attempts to understand the plight of the people who figured in that moment, acknowledging that the choices they made, while sovereign, were conditioned by their dialogue with all around them. Cahan concurs that to a degree, the great movement of peoples was the only choice open to them, and in his refusal to offer alternatives, to simply portray the drama, he suggests that the best path before the immigrants, now that they were in America, was to look beyond the trauma of adaptation to make the most of their dialogue with their new home.

Cahan's fiction documents the story of an immigrant people whose psycho-emotional as well as historical and cultural life has been shaped so definitely by group identity, by all the 'complications' of being Jewish. Their conception of America and their initial and later response to America are also coloured by their Jewishness. Theirs is a story that does not begin on a clean slate, as it were, because the story of the Jews, according to the poet, for instance, is embedded in the story of a God and how He chose to create a universe, while the scholar argues that the story of the Jews

began only 4,000 years ago in desertland. Either interpretation has to take into consideration the unique history of the Jews, a history of suffering and persecution. The story of any one Jew is an old story, then. The Jews' arrival in America gave rise to newer twists in that story. Cahan's success in bringing together all these strands, in uniting the Jewish and the American, is what elevates his work from being merely another portrayal of another ethnic community. The universal tone of Cahan's fiction is certainly apparent. Going beyond ghetto life, his writing sheds light on human nature in general and how it "operated among individuals" (Marovitz 1968, 197). It is this universal quality that invests his fiction with literary value for all time.

Cahan's fiction, although it came long before Bakhtin's thesis that change is inevitable in any encounter, aptly demonstrates Bakhtin's theories. Cahan's stories illustrate the sovereignty of the individual will and the uniqueness of the individual's choices and actions. Cahan shows that the individual's choices spring from her/his own perception of reality, but also that, at the same time, they are dependent on the perspective of the Other (in this case, America) for meaning, as the Self, whose point of view is only one among legion, by itself, cannot arrive at meaning.

Cahan's work demonstrates how the Self, while retaining that essential quality which determines its uniqueness and separateness as an independent Self, does at the same time inevitably change because of the influence of the Other with whom it is engaged in dialogue. When David Levinsky, for example, goes to America with the intention of starting afresh, he sees in the new country the possibility of a professional career as a doctor, something denied him in the Old World. However, because of his own impulsiveness and impatience, pride and determination to succeed, he finally opts for another possibility that America offers him: material wealth and power as an enterpreneur. Levinsky's

tremendous rise in America is due to his opportunistic bent, his ruthlessness and his single-mindedness in pursuing materialism. Rabbi Eliezer, however, will probably never reach the same heady pinnacles of success although America offers him the same possibility because he chooses conscience over materialism.

Both Levinsky and Rabbi Eliezer are unique beings, and therefore, although both find themselves in the same larger experience of America, their individual response to this new world is uniquely different from one another's. America turns out to be a totally different experience for both, as each responds to the particular voice he detects or chooses to listen to. Both realise that material comfort and security come, if it does at all, after years of hard toil. Rabbi Eliezer, however, discovers that a life centered around such struggle anchored him in earthly worries that clouded his spiritual vision, and is troubled by the knowledge. Levinsky, on the other hand, is driven by this very same struggle to want and to acquire more material gain. However, although Levinsky easily discards outward symbols of his Jewishness, as do Asriel Stroon in "The Imported Bridegroom" and Aaron Zalkin in "Reb Avrom Leib's Daughter", he retains his intrinsic Jewishness, as this is his "fundamental building block". As the following chapters consider Cahan's fiction based on Bakhtinian thought, it would be appropriate to look briefly at Bakhtin's conclusions about dialogue and Self/Other relationships.

Bakhtin considers the Self-Other distinction as the "primary opposition on which all the other differences are based" (Clark/Holquist 65). The Self and the Other exist on "two poles of all perceptual possibilities" (74), therefore, as much as the Self is a unique being responsible for its own decisions, it is paradoxically dependent on the Other for arriving at those decisions. The Self alone does not, cannot, generate 'meaning,' but needs the perspective of the Other to give it a fuller, clearer understanding of

an event and even of itself. Monologism, therefore, denies the very basis of existence itself. Bakhtin asserts that monologue is the "denial of the equal rights of consciousness" (Emerson 285). The Self then, is hardly the author of 'meaning,' and does not contain the "ultimate privilege of the real," and is not the source of "sovereign intention" or the "guarantor" of unified meaning" (Clark/Holquist 65). This is evident in considering ethnicity. The uniqueness of any one culture is precious and signifies 'meaning' only when it is appreciated alongside other cultures. The sameness that would exist otherwise, the monotony of stagnation, could add nothing to one's knowledge of one's Self.

Not only do the added perspectives a culture gains awaken it to the beauty of diversity, they reveal different angles of the Self's own uniqueness to itself. Encounter and dialogue do not only dramatise the uniqueness of the Other, they also present to the Self how it too is a unique being different from the Other. From knowing one's Self, one is able to study the Other better, from studying the Other, one knows one's Self better: the two processes are simultaneous and complementary, as Bakhtin evinces (Todorov 109).

An encounter between the Self and an Other would require, ideally, a "creative understanding," a fluid, dynamic vision to link Self and Other, and enable one culture to "[reveal] itself [to the Other culture] more completely and more deeply (but never exhaustively because there will come other cultures that will see and understand even more)" (109-10). It would certainly seem that the Self is more visible to the Other than to itself, and vice versa. Christ's rejection of hypocrisy in Matt.7:3-5 for instance, "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?..." (KJV) implicitly acknowledges this 'blind vision,' the ability to spot the Other's mistakes while remaining oblivious of one's own.

Bakhtin stresses the fundamental nature of a Self-Other relationship: "there is no knowledge of the subject but DIALOGICAL" (Todorov 18), and adds that "Personalisation is in no sense subjective. The boundary there is not the *I*, but this *I* in interrelation with other persons, that is *I* and the *other*, *I* and *thou*" (19). Clearly, the Self cannot do without the Other, as it is from dialogue, from the "constant slippage between self and other" (Clark/Holquist 64) that the closest approximation to 'meaning' of self and identity is derived. Even in so personal an act as apprehending oneself, "only someone else's gaze can give me a feeling that I form a totality" (Todorov 95). Only the other can provide a closer reflection of the self, by which the self may come closer to knowing itself, because it is only in "another human being" that "I find an aesthetically (and ethically) convincing experience of human finitude, of a marked-off empirical objectivity" (Todorov 96).

The Other's perspective of the Self allows the Self to view itself from an angle it might otherwise miss: "You can see things behind my back ... that are closed to my vision, while I can see things that your placement denies to your vision" (Clark/Holquist 70). At the same time, however, it must be noted that "although we [may be] in the same event, that event is different for us both," as, being individuals, our perspectives are uniquely different (70). That is to say, the "fundamental building block" of the Self is "something that all people share as a condition" but that individuals possess as a unique experience. The result is "a paradox that says we all share uniqueness" (71).

Bakhtinian theory then, anticipates future re-shapings of the personality. It is ever mindful that the present alters the future, and that in dialogue lies many of the possibilities of becoming, while alienation nullifies the Self. Becoming takes place in what Bakhtin refers to as the boundary between the two consciousnesses engaged

in encounter (Emerson 287). Bakhtin's dialogism displays the Self returning to itself, but only to continue its journey to the Other, and back again, and so forth, in a constant movement of discovery and self-discovery. It is this continuous shifting that releases the Self to behold itself as just another participant in the greater dialogue of human relations. The Self perceives the Other's uniqueness, and comes to realise that the Other too is a Self, with its unique perspective and privilege to choose its path. In acknowledging the Other's sovereignty to choose its own direction, the Self comes to respect the Other as a legitimate being like itself.

Bakhtin's concept of a unified, wholesome Self is far removed from T.S. Eliot or Samuel Beckett's fragmented, tortured Self alone and trapped in despair and hopelessness, burdened with a knowledge and self-awareness that bring it little or no relief. With today's wider acceptance of not only ethnic sovereignty but of the Other in general (although this does at times seem merely the politically correct thing to do), the Self is accepted as hardy and resourceful as it adapts to the changes and challenges of a fast-moving world.

While Bakhtin stresses the dependence of the Self on the Other for 'meaning,' he points out also that the Self is ultimately answerable for its own unique being. By the same principle, each ethnic group has the right to be, without needing to justify its existence, if only because it ***is***. The basic concerns of each culture are afterall the same: life, death, living and dying. "Each of us," Bakhtin asserts, "has the capacity to be unique," for each Self is a separate being whose sovereignty is assuredly absolute (Clark/Holquist 67). This being the case, an individual "cannot know absolutely how [another] will respond" even "when a situation repeats itself" (67). A changing or changed Self retains its earliest orientation, as what sets it apart as being uniquely itself cannot change. If this basic element of each Self, its "fundamental

building block", could change/were changed, the Self would become a totally different, new, Self. The fact that two Selfs would respond differently if they were placed in the same situation with the same Other shows that each Self is a unique being that responds to the world around it differently. The operation by which the Self makes its unique choices and relates them to the world, the architectonics of its answerability, reveals that the Self is never ever complete but only in the process of becoming complete. Finding itself on the journey of becoming, the Self naturally resists "all definitions" of itself (72).

To Bakhtin, it is the very capacity to be unique that makes all humans "as a species, unique" (67). There is therefore, as Bakhtin expresses it, "no alibi for being," as each Self is a total being "answerable for the authorship of its responses" (68). This is because "Each of us occupies a unique time and place in life, an existence that is conceived not as a passive state but as an activity, an event" (64).

Caryl Emerson explains that "One makes a self through the words one has learned, fashions one's own voice and inner speech by *a selective appropriation of the voices of others*" (italics mine) (Morson ed 31). While the Self, whether consciously or not, whether it wants to or not, changes as it comes into contact with an Other, it retains its essential I-ness. It is afterall the Self, as a unique entity, that chooses its own path of change, and selects which voice to appropriate, as Emerson's statement makes clear. As each Self is a unique being, "the particular place from which [it perceives] something ... determines the meaning of what is observed" (Clark/Holquist 69).

If the Self is "in essence opposed to all categories," how does it finally "fix" itself? Bakhtin explains that this is done by "conceptually seeing myself" through "the values of others" (73). This is possible because "I live on the borders between my own

subjectivity for myself and my status as object for others," therefore "I am able to cross this border and, in my imagination, see the other as subject and myself as object" (93). Since the Self is aware of its role as both Self and Other, it is able to be both subjective and objective about its surroundings, rendering it more open to its world.

The story of the Jewish people is one of the most compelling in the history of peoples. The Jews have suffered every humiliation and persecution for their socio-religious beliefs, customs and, not least of all, their often-invoked 'economic viability'. But their very survival gives rise to a sense of awe among non-Jews: where does the strength come from for a whole people to cling on so stubbornly and for so long to an identity that became a liability almost as soon as it was established?

The issue of Jewish identity would seem to be a riddle that spawns more questions than answers: What does it mean to be the Chosen People of God? *Are* the Jews God's Chosen? Chosen for what purpose? If God really did choose the Jew, did He then not-choose, or un-choose the non-Jew? Is Jewish persecution the expected reaction to a people insolent enough to claim divine sonship at the expense of the rest of the world? Afterall, does not their special status imply that the non-Jew is somehow less special in God's eyes? And is not the Jews' identity as God's Chosen based on an opposing duality anyway-- the Jews enjoy an unparalleled relationship with the Master of the Universe, which automatically also makes them Satan's chief target? Have they not then brought persecution upon themselves? Should they then not 'deserve' 'punishment' for exalting themselves? Or is it that the Jews choose God as their Banner, and despite the inevitable malevolence this draws from Satan and the non-Jew, choose to keep to that Standard because their choice is based on an irrevocable covenant with God Almighty Himself?

The answers to these puzzles,[11] if indeed there are answers at all beyond the subjective matter of faith,[12] are tied up in the sprawling and complex subject of Jewish identity. Jewish identity, however, has changed so radically since Abraham ben Terah left Haran to settle in Canaan that there are vast differences in the expression of Jewish identity nowadays, depending on the individual's personal outlook. Before one even considers Jewish identity, however, one has to cut through the messy tangle of preconceptions about the Jew.

The most prevalent notions are that all Jews are religious, 'they' are all fanatics of some sort, 'they' are all highly intelligent, and 'they' are all greatly motivated by money, not necessarily in that order. The non-Jew's knowledge and interpretation of the Jew are based on past memories of the Jew which are in themselves unjust representations of the Jew. Morton Rosenstock explains that anti-Semitism is a "combination of the belief that Jews are distinguishable from non-Jews, a fear of the Jews, the desire to keep them at a distance, and a willingness to discriminate against them" (159). It is based on "a stereotype that often combines

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[11] According to Pearl and Brookes, the Jew was chosen to "teach the world the truth about the Only One God and the brotherhood of all men" and to "live a life of highest ethical content in accordance with God's revealed will" (99). The atheist Jew, therefore, must create his own, unique, definition of Jewishness for himself, and as such, finds himself alienated from his people and culture as well as from the Other who brands him 'Jew' according to the common definition. This is the predicament clearly facing David Levinsky.

[12] The Jew's faith in God, in messianic redemption and in his 'chosenness', among other questions, rests on the fact that he has "always **felt** that God exists," based on his "unquestioned faith" in God (Pearl and Brookes 96).

contradictory elements" such as that the Jews are "clannish, but at the same time pushy; they are international financiers and international communists; they are materialistic, and greedy and cheaters, yet too bookish; too aggressive, yet too withdrawn and introverted" (159). These stereotypes originate from "religious, psychological, economic, political, and sociological factors," and probably "combine these characteristics in various proportions at different times" (159).[13]

Ever since the rise of Christianity in the Dark Ages, the Jew has been commonly portrayed as devil incarnate, with the Church directly and indirectly propagandising this foul image, for instance through its art (ben-Sasson ed 564-5).[14] The image of the Jew as

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[13] Early Jewish figures to appear in English Literature include Marlowe's villainous Barabbas, Shakespeare's Shylock and Dickens' Fagin. Cumberland's good Jew, Sheva in The Jew, offsets this image, but Sheva's goodness has often been mocked at as being unrealistic. Although Shakespeare's portrayal of Shylock also draws sympathy for the complex Jewish merchant, the popular image of Shylock is that of an unscrupulous, vengeful miser. For more than a century after Shylock, according to Harap, early American Literature resorts to this vile image of Shylock. Whether the Jewish type portrayed was bad or good, his relationship to other characters was mainly pecuniary. Other stereotypical features to surface in American Literature include red hair (an allusion to the medieval Judas-Satan figure); heavy beards; greasy hair and skin; humpbacks; so-called 'Jewish eyes' (sad, mysterious); swarthy complexions; beautiful, good, solemn and long-haired women; and musical talent or extraordinary intellect (Harap 1974, 7).

[14] One example of such Church art is the 'Jewish swine,' a caricature of the Jew found on a wood relief of a chair rest in Cologne Cathedral dated around the 14th century. It shows a number of Jews embracing and suckling on a pig. In Spain, the

"mysterious outsider, heretic and despoiler," profiteer, smuggler, draft-dodger, arch-conspirator (Rosenstock 160-1), murderer (even of little Christian children), miser, usurer and general criminal-at-large that has been passed down from antiquity is still residual in the popular mind. This is evidenced by the easy availability today of the calumnous Protocols of the Elders of Zion[15] which was proven fraudulent in 1934 by Miriam Beard and Carl Van Doren (Harap 1987, 65). What is surprising is not so much that these stereotypes were created at all, but that at this later stage of human intelligence, they still persist. Propagandists such as Des Griffins, whose `sources' include the so-called Protocols are still preaching a Jewish conspiracy to rule the world.[16]

San Martin monastery in Fuentiduena has a capital circa the 12th century that depicts the Jew as an owl, the Son of Darkness, whose skull is being pecked out by two Birds of Light, or Christians (ben-Sasson 564-5).

[15] The Protocols were believed to have been fabricated by members of the Russian secret police in the late 19th century based on a pamphlet written by a French lawyer, Maurice Joly, and circulated in the 1860s. The pamphlet was aimed at Napoleon III. The Russians retained much of the contents, changing it only to appear as if the Jews conspired to take over the world through the spread of evil and through Judaism.

[16]Griffins concocts his accusations from a carelessly-mixed blend of facts torn out of their historical context and myth, and delivers them in the practised tones of the demagogue who incites his audience through rhetoric, emotion and sensationalism. He puts on the demeanour of the committed, outraged Christian fighting for the integrity of his religion: "No other religion in human history has attacked Christ or Christianity with the diabolical intensity of Judaism. ... *Make no mistake! Talmudic Judaism is the deadly enemy of the Lord Jesus Christ! It is the deadly enemy of Christianity!*" (74). Griffins seems to be playing a

Nevertheless, the Jew today has the freedom to be himself like he has never had before. When Bernard Malamud stated that "Every man is a Jew," it was his "metaphoric way" of "indicating how history, sooner or later, treats all men" (quoted in Field and Field 11). For Malamud, the Jew is "universal man," and the story of the Jews, the "Jewish drama," is a "symbol of the fight for existence in the highest possible human terms" (7). The protean Jew, as survivor and innovator, stands out as an apt symbol of the postmodern individual, who consciously seeks out and discovers fresh expressions of being. Although there still are places where anti-Semitism causes mouths to froth, and the stereotypes and myths do persist, the mindless hatred missiled at the Jew seems to have abated for now.[17] Finally it seems, the Jew may proclaim his Jewishness as proudly as does Tevye, Sholom Aleichem's fictitious dairyman, perhaps even without the poignancy.

The question "Who is a Jew?" is now hardly a pressing one, though theoretically at least, it remains an intriguing one, as Ferdynand Zweig shows:

> Strangely enough the question: Who is a Jew? became one of the basic issues of the Israeli `Kulturkampf', stirring up passionate controversy. Are the Falashas (a small group of Ethiopian Jews living North of Lake Tana) or Bene Yisrael (Hindu Jews) or Cochini-Indians -- Jews? Are the Karaits (those who cling to the Old Testament only, rejecting the

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dangerous game, for he draws on deep-seated fears and prejudices of White America, blaming the Jews for everything from socialism and communism to the moral condition of modern America (62).

[17] Israel's precarious position in the Middle East is due more to politics than to anti-semitism, though the two are, of course, related.

> Oral Tradition and the Talmud) Jews? Are Evangelical Jews (those who profess Jesus as Prophet of Israel and accept the Synoptic Gospels) Jews? Is a half Jew on the paternal side to be treated differently from a half Jew on the maternal side? What is decisive: blood, religion, nationality, culture? ... Can a man who claims Jewish nationality, even a Zionist, but not of Jewish religion be accepted as Jewish? What of conversions? Should only formal conversions conducted by competent orthodox Rabbis be accepted or all formal conversions also by reform Rabbis, or informal conversions as well? (96)

Once again, the questions are legion but the answers scarce and elusive. Zweig, like many others before and after him, can only conclude that Jewishness is a personal experience and expression of identity. Only the individual can adequately decide if he is Jewish or not, and just 'how' Jewish he may be. The Jewish Self perceives itself "based on ... personal or collective experience .... on what the Jews think of themselves or what other people think of them." Not the least, it may depend on "fleeting and changeable impressions or on deep theological, historical and sociological disquisitions" (101-2).

Oscar Handlin concludes that as an ethnic group, Jewish Americans do not seem to fit into any real category; they "defy a neat categorization" in terms of "origin, status or even of religious affiliation" (Gittler ed 58). Irving Howe writes that the majority of Jewish Americans consider themselves American rather than Jewish, secular rather than religious (1989 rpt 629). For them, Jewishness, just as if it were Irishness, or Italianness, perhaps, simply adds another dimension of expression to the larger American cultural mosaic.

Although American-born Jews may find it difficult to specify what exactly makes them Jewish, Howe suggests that they do not question the "actuality of their Jewish experience" (629). While an attempt to specifically define Jewishness may lead to "peculiarly nervous discussions about 'who is a Jew?'" Howe states "almost everyone" knows "whether or not he [is] one" (629-30).

For many Jewish Americans, however, being Jewish means being 'different' in a relentlessly conscious way: often, this means showing it off like a proud birthmark or wearing it as the mariner wore the albatross. For yet others, their identity as Jewish Americans lies somewhere between the two expressions. The ambivalence[18] they experience, according to Shmuel Ettinger, suggests that the Jewish psyche is essentially split into consciousness of its identity as Jew and as member of a particular nation (ben-Sasson ed 731).[19]

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[18] Harry Golden states that this duality is well captured in Jewish Scriptures. In II Kings 4:19, a boy is suddenly taken ill, and cries out to his father, "My head, my head"; this to Golden aptly comments on the duality forced upon the Jew, and its tragi-comic consequences. Cumbered with 'two heads,' the Jew can only bewail his unnatural condition to his 'creator'. His troubles seem double the load of the non-Jew, but he can do little to cure himself. Golden remarks:

> mostly [the Jews] joked about ("My head, my head"), their own ambivalence, the contradictory forces that governed their lives; the self-hatred and the conceit; the deep nostalgia for the orthodox ways of their parents and the terrific drive to be like the tall, blue-eyed, blond Irishman (Olsvanger xlii).

[19] Ambivalence and duality may have seemed at one time the birthright of the Jew, but in the postmodern age they are not unique to the Jew. In the maturing and newly-independent states

The ambivalence of Jewish Americans as to their Jewishness may be gauged by their response to the state of Israel. On the one hand, many Jewish Americans unequivocally support a separate nation state for Jews, but on the other, few would actually move to Israel, as Howe points out (1989, 627-30). The existence of Israel certainly does challenge the Jewish concept of ***galut*** (exile) and the idea of a diasporic or wandering Jew, which are not merely stereotypical expressions of Jewishness, but actual characteristics of the Jewish ethos. Yet, a huge majority chose not to migrate to Israel when the opportunity arose, perhaps because by then, Howe posits, ***galut*** had become more than just a geographical state, and/or they saw no real solution or fulfilment in the modern Zionist victory of the creation of Israel (629). To many, ***galut*** together with messianism, had become a deeply profound 'concept-experience': life itself, with its continuous hardship for the Jews was ***galut***. For others, ***galut*** "had acquired over the centuries a significance much richer than that of enforced separation from Zion" becoming "a term encompassing the moral and cultural substance of two thousand years of Jewish life" (629).

Jewish American ambivalence may take on a perverted form as Jewish self-hatred, a phenomenon in the works of first-generation native-born Jewish American writers such as David

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around the world, people are rediscovering their ethnic identities alongside their national identities, and examining one in the light of the other. Many still feel caught in an anomalous state as they try to reconcile different features of their identities to arrive at their 'true Selfs'. The continuing rise of and interest in the excellent 'back to roots' works by writers of Indian and Chinese ethnic origins for instance, are indicative of this heterogenous age. In this sense too, then, perhaps as Malamud stated, every individual is indeed a Jew.

Pinski, Myron Brinig, Albert Halper, Edward Dahlberg, Ben Hecht and Buddy Schulberg. Sol Liptzin refers to these writers as being "uprooted" and "estranged" from their earliest memories of Self and identity. The recurring themes in the works of these writers, who were mostly prolific during the 1930's, center around Jewish degeneracy, the loss of traditional values or the inadequacy of traditional values in the modern age. Their works largely lack the sensitivity and compassion of, for instance, Chaim Potok's critical examination of Orthodoxy in The Chosen. According to Liptzin, their protagonists are often shifty, dishonest and reprehensible, totally lacking in wisdom and dignity. The reasons for their monologic treatment of Jewish themes and characters may vary, but generally, as Liptzin suggests, their diatribes against the Jewish world stem from their inability to accept their identity and history as Jews and as a result of the humiliation and poverty they suffered as children of the modern ghettos.

Howe suggests that it is the very ambivalence of Jewish Americans, the ability to live with the conundrum of identity in a state of "useful discontent" and bear "the troubles of an unfixed identity," that signals Jewish Americans' full entry into the "American condition" (642). Having accepted their Jewish and American identities, Jewish Americans live in the tensile relationship between individual and communal identities that marks much of American life. The 'American condition' takes into account the state of all ethnic races and cultures that have become American, as well as the whole concept of America itself.[20] The

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[20]Indeed, the very term 'American' has always posed some modicum of trouble, as Feingold observes:

> Known as a nation of nations, the land itself is peopled by strangers. America is a national contrivance populated by dozens of subcultures .... There is no one folk like the French. No one really knows precisely what Americans

diversity that engages in dialogue with all that is America comes out of that discourse not a newly-crafted identity, as prophets of the melting-pot theory proclaim, but as Selfs that strive to keep in balance Otherness and Americanness. While America has changed the Jew, Howe offers, the Jewish American has neither lost nor gained anything of true significance to himself because of the transformation (641).

Henry L. Feingold observes that the modern Jew certainly has diverged from the path set by his ancestors. As a product of his times, the modern Jew shares with all modern individuals a "secular perception ... organized around selfness" (158). Like everybody else, he cannot "be forced to assume the responsibility of [his] birthright" as "[b]eing free ... all secular Jews in America are 'Jews by choice'" (190). Feingold observes that Jewish Americans "wisely or foolishly, determine the content of their lives," choosing for themselves "what to consider sacred or profane," and therefore take the place of God (156).

However Jewish identity may have changed or will change in the future, one definite reference point for the Jewish Self is and will still be religion, as Judaism has played a major role in shaping the Jewish psyche. Chaim Pearl and Reuben Brookes opine that Judaism refers to more than just the religion of the Jews; it also encompasses "the totality of Jewish life and thought" and includes Jewish Literature, history and social life, among others (94). As Feingold points out, the tenor of modern living has been to reject religion and even God, and Judaism too has succumbed. If God has become separated from Judaism, and Judaism from Jewishness, it is

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are supposed to be, and therefore a great deal of time and energy is expended in defining what they are not. In the French Parliament they do not need an Un-French Committee, as we had a House Un-American Activities Committee, to set the parameters of identity (164-5).

not an uncommon thing in our century, nor is it a peculiarly Jewish condition: man long ago learned to challenge God's existence. Judaism may not now be central to or even present in Jewish identity for many Jews. Howe documents that many Jewish Americans accept Judaism as simply another feature of their culture. They observe it only in form (as do many adherents of other religions) out of a vague sentimentalism, or in order to 'hold on to traditions,' or because they feel it the 'right' thing to do (616).[21]

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[21] My own correspondence with Jewish Americans reveals that while they possess a strong sense of ethnic consciousness, and may attend synagogue services, they prefer to observe only those Jewish rites which they personally find meaningful. For Sean Pager, being a Jew "basically means having a strong sense of ethnic identity." Pager also "strongly" identifies with "certain Jewish cultural values, family ties, education ...." Although Pager feels a "certain kinship" with "Jews, Judaism, the Judaic/hebrew (sic)/Yiddish/Israeli cultural spheres," and is proud "whenever I hear of somebody famous who's Jewish," he is "not much into the religion except ... as a repository of traditional/cultural values." Leonard Lipkin states:

> I try to get to know my culture and practice my religion, and learn my history in many ways. I try very hard to date only Jewish women. However, I don't keep kosher, I don't attend services frequently, and I am not ***shomer shabbos*** (observe the Sabbath). The more observant American Jew may accuse me of assimilating, even though I stroingly (sic) identify with my cultural heritage. Less observant Jews than myself, who eat pork, never attend services and date and/or marry non-Jews I consider to be the real assimilators.

Whatever the attitude, Judaism (refering specifically to the religion of the Jews) and/or God cannot be totally ignored by the Jewish Self. At this point in Jewish life, God still seems too ingrained in Jewish identity to be completely ignored because Jewish life has always, until recently for some Jews, revolved around its religion.[22] Indeed, according to Jewish tradition, Jewishness and Judaism began with God Himself.[23] Even the non-believing Jew knows something of the God he rejects, and has to grapple with the God-idea at some point, if only to lay it aside. Albert Einstein, for instance, eschewed the idea of God as a personal influence and living presence in Jewish life, but could not completely reject the God-heritage of the Jew that is so much a part of Jewish identity (Shulman 26).

Both the identifiers 'Jew' and 'Hebrew' may be traced back to Abraham, the first Jew. Leon Roth explains that the word 'Jew'

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[22] There may be many Jews who profess religions other than Judaism. The existence of Hebrew Christian organisations like "Jews for Jesus", "Messianic Jewish Association of Great Britain" and "The International Messianic Jewish (Hebrew Christian) Alliance" proves that there are Jews who are Christians.

[23] According to a ***Midrash*** (meaning "Inquiry"; the entire body of literature comprising rabbinic interpretations of Jewish scriptures in the form of moral teachings, legends, parables, sermons, etc.) God approached all the peoples of His earth offering them His Law; all rejected it because they could not live up to its high moral standards. Finally, God offered it to the Jews, who accepted immediately with the words "Naaseh Venishmah" --"We shall perform its laws and accept all its teachings" (Pearl and Brookes 100). The ***Midrash*** underlines the fact that all nations had the opportunity to develop as Israel did, and that the Jews chose to commit themselves to a way of life that was essentially spiritually-motivated.

is derived from the name of one of Abraham's great-grandsons, Yehuda, or Judah; and "Hebrew" from the phrase 'Eber la-Nahar,' or 'beyond-the-river', as Abraham came from a land that was beyond the river from Canaan.

Abraham's covenant with God which made him the "father of many", Roth suggests, contains "universal significance" as 'Abraham' became a "name of blessing to all the families of the earth" (12). Roth asserts that while incidents in the ***Torah*** (what has now become the first five books of the Christian Old Testament) are "local, indeed, tribal," the significance of these occasions is "universal" (14). Indeed, the ***Torah***, whose wisdom forms much of the foundation of two other major world religions, Christianity and Islam, does not even begin with the Jew, but with the story of universal man, Adam. This establishes that human equality is a "primary fact" of Judaism. Roth elaborates: "we may quote the Rabbis. 'Why was man created one?' they ask - and answer: 'In order that no man may say to another, My father was greater than thine.'" (14).

For the Jew, God's law passionately affirms goodness and uncompromisingly denounces evil; it is not "arbitrary or conventional" and therefore, controls "the very make-up of the physical universe," deeply rooted in the "nature of things." As such, it demands obedience from "all the children of earth" (13-4). God's calling is a "new way of life" that is in essence "simple: 'to do justice and [avoid] judgement,' to have 'clean hands and a pure heart'; 'to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with God'" (13).

The very basis of Jewish identity then, is universality, regeneration and renewal. The Self, individual yet communal at the same time, does not die, because it *can* not, as Bakhtinian thought elucidates; this is evident in Jewish tradition itself, which faithfully records the numerous times the Jew reverts to the old idolatrous

lifestyle, demonstrating that the Self does not change its "fundamental building block." The Jewish Self, through dialogue with God, attains a new level of understanding of itself and its world: with every inevitable regression, the Self is purged through guilt, remorse and repentance, and returns to its God. It repeatedly renounces the old way of life and sanctions the new. The cycle is endless. Jewish identity is thus conceptualised as the equilibrium achieved in man's pursuit of God. It is an identity arrived at at the end of a journey of discovery, after which begins a new journey at a more profound level. It is a deeply spiritual experience born out of the conviction that God is supreme, and that God-is-with-man. Man pursues God but in his own strength; but, as Roth observes, it is God who finds man, and initiates dialogue with him. It is no wonder the ***Torah*** envisions a God who speaks creation into existence.[24]

To be a Chosen People is a "moral selection" on the part of the Jewish Self, which chooses to be God's chosen. As God's Chosen, the Jews are "held up to mankind more often as a warning to avoid than as an example to follow." When the "chosen of the chosen" such as David and Solomon are exalted, "suffering is the badge, martyrdom the crown." Roth maintains that the chosen people "is not good because it is chosen; it is chosen because it is good, and the "continuance of its being chosen depends on the continuance of its being good" (40). The Jew is "one with the Divine creative act itself" because he is "creative continuously; and this creativity [is] ... a choosing of 'life'" (31).

The idea of the suffering servant is an intrinsic factor in Jewish identity. The suffering Jew of the ***Torah***, however, differs greatly from the Jew in historical time who has been persecuted

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[24] The New Testament extends this image of a God in dialogue with His creation through His Word Incarnate, Jesus Christ.

continuously by countless enemies.[25] While the ***Torah*** and other Jewish sacred writings are also records of political upheavals and social injustice stemming from within and without the Jewish community, the thrust of these writings is ultimately spiritual. They capture the essence of man's struggle with his carnality which he seeks to master as he flies to God. The Torah, Roth shows, reveals that although the Jew's choice to serve God leads him down a path that "is hard, and both prophet and psalmist are full of the bitterness of suffering," the ideal of the servant "triumphs over suffering" when he apprehends God "in his full majesty" not in "the hour of victory" but in "the hour of defeat" (40-1).

Is a Jew still a Jew if he rejects Judaism? This, Feingold believes, is the most pressing question the Jews must confront in the modern age. The sudden and vast changes that Jewish identity has undergone in just a century, not to mention the very complexity of Jewish identity, makes this an almost impossible question to answer. Feingold can only conclude pensively that "Jewishness and Judaism seem to be growing further apart," but acknowledges that the resilience of the Jewish people suggests that they are merely undergoing another transformation rather than disintegration (161).

Whether it is disintegration or transformation, change is inevitable, and the Jewish Self will keep on changing for as long as each individual Jew, as Feingold is aware, chooses to change. Feingold suggests implicitly that there is a great need for a Jewish

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[25] There have been suggestions that the Holocaust which took the lives of six million Jews under Hitler was to a degree possible because the Jews allowed themselves to fall victim to Nazi brutality by not resisting it enough. This controversial view is of course beside the point, the point being that the Nazis trampled down the most precious and basic rules of humanity when they set out to deliberately exterminate a people.

religo-cultural revival in the US, and unless something concrete is done to this end, Jewishness as a way of life will become extinct. Bakhtin specifies that the Self although absolute needs the perspective of the Other to anchor its own Selfness; in the same way, the modern Jew who knows nothing or little of his own culture needs the perspective of his more (Jewish) culture-immersed Other to realise there is yet another possibility of being.[26]

The story of American Jewry begins as far back as 1492, the very year Columbus set sail for the New World. Joining the historic expedition was Luis de Torres, a New Christian. By 1508, many New Christians were settled in different parts of the new territories such as Brazil, Peru, Puerto Rico and the West Indies. They were mainly ***Sephardim*** (Jews originating from Spain and Portugal)[27] who had been banished from the Iberian Peninsula. In 1654, 23 Jews expelled from Recife, Brazil, arrived in New York, or New Amsterdam as it was then known, on the vessel `St. Charles', and made the New World their home (Learsi 4).

From these paltry beginnings American Jewry has grown to become the largest in the world: Henry Feingold estimates the

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[26] As much as the postmodern Self may be the Self continually reborn out of dialogue with the Other, it is apparent that there are social forces working that frequently challenge the identity of the emerging Self. The Jew may have finally arrived at a point in history where he is, to a larger degree than before, finally accepted for who he says he is. Yet, who can tell how the future may test that assurance- the German Jews caught in Hitler's evil certainly could not. It is perhaps this fear that makes Jewish historians and scholars apprehensive to note the `diluted' forms of Jewishness around them.

[27] `Sepharad' is the old Hebrew word for `Spain' (Zborowski and Herzog 445).

Jewish American population at 5.6million (28).[28] Jewish immigration into the US is usually divided into three phases: the early Sephardic, the German, and the East European.[29] The Sephardim, according to Morton Rosenstock, began arriving in the seventeenth century, and founded settlements along the eastern seaboard, in New York, Newport, Philadelphia, Charleston and Savannah (148). By the time of the American Revolution, the Sephardim had "achieved economic success" mostly in business and trade and enjoyed "religious freedom" as well as "most, though not all, civil rights" (148). The German Jewish immigration wave lasted from about the 1820's to the 1880's, after which the East European Jews began to flood the US until immigration laws were tightened in the 1920's. The German Jews, who joined the general move to the western frontier, (later, some even took part in the gold rush to California in 1849), lived along the Erie Canal and the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, and founded new Jewish settlements in places like Cincinnati, St. Louis and Chicago (149). They were mostly small merchants, traders, tailors and peddlers.[30] The biggest wave

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[28]Total world Jewish population at the beginning of the decade numbered about 12.8 million: 5.5 million in the United States, more than 3.9 million in Israel, about 1.2 million in the Soviet Union, another 1.2 million in Europe, 356,700 in the rest of North America, 32,700 in Asia, 433,400 in Central and South America and about 148,700 in Africa (Microsoft[R] Encarta[R] 98 Encyclopaedia, "Judaism").

[29] Bernard Weinryb clarifies that while there was no period in which all the Jewish immigrants were of the same origin, one group would form the "dominant strain" in each period, "impress[ing] its pattern on the immigrant wave," though it did not form the majority numerically (5).

[30] It was, in fact, the German Jew who established the image of the Jew as the wandering peddler who traversed the New World

of Jewish immigrants was the final one: about 2 million East European Jews, or one third East Europe's Jews, entered the US between 1880 and 1924. They concentrated in highly-populated areas of the big cities, like Boston's North End, Chicago's West Side, Philadelphia's downtown, and especially, New York's Lower East Side (153)[31].

The Sephardim, because they had arrived first and were already assimilated, tended to view themselves as "superior to and distinct" (Weinryb 5) from later Jewish arrivals. Louis Wirth explains that these older immigrants "maintained an attitude of exclusiveness and hauteur" (135) towards the German Jewish immigrants. The Sephardim, Wirth elaborates, "were prosperous" and had a "European tradition of superiority" which the newcomers lacked (136). The Sephardim's conception of their own worth, according to Wirth, "made them a distinct aristocracy in the communities in which they were the original settlers" (136). The poverty-stricken, unsophisticated newcomers alarmed the Sephardim, who felt their own hard-won stability and respectability

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with his ***kuttle muttle*** (a colloquial reference to the odds and ends the peddlers carried in their packs). As they often bore with them news from all over, these peddlers were a welcome sight to the Americans who lived in rural areas. Ruth Gay states that Jewish peddlers drew a lot of interest in more remote locations as people there found the Jew a novelty; before this they had only encountered Jews in the Bible.

[31] The Lower East Side, according to Chambers et. al., is "the area of Manhattan bounded by 14th Street on the north, Catherine Street on the south, Broadway on the west and the East River on the east" (1).

in America threatened by the sorry-looking immigrants, who like them, were Jews.[32]

Having lived in the New World longer, the Sephardim's strong sense of belonging was not at all surprising. They held the advantage of being 'Americans,' the ultimate identity which the newcomers could not as yet lay claim to. In addition, they possessed a unique heritage: a rich blend of Arabic and Old World influences reflected in their culture, learning and poise. The German Jewish immigrants, on the other hand, had long belonged to the peasant class. Compared to later Jewish immigrants, the Sephardim were well-to-do. They took with them to America "much-needed wealth," and retained business connections with the Old World (Wirth 138). According to Weinryb, although the Sephardim were conscious of their Jewishness in the Old World, they had "always been steeped in general secular culture" (9). This helps to explain their quick assimilation in America.

In the US, Weinryb notes, the Sephardim appeared "little versed in Jewish learning," and were "lax in ritual and religious observance." However, they did "for the most part [cling] to their religion, celebrating the Sabbath and holidays in their homes, and retaining their hope for redemption" (10). They also participated "as individuals" in the "political life of the country and the social life of their neighbours" (10). Rosenstock suggests that the Sephardim

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[32] Weinryb offers an amusing example of the prejudice and class snobbery of the Sephardim towards the German Jews:

> When Philadelphia had a Jewish population of only two or three dozen families, conflicts between the old settlers were already taking place. In 1769, when Barnard Gratz- a merchant in Philadelphia- was in London, he received the following request in a letter from another 'old timer' in Philadelphia: 'Pray prevent what is in your power to hinder any more of that sort to come!' (5).

"set the pattern and tone of Jewish American life, just as colonial America laid the basis for present-day America" (148).

In 1820, the number of Jews in the US was only about 4,000, but six decades later, after the huge influx of Jews from Germany, the number shot up to about 250,000 (Learsi 64). The German Jews[33] hailed from a provincial background, uprooting themselves from towns and villages such as Baden, Wurttemberg, Pommern, Schlesien and Posen (Wirth 141-2). They had mainly been storekeepers, farmers, artisans, petty traders, horsetraders, merchants and bankers in the Old World. Rosenstock explains that the German Jews, who were "almost universally poverty-stricken" on their arrival, came "for the same reasons" that propelled the "massive out-pouring" of other Germans at the time: the economic depression of the 1830's and 1840's (149). Rosenstock recounts that the rural folk were especially affected by the great changes in agriculture as well as the switch from an agrarian system to industrial capitalism. The Jewish Germans, however, bore the brunt of "severe political repression," and suffered discrimination such as "imposed limitations on Jewish marriages and residence in towns" (149).

The German Jews were often lonely and alienated as they struggled to acquire a new language and culture in America, where they found circumstances "most discouraging" (Weinryb 12). This was because everything, even the Jews in America, seemed strange and daunting to the immigrants. What was perhaps particularly trying for the newcomers was the Sephardim's proud nature and

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[33] Jews of German and Central and East European stock are commonly known as 'Ashkenazim,' as opposed to 'Sephardim' (Encyclopaedia of the Jewish Religion 45). According to Ruth Gay, 'Ashkenaz' comes from the name of one of Noah's great-grandsons, and is generally used to refer to the East European Jews (14).

their contempt for the immigrants, whom they felt were "uncouth" and "uneducated" (12). The newcomers, however, did not tolerate this treatment for long, and soon protested by setting up their own institutions for their social and emotional support.

A new group of German Jewish immigrants began arriving in the 1840's, and this group took it upon themselves to organise the German Jewish immigrants in order to better the lot of the community. They were mostly intellectuals and social radicals who brought with them the ideals of the ***Haskalah*** (the Jewish Enlightenment movement).[34] This group of more sophisticated city-dwellers were greatly influenced by socialism, and America was to them the ideal place for the planting of their socialist aspirations. These mainly young radicals were less strict about observing Jewish Law than the earlier German Jews had been, and viewed the more conservative pioneer group as being socially and intellectually backward. As they were well grounded in German culture and

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[34] Centered in Germany and eastern Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, the ***Haskalah*** was an offshoot of the European enlightenment, which gave supreme importance to the human mind. The ***Haskalah*** was spearheaded by individuals, such as Moses Mendelssohn (1729-86), whom Rufus Learsi refers to as the "frail and gentlre sage of Berlin," (142) who were greatly influenced by the the European Enlightenment, and believed these principles could lead to the Jews' deliverance from intellectual and social backwardness. According to historian Shmuel Ettinger, the Haskalah drew from "the spiritual riches of the surrounding culture," so that "even among those ***maskilim*** [followers of the Haskalah] who in theory remained true to Judaism," the Haskalah became "an expression of universal spiritual man" (ben-Sasson 782). Mendelssohn, explains Ettinger, "endeavoured to connect faithful observance of religious injunctions ... with tolerance and the widest possible freedom of opinion" (783).

thought, they took it upon themselves to educate the earlier immigrants. Weinryb submits that these younger immigrants "gave direction" to the "craving" of the earlier German Jews for "some sort of belonging and for some Jewishness" (14). They organised clubs and societies to offer moral support and comradeship to the lonely, frustrated and homesick immigrants and to encourage them in their new undertaking. They were also anxious to raise the social awareness of the Jews in general and to convert them to socialism, so "[only] a minimum of Jewishness was encouraged in the synagogue which was mostly patterned after the non-Jewish church," and "exclusive clubs and associations" were organised (14).

In the 1880's, the Jewish American community experienced another great and sudden change with the mass arrival of the East European Jews. Weinryb believes the East European Jews who emigrated were the poorer, "unlearned or less learned" and the underprivileged, while the handful of wealthy and contented Jews in the Old World saw no need to leave the established order (16). Many intelligent, ambitious radical socialists, such as Abraham Cahan, who yearned for change, also left for America when their revolutionary activities hurled them into conflict with the authorities. To these, Jewishness and Judaism meant little as they counted themselves intellectuals and socialists whose duty it was to usher a new social and political order into Russia, if necessary through subversive and anarchic means. Like Cahan, many of these radicals and socialists decided to stay on in the US.

The East European Jews shared a tighter communal bond. In Eastern Europe, Weinryb explains, the Jews lived in "compact masses" (15). "Not only did they form the majority of the population in many towns and hamlets, as well as a considerable percentage in the big cities, but the Jewish sections in these

settlements were generally 'pure Jewish'" (15).[35] Among the East European Jews, who were orientated in "the feeling of homogeneity, of ***Klal Yisrael*** (unity of Israel)," there was "a definite sense of belonging to a 'nation' or people" (15). As they were governed by a strong set of Jewish values and attitudes, especially religious devotion and observance, their "mode of life," Weinryb adds, "was less a matter of individual choice and more a matter of control by the group through the medium of public opinion" (15).

However, by the late 19th century, the Jewish communities of East Europe were already disintegrating, although, Weinryb offers, "the exact degree of disintegration varied from region to region, from community to community and from group to group" (15). Weinryb suggests that the traditional way of life of the East European Jew was first disrupted the century before with the rise of Hasidism,[36] leading to fierce clashes between the traditionalists and

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[35]Weinryb offers a brief, general description of Jewish communities in East Europe: "In the smaller communities the Jews usually occupied the central neighhborhood surrounding the market place and business section, while the non-Jews lived in the suburbs. In the big cities the Jewish population was mostly concentrated in a certain section with only a few living in ... other neighborhoods" (15).

[36] Hasidism, according to Shmuel Ettinger in A History of the Jewish People, arose within Polish Jewry at a time when there was a "prolific emergence" of "esoteric mystical theories" and "[e]xtreme asceticism." The movement, initiated and inspired by Israel ben Eliezer (1700-60), steered the masses away from "self-castigation and seclusion" to "leadership of the community." One of the main tenets of Hasidism is its strong emphasis on joy, which sprang in direct "opposition to and rejection of" asceticism. Ettinger suggests that it was the "stress on joy and the special

the ***Hasidim*** (followers of Hasidism). In the 19th century these East European Jewish communities had to confront further changes in ideology, introduced this time by the ***maskilim*** (followers of the Haskalah), who were impatient to transport the Jewish community into the modern age. According to Weinryb, other causes of the disintegration of these traditional communities include the disparity between rich and poor Jews (the latter did not have the means to evade disciminatory laws such as the government ruling that forced Jews as young as 12 to serve in the army), the Tsarist evictions of Jews from villages; and the powerful forces of modernisation, urbanisation and secularism (15-6).

Arriving in the US in all their poverty, the East European Jew seemed to walk straight out of the confines of the claustrophobic Russian Pale of Settlement[37] into the New World.

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hasidic way of life arising from it" that made Hasidism so popular with the masses, especially the young. Ettinger also believes that the "main power" of ***Ba'al Shem Tov*** (Master of the Good Name, as Rabbi Israel came to be known) lay "not in his teachings," but in the "force of his personality." Ba'al Shem Tov was born in Podolia to a poor family. As a youth, he worked in the synagogue as a sexton and an assistant teacher for some time, and later spent a number of years in solitude and meditation, after which he became known as a ***ba'al shem***, or miracle worker, curing with amulets and charms (ben-Sasson ed. 768-9).

[37] The Pale of Settlement covered portions of Russia, Russian-ruled Poland, and several small East European states. The Pale was established in 1771 after the first partition of Poland, bringing the Jews of White Russia under Russian rule. The Russians moved quickly to restrict Jewish movement and settlement, and as they did not want the Jews spreading to other parts of Russia, confined them to the notorious Pale. However, certain cities and districts were closed to Jewish settlement even

Just as the Sephardim had been when the German Jews began entering the US, the German Jews were now dismayed by the rustic and shabby-looking East Europeans, whom, according to Wirth, they referred to derisively as ***Hinter-Berliner***, alluding insultingly to the newcomers' provincial background (146). The German Jews, according to Isaac M. Fein, were afraid and resentful that the "outlandish" newcomers, clearly identifiable as their "kinfolk" in that they were Jews, would "endanger" their "well-established position" in America (qtd in SAJL 1997 13-4).

The newcomers were essentially a "closely-knit, self-contained body" that had "little in common" with the other Jewish groups (Wirth 146). They brought along "a set of traditions" that were "strangely different" from the "cultural baggage" of the German Jews (146). Before long, the tension between the two groups manifested as a social reality: there clearly existed "two opposing camps" of Jews different in "life habits, ... cultural background, ... religious belief and practice, [and] ... social and economic status." They were kept isolated from each other by "deep-seated prejudices" of one another and "distinct forms of communal organisations" (148-9). The East Europeans soon "drifted into occupations that the German Jews had outgrown," but instead of "scattering" into other parts of the country like the

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within the Pale. In 1835, for instance, Kiev, Nikolaev and Svestopol were forbidden to Jewish settlement, while Riga was closed to new Jewish settlement. A narrow stretch of land running along the western border was also closed to new Jewish settlement, and the Jews were not allowed to settle in villages in provinces stretching from just outside Riga to Kremenchug in the south. Wirth explains that while Jews were accepted in certain parts of Russia at different times, these were mainly small groups, "among them graduates from universities, merchants of the first guild, and prostitutes" (4).

Germans had done, they settled in the larger industrial centres (146). They ended up working for German Jewish bosses in clothing and cigar factories as well as in stores which supplied peddlers with wares (Weinryb 19).

Despite the "shock and horror" with which the German Jews greeted the East European 'greenhorns,' they "saw it as a necessity for their own status" as well as "a moral obligation" to "aid and uplift" the newcomers (Rosenstock 156). The German Jews helped the new immigrants with financial and housing aid just as the Sephardim too had helped them earlier. Moreover, news of the horrible pogroms in Russia in the 1880's united the Jews in the US and other parts of the world. The rich and prominent such as talented poetess Emma Lazarus, whose sonnet "The New Colossus" is plaqued to the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, worked together with other Jewish Americans to evacuate East European Jews and help them find entry into the US. Jews from all over also organised protest meetings and formed organisations to pressure governments to accept Jewish refugees. Apart from altruistic reasons and the Torah injunction to help the stranger in need, Jew or otherwise, the older Jewish Americans were anxious to prevent the sprouting of overpopulated, crowded slum areas and the spread of disease and poverty which would inevitably follow. This was an image of the Jew to be avoided at all costs. As such, the German Jews were eager to divert the fresh arrivals to less densely populated areas. Help from the older Jewish Americans notwithstanding, the East Europeans ended up creating overpopulated, crowded and dirty settlements in concentrated tenement areas such as the Lower East Side.

The East European Jews, Ruth Gay documents, found jobs as tailors, dressmakers, bookbinders, milliners, watchmakers, jewellers, locksmiths, painters, glaziers, photographers, butchers, cigar-packers, printers, bakers, carpenters and blacksmiths (91).

They were especially prominent in the garment industry, and indeed, were the major force in developing the American garment industry and garment-workers' unions. Rufus Learsi writes that many East European Jews, including those who had practised other crafts in their old homes as well as those who had failed at peddling or at other petty trades, "flocked" to tailoring because many of the earlier Jewish immigrants were involved in the industry, and the newcomers "counted on their coreligionists for help and understanding" (152-3).

The industry, which included the manufacture of headgear, neckwear, shirts, pajamas, overalls, work clothes, millinery, underwear and furs (153), was a boon to the immigrant, but not always so. The trade was seasonal, therefore, juxtaposed with intense periods of activity when the workers were driven mercilessly to complete huge orders, were slack intervals when work was scarce. Worse still, the industry faced "cutthroat competition" (153). While some immigrants may have been fortunate enough to find work in their respective trades, many realised they would have to adapt their skills and wits to the rigorous demands of American industrialisation.

The dominant secular environment of the US was a bewildering experience for the East European Jew. Although the ***shtetl*** (town or village) way of life was already under threat before the East Europeans left for the US due to economic hardship and industrialisation as well as to the force of modernisation and the rise of Hasidism, the ***shtetl*** still provided a sense of community for the Jew, and together with his family, acted as a strong check against any tendency to break away from the fold. In the strangeness and freedom of the New World however, the individual had to rely mostly on himself, and it was only much later that he had the fellowship and support of Jewish organisations to direct him. Faced with the anxieties, conflicts and uncertainties of a changing Self, the

immigrant Jew looked for familiarity and comfort in these organisations (Weinryb 16).

The immigrants sometimes came across old neighbours and friends who were usually willing to help them adjust to life in America, often by allowing the newcomers to board with them until they could fend for themselves. The newly-arrived Jewish immigrants could also offset their loneliness and anxiety by joining clubs formed by members of the same village from the Old World called ***lansmanshaft*** where they could expect comradeship and financial help.[38] By 1914, there were about 530 ***lansmanshaften*** in New York seeing to immigrant needs such as acquiring jobs, housing, raising money during emergencies, looking for relatives and acquaintances; they also formed committees to call on the sick and to bury the dead (Gay 83).

According to Gay, the East European Jews lived packed together in crowded streets, effectively recreating the Old World ghetto atmosphere in American cities so that the Lower East Side "began to resemble the geography of East Europe" (82). New York, being the main port of arrival for immigrants, became the American city with the most number of Jewish inhabitants. While some moved on to less populated parts of the nation, many

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[38] In the ***lansmanshaften***, Gay explains, the immigrant

> was not just another greenhorn but a man with a family and a history. ... An introduction would place him in a familiar way: "You remember Tzi-Hirsh," someone would say, "He's the second son of Abraham who lived in the Tailor's Court." His origins, his place in some kind of world were, in this way, restored to him while he struggled with the difficulties of a new language and making a living (82-3).

embraced the sprawling metropolis as their homes, simply because they lacked the funds to move on, or perhaps in a strange, frightening, yet exciting way, the city spoke to them in reassuring, intimate tones.

By the twentieth century, New York had the highest concentration of East European Jews than even any East European city. Before 1880 the city held about 50,000 Jews, or five percent of the city's total population. About forty years later, by 1919, New York City was home to about 1,400,000 Jews. This amounted to more than one quarter of its population. It was no surprise then that New York Jewry left its mark on the rest of American Jewry. Its influence was deep, and clearly seen, for instance, in the number of Jewish publications which mushroomed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many non-political magazines appeared as well to satisfy the insatiable demands of the Jewish reader on a wide range of subjects: serious literature, the theatre, humour, women's issues, chess, health, and even marriage brokering. Between 1885 and 1914, New York's Jewish publications numbered 150; one of the most popular and widely-read was, of course, Cahan's newspaper, The Jewish Daily Forward. The Forward is still published today, but as a fortnightly, and has its own website. It recently began publishing in English and Russian as well.

The proliferation of publications is an indication of the Jews' deep interest and involvement in social and political affairs. Having come by freedom the hard way, they were not about to lose their voice in modern dialogue. The Jews were prominent in American labour unions, workers' rallies and in promoting the cause of Socialism in America. Their desire for social justice however did not take away their interest in the more down-to-earth; one important area of Yiddish life to transplant itself and flourish in America was Yiddish theatre. New York Yiddish theatre companies

were respected throughout the country, and were often invited to perform in other states. Gay states that they set the tone for other Jewish companies across the nation (90).

While the German Jews had responded to the vastness and strangeness of America by wandering the length of the nation with their ***kuttle muttle*** (a colloquial reference to the peddler's wares), the East European Jews became known for their pushcarts that lined the packed streets of the Lower East Side. The pushcart peddlers specialised in every variety of goods - old crockery, tableware, kitchenware, glass, soup-greens, fish, butter, cheese, milk, empty eyeglass frames, watchwork, cases, pictures and many others (92). Streets like the famed Hester Street captured in Cahan's Yekl resounded every morning with the inviting cries of vendors and the complaining or coaxing tones of hardened bargainers. The hustle and bustle of pushcart vendors and their uncompromising customers all added to the local colour and drama of the Lower East Side, which Cahan has immortalised in his fiction. As the new century opened, the streets of the Lower East Side were home to about 25,000 pushcarts (92).

The arrival of the East European Jews also revived the practice of traditional Judaism in the US. In America, traditional Judaism had already evolved into Reform Judaism by the 1820's. Reform Judaism was first practiced in Germany in the early 19th century. It took its impulse from the European Enlightenment, during which Christian scholars began using scientific methods and the principle of reason to evaluate and understand the Bible. Rufus Learsi explains that while "many impulses combined to produce [Reform], [including the] ideological, aesthetic, social and political," the proponents of Reform found that Judaism's "ancient doctrines and practices" had for too long resisted the "process of change" to which "all human institutions ... including religion," were subject (113). The reformers of Judaism were prompted to

"reject or reinterpret" ancient doctrines and to "[envisage] the national restoration" of the Jews (113). Reform in America found its main hold in Cincinnati, with its most famous advocate being Isaac Mayer Wise.

Conservative Judaism arose in opposition to Reform Judaism. According to Ruth Gay, "Jews who had been nourished on traditional Talmudic Judaism and cherished the old forms were incensed by what seemed to them the presumption and sacrilege of the Reform Jews" (72). Learsi clarifies that Conservative Judaism, which "lends itself less easily to definition" than does either Reform or Orthodox Judaism, "stands midway" between the two, and while in theology and liturgy it is "almost identical" to Orthodoxy, it is "more responsive" to social changes and "resembles Reform" in "some of the innovations which its houses of worship have introduced" (120).

Orthodoxy, which the East European Jews practised in America, is, as the name implies, a "fundamentalist religion of belief," (Gay 75). In its purest form, Orthodoxy "deplores the new sciences of learning when they are used to give men a 'vantage point from which the revealed word of God will be arrogantly evaluated'" (75). Orthodoxy stresses Jewish learning as "the road to piety," where piety is "the observance of the Law, and the Law is the Word of God." Furthermore, "from the long perspective of Jewish history" the Jew cannot believe that his "particular society" is indispensible, as Orthodoxy teaches that to God, "all ages are but a moment, and only the Torah is eternal" (75). For the Jewish American immigrant, this meant that "Americanization, adjustment, adaptation" were all "things of the moment" (75) which they were dutybound to transcend in order to see that only the Law of God has any meaning in a transcient existence.

Charles Leibman has suggested that the East Europeans conformed only "superficially" to many "Orthodox norms" out of a

feeling of communal loyalty, than of any kind of religosity (27). Leibman also submits that Orthodoxy was already beginning to disintegrate in Eastern Europe due to the influence of the Haskalah, Zionism, Marxism and socialism before the exodus of immigrants began. The pressing socio-economic forces in the US, then, Leibman proposes, were the catalyst rather than primary cause for the gradual loosening of Orthodoxy in America. Leibman asserts that synagogues actually functioned as "social forums and benevolent societies adapted to the requirements of the poor, unacculturated people" (28). He adds that "The oft-cited absence of decorum" during services "strongly suggests" that "even the act of worship was perhaps a social more than a religious function," and this may have been the situation in Eastern Europe as well (28). Leibman also points out that until 1915, there were only two Jewish day schools in the country, as the Jews "flocked" instead to public schools, night classes and adult-education courses "not only for vocational purposes but for general cultural advancement" (28) in order to be seen as and to feel American.

In 1914, when US immigration rules began to tighten with the onset of World War I, 90 percent of American Jewry was settled largely in the north, in cities like New York City, Philadelphia and Chicago.[39] Whatever their lot in life, the Jews seemed determined to improve it. They had not battled the hardships of the Old World and fled Europe for nothing. They grabbed whatever opportunity was open to them. They worked hard that they and especially their children might not always labour so heartbreakingly to eke out a living. The immigrant who was able to, pursued education vehemently, as he knew that this was his gateway to a better quality of life. Business was an alternative road

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[39] The Jews formed only ten percent of the total number of immigrants to settle in the US during this time.

to success, but commercial success somehow seemed second-rate, as David Levinsky, Aaron Zalkin ("The Daughter of Reb Avrom Leib") and Asriel Stroon ("The Imported Bridegroom") come to feel in their later years. Perhaps this had much to do with the Jewish tradition of learning. The Jews' love of education seemed great enough for even the wealthy Jew to envy the learned, as do Levinsky and Stroon. Though many immigrants did achieve economic success, they remained tied to their original occupations. It took their children to achieve their parents' dreams of success in America.

CHAPTER 2

`BETWEEN A LAUGH AND A HEARTACHE'[1]: CAHAN'S GREENHORNS IN THE EARLY, FLOUNDERING YEARS

> "'Bother your hands and your words!' said the merchant. 'This ain't Russia,' says he. 'It's America, the land of machines and 'hurry up!'' says he, and there you are!" The old man's voice fell. "Making letters smaller, indeed!" he said brokenly. "Me too, they have made a hundred times smaller than I was. A pile of ashes they have made of me. A fine old age! Freezing like a dog, with no one to say a kind word to you."[2]

This chapter looks at the early dialogue between Cahan's `greenhorns' and America when the socially-inept and impoverished newcomers were just embarked on the process of becoming American. Set in the early, floundering years of the dialogue of becoming, the short stories are, in the order examined, "A Sweatshop Romance" (1898), "A Ghetto Wedding" (1898), "Circumstances" (1897), "Rabbi Eliezer's Christmas" (1899) and "The Apostate of Chego-Chegg" (1899). Except for the last two, all are taken from the collection Yekl and the Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories of Yiddish New York (1970). "Rabbi Eliezer" is from Moses Rischin's collection of Cahan's

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[1] W.D. Howells' description of Cahan's writing.

[2] Cahan, Abraham. "Rabbi Eliezer's Christmas" p. 66.

work, Grandma Never Lived in America (1985) while "The Apostate" is from Century vol. 59.

One of the ironies surrounding Cahan's life, critics state, is that while the writer fervently called for Americanisation, his literary impulse seemed to stem directly from the conflicts caused by Americanisation. The two situations, however, may be seen as complementary rather than ironic. As social reformer, Cahan preached what he believed at the time to be the best response to America, to become American, although the methods he advanced, that the Jews should quickly discard their Jewish ways and manners, were indeed demeaning to Jewishness. Cahan, astute and sensitive, and having gone through the process himself, was of course aware that Americanisation was traumatic and conflict-ridden. The note of despondency in his fiction, then, was the realistic writer's way of acknowledging the immigrants' discontentment in America.

By acknowledging the immigrants' sense of alienation and loneliness and by identifying their frustrations, Cahan helped them come to terms with the changes that assimilation introduced. Rather than discourage the immigrants from continuing in the American path they had chosen, or that Editor Cahan urged them to stay on, the cathartic effect of Cahan's writing enabled them to carry on in their journey. By acknowledging that the trials of acculturation were difficult and demoralising, and that America was not the Paradise it was often made out to be, Cahan reassured the immigrants that they were not alone in their plight, that their very leaders shared their burden. Cahan, who had himself reached and then journeyed beyond disillusionment, had decided that if he could not "beat 'em," he should "join 'em," (quoted in Sanders 1969, 269) and seemed now to be advocating just this attitude to his immigrant readers. Cahan was looking far ahead to the time when the differences between Jew and American would be too

tenuous to ever cause trouble for Jews again. He recognised that the immigrants' trauma was the inevitable beginning towards that end, and well within the immigrants' dialogue with all that was America.

Cahan's fiction falls within the area which Mikhail Bakhtin defines as being the locus of encounter where becoming takes place, the meeting place of two consciousnesses. It is a field charged with tension where the Self and the Other, both unique entities, are confronted with the uniqueness of one another, and must choose how to respond to one another. Cahan portrays his Jews as individuals who, because thay have the "capacity to be unique," (Clark/Holquist 67) are ultimately answerable for their own unique being. Each character is presented with choices, and based on his individual make-up, or "fundamental building block" (71), decides on which course to follow. Cahan suggests that each individual, in choosing how to respond to the American experience, must be answerable for his choice, and must, therefore, bear the consequences of his choice. In contrasting David and Heyman in "A Sweatshop Romance," for instance, Cahan traces the consequences of two different choices made in response to the same possibility: marriage to Beile. The choices of both men are different as both are unique individuals motivated by their sovereign wills and desires.

At the same time, Cahan suggests, as much as the individual Jewish immigrant as an independent Self is answerable for his choice, a choice that is at all times unique, he is still conditioned to a degree by America. Because the New World ambience is largely one of modernism and industrialism, the choices open to the immigrants are mostly to do with this modern, commercial, outlook. A fundamental question each Jewish immigrant must decide in America then is whether he should change his Old World lifestyle for a more modern approach in

industrial America. This is the conundrum that agitates Rabbi Eliezer, who in "Rabbi Eliezer's Christmas" finds his identity threatened by modernisation and capitalism in America. As for David and Heyman, both are greatly restricted by poverty in America. Heyman's miserliness may be an inherent flaw, but it is also greatly accentuated by this poverty, and this forces him to forego many present pleasures for the sake of a financially secure future. This in turn causes him to lose Beile to David. In this way, Cahan reveals that while the immigrant is responsible for the choices he makes, his choices are also somewhat tempered by conditions in America.

Cahan also shows how the immigrants are made aware of facets of their own personality veiled to them before this experience. Tatyana, in "Circumstances", and Michalina, in "The Apostate of Chego-Chegg", for example, discover reserves of strength within themselves which finally enable them to choose to be independent in America. Indeed, by this Cahan demonstrates Bakhtin's thesis that "Personalisation is in no way subjective," (Todorov 18) as it is "only someone else's gaze" that can convince the Self that it is a "totality" (95). Both Tatyana and Michalina need the objectivity of the Other to reveal to them what they cannot perceive in their own Selfs. Cahan also demonstrates that while the Self changes as a result of encounter, it retains its uniqueness as a Self; although both Tatyana and Michalina change as a result of their encounter with America, they retain those qualities that distinguish them as unique beings.

Cahan's main themes in these stories are the clash between expectation/desire and reality, the collision of Old World and New World principles and mores, the friction between Orthodoxy and secularism, personal inadequacies and strengths, anxiety and discontent, the disintegration of former relationships and loyalties, and spiritual and physical estrangement. The

pervading tone in Cahan's fiction is clearly of yearning and discontentment. Even when his protagonists do manage to attain their desires, for example in "A Ghetto Wedding," the overall mood hints of inadequacy and failure. Sanford Marovitz posits that the sense of defeat which shrouds Cahan's protagonists springs from their own moral deficiencies rather than from the debilitating effects of America the industrial giant. Marovitz argues that "it was neither America nor the sweatshop that defeated Cahan's soul-racked immigrants but an essential weakness, or flaw, in the characters themselves" (1968, 197). To a degree, this is true, especially in the case of Yekl Podkovnik and David Levinsky, as we examine in detail later in chapter 4 of this dissertation. Marovitz points out that in Cahan's fiction, it is "ironically not the pious Jew who suffers the pangs of longing and loneliness [in secular America]," but "the secularized individual, the Jew who sloughed off his Judaism as though it were an old coat and thus left himself bare to face the world alone..." (198). This, however, seems rather inaccurate as Cahan does write about the pious Rabbi Eliezer, who appears lost and confused in America, and despite himself, must learn the importance of money in America just as he struggles to deal with the modernisation that threatens to engulf him. Although Rabbi Eliezer does go to America to seek some kind of material fortune, and his piety may at times seem suspect, he never intends to "slough off his Judaism." In his moral fumblings, in his naive belief that he can attain material satisfaction without compromising his spiritual ideals, in his desire to do the right thing and to make amends for his greed, he is clearly one of Cahan's most human characters and is in no way comparable to Yekl or Levinsky. At any rate, Cahan's focus in his fiction was not so much the pious as the secularised Jew, and therefore it is largely the inner conflicts of the secularised Jew that we are able to consider in Cahan's work.

Marovitz also states that the "failure" of Cahan's protagonists "is definitely not the failure of America" (210). While this may be true to an extent, as certainly, Cahan's most human characters display flaws that lead to their sense of defeat in America, it is also true that their discontentment in America is partly caused by socio-economic conditions in the idealised Land of Riches and Glory. Industrial America as Other did have a bearing on the choices made by the Jewish immigrants. Indeed, immigration, observes Oscar Handlin, altered not only America, but the immigrants who rushed to her shores in such overwhelming numbers (1973 rpt 4).

For the (East European) Jewish Self, Irving Howe submits, the trauma of immigration was so great that the Self gave up an essential element of its be-ing, its former culture. The Jews who entered America in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Howe explains, were "so shaken" by "the ordeal of flight and arrival that for a time they seemed all but culturally dispossessed. It would take at least a quarter of a century before they could regain the culture they had left behind" (1989 rpt 71). Entering the liberal atmosphere of America, the Jews dropped their burden as archetypal outsider as they acquired a new identity as Americans. However, freedom, supposedly a basic ingredient of American life, turned out to be a relative matter as the Jews discovered themselves still shackled in so many ways: spiritual and cultural dislocation; disillusionment that America did not provide wealth and comfort instantly or equally; anti-Semitism even where the Goddess of Liberty reigned; long working hours; pitiful wages; ill health; hunger; the break-up of former relationships. More than this, they realised they were too tightly bound to their Jewishness to give it up fully. America offered them the freedom to choose their individual direction, and they were glad to be rid of the socio-religious restrictions that being Jewish placed on them. While in

this sense they were glad to be Other, they were not fully at ease as Other, as they felt guilty at having given up their Jewishness.

Cahan himself laid much of the blame of the 'fall' of the immigrants not on the individuals themselves but on the forces that plagued them: "'Curse you, emigration. ...Accursed are the conditions that have brought you forth! How many lives have you broken, how many brave and mighty have you rubbed out like dust!'" (quoted in Howe, 1989 rpt 70). He criticised sweatshop bosses, but acknowledged that they were not solely to blame they were largely products of a vile system. According to Daniel Walden, Cahan realised it was "the inevitable outgrowth of mass production, industrialism, and unregulated capitalism in America" that was largely responsible for the sweating system (1990, 16). As socialist and journalist, Cahan was of course well-versed in the matter of Jewish mobility in the US. He was also aware of the lamentable working conditions forced upon the Jewish immigrants.[3] He knew, as Walden explains, that Jewish immigrants not only "learned America's values and the rules for success," they "practised them well"(16). The change that overcame the immigrants then was due not only to their inherent

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[3] The bosses were mostly Jews who had arrived earlier and succeeded somewhat in climbing the social ladder. Bosses like Samuel Ornitz's Philip Gold in Haunch Paunch and Jowl (1923) were aware of the stigma of their own poverty, and felt excruciatingly the need to escape the ghetto. Driven by despair and desire, they repeated the cycle of tyranny, inflicting upon their workers the squalid working conditions and inhuman treatment they had had to battle when they first arrived. The bosses seemed to understand only the need to make money, money being the most important ticket out of social inferiority. It mattered little that they victimised the worker.

flaws, as Marovitz suggests, but to conditions they found in America.

In "A Sweatshop Romance," Cahan resorts to the tools of the satirist, humour and caricature, to criticise the inhuman sweating system, the ruthless Jewish bosses, the exploited workers, the distressing working conditions as well as the psycho-emotional conflicts that often enslaved the workers. The story is also valuable for its sociological interest, for instance, the organisational structure of the sweatshop and the specialisation of labour in the sweatshop. The plot itself is slight;[4] both Heyman and David are in love with Beile, and while Heyman has been seeing Beile for three months, and she expects him to propose to her, he keeps postponing the moment due to his extreme diffidence. In the end, it is the more enterprising David who wins Beile, after he eggs her on in an argument with the proprietor's wife, Zlate, while Heyman sits by watching the row, cringing like a coward. The outcome is predictable: the better man wins the damsel. Cahan's tone here is instructive as he contrasts the efficacy of action against the immobility of non-action, illustrating the need for the immigrants to step beyond their fears and grab every rightful opportunity if they meant to succeed in the New World. Just as he was to do later in ***Bintel Brief*** ('A Bundle of Letters', a column in his newspaper which aired grievances from readers together with Cahan's replies) Cahan in this story advocates positive action as the immigrant's means towards becoming American.

Cahan's language in this story is often laborious and his style somewhat pedantic, as seen in the following examples: "Lipman's was a task shop, and, according to the signification

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[4] Jules Chametzky in From the Ghetto records that Cahan himself was distressed with the story's pat ending (52).

which the term has in the political economy of the sweating world..." (191); "For a more lucid account of the task system in the tailoring branch, I beg to refer the reader to David..." (191); and the rather long-winded, slightly affected

> She did not know that only two days ago the idea had occurred to him to have recourse to the aid of a messenger in the form of a lady's watch, and while she now sat worrying lest she was being made a fool of, the golden emissary lay in Heyman's vest pocket, throbbing in company with his heart with impatient expectation of the evening hour, which had been fixed for the delivery of its message (195).

Though Cahan's language and style are guilty of such hiccups, he clearly understands the passions that motivate his characters, whom he picked out of the living, breathing ghetto he knew so well. As such, he is able to deal with them with sensitivity even as he chides them. Daniel Walden and Jules Chametzky, while mentioning the obvious flaws in this story, such as language and style, are ready to overlook them as they stress that this story, Cahan's second in English, is indeed experimental and transitional in the writer's literary career. The story, they suggest, should be seen within the context of Cahan's growth as a writer.

The tale begins with the description of a typical New York sweatshop. The owner, Leizer Lipman, Cahan writes, is "one of those contract tailors who are classed by their hands under the head of "cockroaches," (Yekl 188). Like a true parasite, Lipman feeds off the magnanimity of his wife's second cousin, who, despite the distant family ties, "[sees] to it that his relative's husband [is] kept busy" during slack seasons (189). Lipman runs his shop under deplorable conditions, squeezing all he can out of

his underpaid workers while ignoring their health and comfort. The shop itself is puny, Cahan describes, in a detailed look at a model sweatshop, focusing on the lack of space and fresh air available to the immigrant workers:

> The shop was one of a suite of three rooms on the third floor of a rickety old tenement house on Essex Street, and did the additional duty of the family's kitchen and dining room. It faced a dingy little courtyard, and was connected by a windowless bedroom by the parlor, which commanded the very heart of the Jewish markets. Bundles of cloth, cut to be made into coats, littered the floor, lay in chaotic piles by one of the walls, cumbered Mrs. Lipman's kitchen table and one or two chairs, and formed, in a corner, an impoverished bed upon which a dirty two-year old boy, Leizer's heir apparent, was enjoying his siesta.
>
> Dangling against the door or scattered among the bundles, there were cooking utensils, dirty linen, Lipman's velvet skullcap, hats, shoes, shears, cotton-spools, and whatnot. A red-hot kitchen stove and a blazing grate full of flatirons combined to keep up the overpowering temperature of the room, and helped to justify its nickname of sweatshop in the literal sense of the epithet (188).

Cahan's description of the stultifying atmosphere of the sweatshop is an apt comment on the life of the Jewish immigrants, a life that intimated circumscription: in the poverty that cribbed them, ill-health due to crammed and unhygienic living conditions in the tenements, the long hard hours of labour coupled with minimal wages, and heaviest of all to bear, the disillusionment that

swiftly followed the discovery that the Promised Land did not overflow with milk and honey after all.

Leizer Lipman, thinking along purely capitalist terms, has crammed a sewing-machine operator, one baster, one finisher, and one presser into this airless hole. Cahan explains that the workers "while nominally engaged at so much a week, were in reality paid by the piece" (191). The system invariably discriminated against the workers as they were expected to finish a given amount of work each day, and so, may collect their full week's wages only upon completion of their quota for the week. This meant that the week was often stretched beyond the stipulated six working days. In a relaxed moment when Lipman is away, David the baster, as Cahan's mouthpiece, points out the reality of the "twelve-day week" created by the sweatshop system:

> "Well, I get twelve dollars a week ... . Now a working week has six days but ... a day is neither a Sunday nor a Monday nor anything unless we make twelve coats."
> "What do you mean?"
> "They say a day has twenty-four hours. That's a bluff. A day has twelve coats" (192).

Having grudgingly come to terms with these conditions, the workers are able to joke about the pathetic situation, but barely hidden beneath their jesting lies the consciousness of being trapped in a hopeless situation. This is conveyed not only through the irony of David's statement, but in the workers' "them versus us" attitude as they hit back at Lipman behind his back.

The workers choose to make the best of a sorry situation, banding together in their disgust for the boss and their own pathetic condition. Lipman's absence provides the workers a "respite" and they "freely [beguile] the tedium and fatigue of their

work, now by singing, now by a bantering match at the expense of the employer and his wife, or of each other" (189). Interestingly, Cahan chooses to capture the sweatshop ethos in music imagery, alluding perhaps to the therapeutic singing of the work gangs in the days of slavery. Certainly, this is something Black American writers, for instance Ralph Ellison in The Invisible Man, did (and still do) when they projected the pain of their people through music imagery. Cahan describes the workers' morale, their spirits lightened a little when Lipman is absent:

> [Heyman] swayed in unison to the rhythmic whirr of the machine, whose music, supported by the energetic thumps of Meyer's press iron, formed an orchestral accompaniment to the sonorous and plaintive strains of a vocal duet performed by Beile, the finisher girl and David, the baster. ...The silvery tinkle of Beile's voice, as she was singing, thrilled Heyman with delicious melancholy, gave him fresh relish for his work, ... (189)

Here, however, Heyman's swaying captures of course a typically Jewish rhythm, recalling as it does the Jew's rocking back and forth as he prays over his holy books. In this description, Cahan conveys to us a vital impression of the Old World as it became transposed in America. When the sweatshop stole so much of the worker's time, energy and consciousness, forcing him to abandon the religious obligations he may have once deemed important, Cahan's description of Heyman's swaying is weighted with the added connotations of the displacement of a whole people. In the Old World, the most important occupation for the Jewish male, indeed, it was considered a ***mitzvah*** (commandment or good deed), was to spend his days and nights studying the Torah and the rabbinical writings. In America, the pursuit of a decent life,

obtained through money, had to become the immigrant Jew's major occupation. The synagogue was, in a general sense, replaced by the sweatshop, and garment factories became the place of assembly, and here, the Jewish worker was forced to worship the gods of capitalism and industrialisation.[5]

Cahan exposes the main circumstances that affected the choices made by the immigrant Jewish workers in America: impossible working conditions, protracted hours and pitifully low wages. As a group, the workers in Lipman's shop choose to subvert the torture they must endure through wit and humour. They dig into their reserves of perseverance to deal with the situation, well aware that to a large extent, their survival in America depends upon their wages. While as a group they may seem resigned to the situation, Cahan shows that as individuals, they had their own plans and made their own choices. Focusing on the individual responses of Heyman, David and Beile, Cahan indicates that while they are hemmed in by the same obstacles, they choose to respond to America in a way unique to each, based on their own, sovereign will and what they personally perceive of their experience in America. Being intrinsically different, each perceives similar conditions differently. At the same time, they discover that their unique perception is only one view of that experience.

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[5] With regard to Charles Leibman's thesis that the Jews who migrated to America were not as religious as they seemed to be, the fact here remains that whatever the significance of Judaism to the individual Jew, whether social, psychological or truly spiritual, the long working hours in industrial America prevented him from performing what he was brought up to view as an obligation.

Heyman is at that point of his search for identity as an American where he is groping towards formulation of a Self able to contend with the challenges of becoming American. Heyman forfeits his happiness because he lacks the courage to project his desires into reality. He remains content to dwell within the illusion of achievement, rather than grasp what he may rightly come to possess. After three months he is still paralysed by a deep sense of inadequacy, and will not ask Beile to marry him. He thinks of her often, but not with the incisiveness of passion and determination of a mature man. Instead, like a child, but lacking even its creativity to realise his desires, he imprisons himself in his frigid imagination, invoking "little images of [Beile] ... between the figures of [the] credit columns [of his bankbook], ... the sum total [conjuring] up to him a picture of prospective felicity with her for a central figure" (195).

Heyman, bewildered by the demands of the New World, responds defensively. He is far too cautious, refusing to proceed until he feels secure enough to do so, and carefully lays aside his money as a foundation for a secure future. His colleagues tease him about his miserliness: "You had better stick to your work, Heyman. Why, you might have made half a cent the while" (190).

They consider him a "niggardly fellow, who [overworks] himself, [denies] himself every pleasure, and [grows] fat by feasting his eyes on his savings-bank book" (190). Heyman is even tight-fisted when it comes to Beile, whom he assures himself he loves. For instance, whatever treat he buys for her-"losses to his pocketbook"-he is sure to make up for by "foregoing his meals" (194). Suppressing his pleasures in this way, his vision is projected too far into the future that he is blind to present exigencies. When Heyman finally does make a move, buying a wristwatch for Beile as an indication of his feelings for her, he is unfortunately too late. In a perverse twist of fate, Beile clashes

with Zlate at David's instigation that very same day, loses her job, and walks out with David. Heyman, whose name, Daniel Walden notes, contains sexual connotations (1990, 16), sinks in his impotence, disempowered by his own ineptitude:

> Heyman was about to say, to do something [when Zlate delivers Beile the ultimatum of either fetching soda for her guests or leaving the sweatshop], he knew not exactly what, but his tongue seemed seized with palsy, the blood turned chill in his veins, and he could neither speak nor stir (199).

Cahan shows how by failing to confront reality, by turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to a situation that cries out for active commitment, Heyman victimises himself, and falls in danger of being silenced in the dialogue of becoming, which calls for a certain amount of positive action:

> Heyman, who ... was a witness of the scene, at this point turned his face from it, and cringing by his machine, he made a pretense of busying himself with the shuttle. His heart shrank with the awkwardness of the situation, and he nervously grated his teeth and shut his eyes, awaiting still more painful developments. His veins tingled with pity for his sweetheart and with deadly hatred for David (198).

Heyman chooses to clutch at excuses for his cowardice, consoling himself that confrontation would have been unwise:

> What could he do? he apologized to himself. Isn't it foolish to risk losing a steady job at this slack season on

account of such a trifle as fetching up a bottle of soda? What business has David to interfere? (198).

Rather than take responsibility for realising his own desires, Heyman projects his guilt and inadequacies onto David, blaming David for his choice to act. In fact, this seems to be Heyman's '*modus operandi*': to deflect blame from himself onto others so that he remains innocent in his mind, and therefore, need not change his own course of action. When Meyer, one of the workers, had earlier blamed him for initiating the collection drive for Lipman's present, for instance, Heyman had replied defensively: "Did I compel you? ... Am I to blame that it was to me that the boss threw out the hint about that present?" (190). In this way, however, he greatly limits his own dialogue with America. When he has a chance to redeem himself, Heyman still chooses to dally. He goes to Beile's the very next day, but "on coming in front of the building his courage [melts] away" (200). His delay worsens the situation, as guilt and shame mount, and Heyman is further crippled by inaction. Finally, a fortnight later, "forgetting to lose courage," (200) Heyman finally goes to Beile's apartment. He is too late, and discovers that Beile has just become engaged to David.

Although Heyman evidently seeks and searches for a legitimate identity in the New World, carefully accumulating a cache that will springboard his success in America, his dreams remain frozen in the world of illusion. His striving to become follows the conventional path; he takes no risks and follows the rules diligently. He jumps to action only when it profits himself to do so, or when the Other seems weaker than he. For example, when Lipman hints about a present for his birthday, it is the sycophantic Heyman who begins a collection drive which everyone except David feels obliged to honour. Or when

Lipman's little boy irritates Beile, Heyman jumps to her defence to smack the child, but when Lipman walks in, Heyman "[skulks] away to his seat, and, [buries] his head in his work" (196).

Cahan's comic portrayal of Heyman's situation reduces whatever pathos about the immigrant to bathos, so that we hardly sympathise with his impotence to act. Heyman's 'suffering' is thus neutralised. The high drama of the row is also laden with irony, as Cahan uses it to draw a parallel between Heyman's ineffectuality and Lipman's. Lipman, like Heyman, seems denuded of dignity in his extreme deference to his wife. Zlate brings to the shop guests newly arrived from her old village in Russia, Basse and Avrom, "in order to overwhelm them with her American achievements," and instructs Lipman to "initiate" Avrom into "the secrets of the "American style of tailoring""(197). Lipman, "in obedience to [this] order from his wife," meekly complies. Later, when Zlate picks on Beile, Cahan immediately shifts his focus from Heyman to Lipman to suggest a connection between the two: "Leizer, who was of a quiet, peaceful disposition, and very much under the thumb of his wife, stood nervously smiling and toying with his beard" (199). When David upbraids Zlate, she is aghast that Lipman does not defend her:

> "Leizer! are you-are you drunk?" Mrs Lipman gasped, her face distorted by rage and desperation.
> "Get out of here!" Leizer said, in a tone which would have been better suited to a cordial invitation (199).

Lipman's words, when they finally emerge, drop lifeless as David is already dressing to leave.

By this, Cahan cleverly illustrates what the future may hold for the shy, meek Heyman. He may eventually acquire wealth, but will remain a moral weakling if he continues to choose

passivity. Heyman, as a unique being answerable for his own actions, must bear the consequences of his cowardice and diffidence. The path he chooses to take in America traps him within his monological view of life, which allows him to converse only with himself. Refusing to step out of his Self to dialogue with the Other, Heyman's choice denies him the very basis of existence itself because the Self, as Mikhail Bakhtin explains, does not contain "the ultimate privilege of the real" and is not "the guarantor of unified meaning." Heyman's encounter with David illustrates for Heyman another choice of action that is possible in America, but when Heyman finally chooses this course too, the result is different for him, as he chooses to act too late. Once again, Cahan's story demonstrates the uniqueness of every individual's motives and actions.

In contrast to both Heyman and Lipman, David stands out as the independent man of action not afraid to go against the grain when he feels he must. David, like Heyman begins as a poor immigrant, and finds himself trapped in the same socio-economic situation as Heyman, but chooses to live in the present and to take bold action whenever necessary. As a sovereign, unique being, he chooses to stand alone when he refuses to contribute to a present for Lipman, and later, although he risks his job, he stands up to Zlate. David resorts to his active sense of humour and imagination to defeat the oppression of the sweatshop. He keeps his imagination alive while engaged in the dull monotony of the sweatshop routine by, for instance, describing his shopmates' characteristics in a totally unique way, comparing Meyer, for instance, to the figure '7' and Zlate to a teakettle puffing out a lot of hot air. Though he is "rather inclined to taciturnity," (191) Cahan informs us, David can rise to the occasion when necessary, unlike Heyman, to provide his mates with "boisterous merriment," (191) helping them transcend the drabness of sweatshop life.

Unlike Heyman, whose goals are material success and comfort, David places great importance on the integrity of his Self. This is the ideal he envisions in becoming American, while Heyman's idea of strength is a secure financial base. While Heyman chooses to uphold the material, commercial aspect of his Americanness, David chooses freedom and independence, two other significant American traits. Heyman shuts himself to his own Self in his pursuit of his American Dream, so that he only sees what is before him and not what is within himself, but David is wide awake to the possibilities of his Self as well as to what America has to offer him, and so, is able to partake in the dialogue of becoming American more fully. Unlike Heyman, David is able to choose more wisely as he is more aware of his choices.

In her turn, Beile learns from David's example to be independent, coming to realise that America's brisk pace of life requires quick decisions based on realities of life rather than, for example, on adolescent notions of love and romance. Before the spat at the sweatshop, she muses on Heyman's physical appeal, unsure yet convincing herself she loves him:

> She loved him. She liked his blooming face, his gentleman-like mustache, the quaint jerk of his head, as he walked; she was fond of his company; she was sure she was in love with him: her confidant, her fellow country girl and playmate, who had recently married Meyer, the presser, had told her so (194).

Beile however is too sensible to be ruled by passion only, unlike Fanny the Preacher in <u>Yekl</u>. Fanny, when Yekl rejects her, allows herself to be controlled by her jealous passion, and acts to wreck his life. Beile however is independent in a positive way, and is capable of making her own judgement rather than depend solely

on her confidant's. She chooses to be practical rather than maudlin, which is what Fanny chooses. When she seriously evaluates her feelings for Heyman, Beile realises she is discontented:

> But somehow she felt disappointed. She had imagined love to be a much sweeter thing. She had thought that a girl in love admired *everything* in the object of her affections, and was blind to all his faults. She had heard that love was something like a perpetual blissful fluttering of the heart. ... And here, she never feels anything melting, nor can she help disliking some things about Heyman (194).

Though Beile feels she might still accept a proposal from Heyman even after his cowardly behaviour, she finally chooses David's boldness and persistence over Heyman's irresoluteness. Although Beile's choice is conditioned, to a degree, by circumstances, it is she who, as a sovereign being responsible for her own actions, finally chooses David over Heyman. The ending may seem pat, but Cahan, ever the upholder of Realism, ends the story on this note, with Beile making the sensible rather than romantic decision.

By contrasting the unique, independent actions of these three individuals, especially those of Heyman and David, Cahan illustrates that the Self is indeed a unique being responsible for its own actions. Cahan shows clearly how David and Heyman are both in the same situation, both even loving the same woman, but end up making different choices because both are governed by separate, sovereign wills and desires. At the same time, however, because by itself, the Self cannot generate meaning, its vision being only partial, each man needs the unique perception of the other to see himself more clearly. While Heyman needs David's boldness to realise he himself is something of a moral coward, David is encouraged to act by Heyman's ineffectuality. Heyman is

finally moved to agree with David that Zlate should not treat Beile meanly, and even voices out his disapproval: "Why *should* one be ordered about like that? She is no servant, is she?" (199-200) although he does this in a murmur, "addressing the corner of the room" (200). David, on his part, because he vaguely considers Heyman to be less manly than he himself is (in one of his musings, David reckons that Heyman's face "would much better become a girl" [193]), is inspired to act decisively where Heyman seems helpless. Beile, too, needs David's as well as her girl friend's unique understanding of her situation to see more clearly the choices open to her in America. When she finally decides, her decision comes from her own unique understanding of her situation. In this, Cahan shows how the Self is more visible to the Other than to itself, and learns to perceive itself in fuller, clearer, detail from the eyes of the Other.

Cahan also illustrates how immigrants like Heyman lost their inner peace due to inherent flaws within themselves as well as to conditions in America which stressed commercial success over spiritual well-being. By making clear that poverty was a striking element of ghetto life, Cahan shows how its influence was apparent in every immigrant's life. To an extent, Heyman's decisions are forced by poverty, and he feels pressingly the need to survive by stashing away his earnings. David, despite his highly independent nature, also feels the strong clutch of poverty, and is forced to put up with deplorable working conditions and long hours to make a living in America.

In "A Ghetto Wedding," another story with a moral for the immigrant Jew, this time about the foolishness of entertaining immoderate desires, Cahan shows how the background of poverty in the ghetto ruled the immigrants' lives to a large extent. Again, Cahan stresses that while the immigrants made their own choices and decisions in America, those choices were to an extent

determined by conditions in America. The story revolves around Goldy and Nathan who are too poor to get married in the high style that Goldy desires; brushing aside Nathan's objections, Goldy uses up their entire meagre savings of 75 dollars on a grand wedding ceremony, convinced that their guests will bring them as presents the household furniture and furnishings she covets. Business is slack everywhere in the ghetto, however, and no one can afford the kind of gifts Goldy dreams about. In fact, only a handful turn up for the wedding, leaving much of the food wasted. Goldy is crushed by the outcome, but the story ends on a cheerful note.[6]

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[6]One of the interesting things about this story is the wealth of information on Jewish life in America. For example, the wedding ceremony, detailed in pages 233 to 236, follows the traditional pattern, from the zeal of the mandatory wedding band to "fulfill its mission of eliciting tears even when hearts are brimful of glee" (234) to the symbolic breaking of the wineglass to recall the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (among its many symbolic meanings). Apart from the cultural flavour of the celebrations, Cahan also imparts to us a feel of the close-knit Jewish community. The emphasis is on the community rather than on the individual as seen in the entrenched roles, rituals and symbols. Goldy and Nathan's wedding revolves around old, prescribed roles and functions: wedding band; wedding bard skilled in extemporaneous verse to draw just the right response from the assembled, so that when Goldy faints, "an elderly matron," herself seeming part of the ritual, affirms the proceedings with, it would appear, an expected comment-"Murderer that you are!"-delivered with an "air of admiration for the bard's talent as much as of wrath for [its] far-fetched results" (235); the two brideswomen, "wives of two men who were to attend upon the groom" (234) between whom the bride must sit; the women to weep and wail at appropriate junctures;

Cahan begins his story with a look at the marginalised life of the ghetto: poverty, hunger and scarcity of jobs that have forced many to peddle goods out in the cold streets. Cahan exposes the suffering that is masked by a superficial air of "contentment and kindly good will":

> Had you chanced to be in Grand Street on that starry February night, it would scarcely have occured to you that the Ghetto was groaning under the culmination of a long season of enforced idleness and distress. The air was exhilaratingly crisp, and the glare of the cafes and millinery shops flooded it with contentment and kindly good will. The sidewalks were alive with shoppers and promenaders, and lined with peddlers.
>
> Yet the dazzling chaos had many a tale of woe to tell (224).

He goes on to examine these woes:

> The greater part of the surging crowd was out on an errand of self-torture. Straying forlornly by inexorable window displays, men and women would pause here and there to indulge in a hypothetical selection, to feast a hungry eye upon the object of an imaginary purchase, only forthwith

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the cantor to pronounce blessings handed down from the days of Moses. Naturally, the immigrants transported to America these deeper layers of socio-cultural meaning as conceived in Jewish self-identity. These formed after all the very substance of life as the immigrants knew it.

> to pay for the momentary joy with all the pangs of awakening to an empty purse (224).

The peddlers, Cahan explains

> bore piteous testimony to the calamity which was then preying upon the quarter. Some of them performed their task of yelling and gesticulating with the abject effect of begging alms; while in still others this feverish urgency was disguised by an air of martyrdom or of shamefaced unwontedness, as if peddling were beneath the dignity of their habitual occupations, and they were driven to it by sheer famine-by the hopeless dearth of employment at their own trades (224).

Compared to some of the impressions of ghetto life by writers and observers at the turn of the century, Cahan's consideration of the ghetto offers a somewhat sanitised impression. It lacks the bite and force of such compelling, even shocking, accounts of the ghetto described, for instance, in Jacob Riis' How the Other Half Lives (1902), or his The Children of the Poor (1892).[7] Cahan's

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[7]According to Chambers et. al. the poverty-stricken Tenth Ward in the Lower East Side, known as "New Israel", :

> was [reportedly ... the most densely populated place on earth in 1900. The ward contained 109 acres which was (sic) bounded by Rivington Street on the north, Division Street on the south, the Bowery on the west, and Norfolk Street on the east. According to a survey of New York's tenement houses in that year, the tenth ward contained 1,179 tenement houses in 1900. These houses were homes to 15,132 families, comprising a population of 76,073 (2).

account of ghetto life lacks this impetus largely because of the ponderous language he uses, illustrated in the passages quoted above. The general, sweeping picture he sketches, while effective in an impressionistic way of creating atmosphere, is reduced to a bulky portrait by his unwieldy expressions. Despite this flaw, Cahan's story moves with sympathy and feeling for the main characters, Goldy and Nathan, as well as for the ghetto residents in general. For instance, in the excerpts above, he is sensitive to the

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Riis' grim account of his first-hand experience of 'Jewtown' below gives us a vivid picture of the rank and diseased ghetto:

> In [a] house where a case of small-pox was reported, there were fifty-eight babies and thirty-eight children that were over five years of age. In Essex Street two small rooms in a six-storey tenement were made to hold a "family" of father and mother, twelve children and six borders. ...Even the alley is crowded out. Through dark hallways and filthy cellars, crowded, as is every foot of the street, with dirty children, the settlements in the rear are reached. ... Life here is the hardest kind of work almost from the cradle. ...
>
> Penury and poverty are wedded everywhere to dirt and disease, and Jewtown is no exception.... Typhus fever and small-pox are bred here, and help solve the question what to do with [children]. ...It has happened more than once that a child recovering from small-pox, and in the most contagious stage of the disease, has been found crawling among the heaps of half-finished clothing that the next day would be offered for sale... ; or that a typhus fever patient had been discovered in a room whence perhaps a hundred coats had been sent home that week, each one with the wearer's death-warrant, unseen and unsuspected, basted in the lining (Hindus 98-101).

immigrants' understandably bruised ego and pride in being reduced to hawking in the streets. For men and women who fled to America expecting to find a better quality of life ensured by freedom, it was a sore thing indeed to find themselves trapped in abject poverty while all around them were signs of plenty.[8] Cahan's description above of the ghetto also reveals his sensitivity to ghetto life, showing himself aware to more than just the poverty of the ghetto. Having established the background of poverty and distressing social conditions that clouded the immigrants' lives in America, Cahan seems eager to show that in spite of the gripping poverty, the Jewish immigrants, survivors if nothing else, were a vibrant, dynamic people.

In such a setting a wedding celebration ought to have been an opportunity for communal catharsis, a little along the lines of Bakhtin's idea of carnivalisation, where the cathartic effects of

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[8] Poet Ephraim Lisitzky (1885-1962) writes movingly of his father's hard life as a peddler in his autobiography In the Grip of Cross-Currents (1959) (the title in the original Hebrew is Eileh Toldot Adam):

> During the day he peddled rags and bottles, in the evening he peddled Hebrew lessons to Jewish boys, whom he trained for Bar Mitzvah.
>
> Sometimes young rowdies threw stones at him, and in winter snowballs with pieces of coal inside, sometimes hoodlums pulled his beard, sometimes he would be attacked in dark hallways and his pockets emptied.
>
> The night of the [Passover] festival, when he sat down at the head of the table to reign over the Passover seder, he was a sore and miserable king indeed, with swollen feet, bent back, all his joints aching, muscles cramped. ... (Ribalow 175-6).

laughter and rejoicing relieve the community somewhat of its misery. Unfortunately, the ghetto is caught in times so hard that too many are "cruelly borne down by their cares to have a mind for the excitement of a wedding; indeed, some even [think] it wrong of Nathan to have the celebration during such a period of hard times, when everybody [is] out of work" (233-4). It certainly seems myopic and even selfish of Goldy to have reckoned on achieving her heart's desires through her friends and relatives. She appears obnoxious in her wish to show off to her neighbours with a grand wedding and to the people in her old village through a small sample of carpet she sends her mother, delighted at the thought of her mother "going the rounds of the neighbours, and showing off the 'costly tablecloth' her daughter will trample on" (230).

Yet we can understand Goldy's yearnings. Young and vigorous, she seems to epitomise the American spirit to be bold and enterprising. She is determined to make a go at establishing a decent life for herself and her family. She is intelligent and shrewd, resourceful and ready to take risks. If anything, she is a fighter and a survivor, and this we may admire. Her desire for social eminence in the New World is not the product of vulgar snobbery such as Zlate's in the previous story, but is merely a projection of her fierce determination to survive and succeed in the dialogue of becoming American. Unlike Heyman in "A Sweatshop Romance," she seems more capable of participating in this dialogue. Believing in her right to ***be***, she forges full steam ahead to realise her deepest yearnings, undaunted by the perversity of the times. To her, America is indeed the land of possibility and opportunity where she may work hard to achieve her dreams. She attempts to vocalise to Nathan her belief in her unique Self and in her right to make her own choices:

> "One does not marry every day," she argued, "and when I have at last lived to stand under the bridal canopy with my predestined one, I will not do so like a beggar maid. Give me a respectable wedding, or none at all, Nathan, do you hear?" (227)

Unlike the tender-hearted Nathan, she sees no disgrace in peddling as a means of fulfilling their dreams. Nathan, on the other hand, is embarrassed that she should see him peddling crockery in the street, but she scolds him: "Are you really angry? Bite the feather bed, then. Where is the disgrace? As if you were the only peddler in America! I wish you were. Wouldn't you make heaps of money then!" (227). We get the impression that Goldy would make a better peddler than Nathan. Nathan is too self-conscious of his descent from cap-blocker to peddler:

> [he] was constantly gazing about for a possible passer-by of his acquaintance, and when one came in sight he would seek refuge from identification in closer communion with the crockery on his pushcart ... .
>
> When business was brisk, he sang with a bashful relish; when the interval between a customer and her successor was growing too long, his singsong would acquire a mournful ring that was suggestive of the psalm-chanting at an orthodox Jewish funeral (225).

Indeed, Goldy appears to be of stronger mettle than Nathan, who though he disagrees with her plan, gives in to her tears, and lets her have her way. Cahan certainly invests Goldy with more colour and spice to her personality than he does Nathan. For instance, he allows her her idiosyncracies:

> It is to be noted that a "respectable wedding" was not merely a casual expression with Goldy. Like its antithesis, a "slipshod wedding," it played in her vocabulary the part of something like a well-established scientific term, with a meaning as clearly defined as that of "centrifugal force" or "geometrical progression" (226).

In her encounter with America then, Goldy is ready to meet the challenges posed by the Other just as she finds them. The dialogue she is engaged in, with America as the Other, generates its conflicts, and while Goldy responds impetuously to the sheer force of those conflicts, for instance, the conflict between her strong, unfulfilled desires and the realities of harsh ghetto life, she is finally able, to a large extent, to come to terms with those conflicts.

Having achieved one of her desires, marriage in her new homeland to signify the start of a new life begun with a fresh identity, Goldy realises that marriage in itself cannot empower her or accomplish her goals for her. After the long, tiring ceremony, she assures herself:

> "Now I am a married woman!" But somehow, at this moment, the words were meaningless sounds to her. She knew she was married, but could not realize what it implied. ...Goldy felt the relief of having gone through a great ordeal. But still she was not distinctly aware of any change in her position (236).

Only later at the reception does "the realization of her new self strike her consciousness full in the face" (236). She realises the horror of her situation: she has plunged them into the responsibilities of married life but taken away their sole financial

reserves. As free-flowing lager dissipates the tension of the newly-weds and their guests, Goldy calms down. She confronts the horrible experience, and is able to bear it. She looks for comfort in her love for Nathan, and receives it. Later "with the grim determination of one bent upon self-chastisement, " (239) she acknowledges her foolishness: "`A poor woman who dares spend every cent on a wedding must be ready to walk after the wedding.`" (239). She reveals an attitude ready to make amends for her foolhardiness, and this reflects a triumphant spirit. She is resilient, and shows a willingness to withstand the pressures of acculturation and assimilation. Stuck for the moment on the lowest rung of society, she cannot hope for social status or money to relieve her situation. She has to learn that she herself must make the most of her resources - youth, energy, grit and determination - to succeed. As a sovereign being, Goldy makes a choice unique to her Self, and then realises she must deal with the consequences of that choice. She is answerable for the actions of her Self, and rightly takes responsibility for the outcome of her plans.

Cahan is sympathetic in his portrayal of Goldy and Nathan's love for each other. Throughout the story, he welcomes us to glimpses of this love, regarding it as an asset that transcends the materialism of modern life as it is anchored in true esteem and affection for one another. The story ends with this love surviving the fiasco of the `subverted wedding'. On their way home through the "gloomiest and toughest" (239) part of the ghetto, Nathan and Goldy, two sorry figures trudging back on foot in their wedding finery, meet with verbal abuse from a group of drunk non-Jewish men. The couple walks away in silence; when the men throw something that hits Goldy's back, Nathan wants to confront them, but Goldy restrains him, fearing the men might kill him. And so they "proceeded on their dreary way through a somber, impoverished street" (239). Once again they have to put up with

suffering, this time, it is the evil of prejudice. Once again, they confront it together, discovering comforting strength in their unity. They learn that their success in the new country, in becoming Americans, depends largely on their attitude towards the reality of life in America. Whether it is anti-semitism or poverty, they learn to deal the best they can with the vagaries of modern American life. What is refreshing is their commitment to continue with the dialogue of becoming rather than be swallowed up by the challenges of acquiring a new identity as Americans.

Goldy and Nathan succeed then, in finding a balance they may live by in America, though it means Goldy may have to scale down her social aspirations to more realistic proportions for some time at least. That scaling down begins as they journey back together in the protection of their love for each other. Having travelled together in a toughening experience, they are able to transcend their woes to focus on their shared strengths. Cahan's narrative invests the moment with a tranquillity derived from nature itself. A gentle breeze is the couple's only herald after their guests hurriedly abandon them to their fate, but its presence and the natural setting, though impoverished by the debilitating forces of modern life that seem concentrated in the ghetto, seem more soothing than human company at this point. A tree bequeaths them its "tender felicitations":

> here and there a rustling tree - a melancholy witness of its better days - they felt a stream of happiness uniting them, as it coursed through the veins of both, and they were filled with a blissful sense of oneness the like of which they had never tasted before. So happy were they that the gang behind them, and the bare rooms toward which they were directing their steps, and the miserable failure of the wedding, all suddenly appeared too insignificant to engage

> their attention - paltry matters alien to their new life, remote from the enchanted world in which they now dwelt.
>
> The very notion of a relentless void abruptly turned to a beatific sense of their own seclusion, of there being only themselves in the universe, to live and to delight in each other. ... They dived into the denser gloom of a sidestreet.
>
> A gentle breeze ran past and ahead of them, proclaiming the bride and bridegroom. An old tree whispered ahead its tender felicitations (239-240).

Cahan's narration of the ending is rightly brief to impart the full shock of the anti-Semitic attack on Goldy and Nathan earlier. He narrates the event without exploring the couple's inward reaction to the attack, rather he moves immediately to the description of the world without. Earlier, the couple had been "so overcome by a sense of loneliness, of a kind of portentous, haunting emptiness" that they could only trudge "in dismal silence," (239) but the attack lifts them out of this despondency to consider that they still do have something precious: their genuine love for one another. Rather than give in to depression, they choose to protect what they have. It is this realisation that allows them to transcend another very real fear - destitution.

Cahan places the threatened and disillusioned young couple when they feel "a stream of happiness uniting them" (239) in surroundings that seem hardly conducive to peace of mind: "the gloomiest and toughest part of the Seventh Ward"; "a somber and impoverished street"; with only a "rustling" tree that is "a melancholy witness of its better days"(239). This ironic twist, a realistic touch, is Cahan's comment on and acknowledgement of what often appears as a paradox of human life: the existence of

beauty and sordidness side by side. It seems an apt description of ghetto life.[9]

Jules Chametzky in From the Ghetto, while noting the slight plot and dialogue, the story's sentimental ending and what he refers to as Cahan's "arch and condescending attitude" towards his Jewish characters (63), commends the ending as a singular moment in Cahan's work: "... the conclusion strikes a note that is beautiful - the sweetness and wonder of Chagall, an anticipation of Malamud. It is a note not always heard or appreciated in Cahan's work, but it is unmistakably there" (81).

The ending however appears rather weak in its too-sudden transition from discord to harmony. If Cahan had begun and continued in this economical style of narration, his brevity here might have worked better. However, he begins his story in the conversational tone of a story-teller in the style of a Sholom Aleichem or a Mark Twain perhaps, settling down to recount to his readers a tale of the ghetto, and addressing them in the familiar second-person "you". He goes on to give us details of Goldy and Nathan's lives and minds, and the reader then expects this confidentiality to continue. The ending however is a little disappointing because Cahan's brevity suddenly distances the reader from the protagonists and their feelings.

The stillness of the ending is evidently meant to contrast with the rough energy and chaos of the beginning of the story: the milling streets, "the dazzling, deafening chaos" with its many tales of woe (224); the disillusioned people craving for the very

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[9] Hutchins Hapgood's Spirit of the Ghetto : Studies of the Jewish Quarter of New York (1902) is a must-read for anyone wanting to appreciate the Lower East Side of the turn of the century as the work is a sensitive first-hand account of the ghetto.

essentials of life, desperately suppressing needs they cannot afford to satisfy. The cacophony of ghetto life is a foil to the harmony achieved by the newly-weds; Cahan highlights their triumph over the sordidness of ghetto life. The contrast allows him to capture a moment of almost epiphanic brilliance set free from its wretched time and space. He shows that such moments of beauty were possible even in the lowly lives of the Jewish immigrants who had much to discourage and pull them down. However, because the transition is not convincingly achieved, Cahan's ending seems contrived rather than natural or realistic.

"A Ghetto Wedding" demonstrates once again how the Self is dependent on the Other for a proper understanding of itself. Goldy chooses to act on her own understanding of opportunity in America, refusing to listen to Nathan's counsel for caution during such bad times. Depending only on her partial vision of the situation to guide her, Goldy fails in her endeavour. Here we see how the Self, as Bakhtin elucidates, does not contain absolute understanding of any one event. The Self needs its Other to clarify events for it as the Other provides a different perception of the same event based on its own unique vision. Goldy is brought to realise her foolishness when her friends do not send presents or turn up for the wedding. She learns that she has much to learn about America as Other; for instance, she cannot expect to solve problems in the old way. Whereas it used to be the custom in the Old World for friends and relatives to help out a newly-wed couple with presents for their new home, in America, different rules apply, such as the rule of poverty. Goldy's dialogue with America then, teaches her another valuable reason, that America as Other is unique and different from the Old World so familiar to her. In order to survive in America, she must teach herself to listen to those strains of the American voice that speak to her directly, such as poverty and anti-Semitism.

Cahan's stories like "A Ghetto Wedding" sound the warning that ***shtetl*** (East European Jewish town or village) life, while sustainable to some extent in America, could not long resist the assaults of the modern world. Cahan demonstrates here how the encounter between the Jew and America changed the Jewish Self, which learned to be more American. At the same time, however, because the Jewish Self remains fundamentally Jewish in orientation, it retains a recognisably Jewish expression of being. This is seen in the rituals and customs performed at Goldy and Nathan's wedding. In the ***shtetl***, life unfurled at a much slower pace, and the Jews were kept downtrodden, and so could not aspire to much. However, it was possible for them to eventually acquire wealth and comfort in America, and so, given the poverty of their lives both in the Old World as well as in America, the mad rush to compete in nearly everything dominated from the beginning. The strain of always competing and striving told on the immigrants in many ways. The next story, "Circumstances," depicts the corrosive effects of that strain on the individuals and the relationships they struggled to hold together in America.

In "Circumstances," Tatyana, a Russian college graduate and her husband Boris Lurie, a law graduate, emigrate to the US when Boris is not allowed to practice in Russia because he is Jewish. Typifying the spirit of Russian intellectualism of the early twentieth century, Tatyana and Boris delight in discussing literary works and ideas, as well as social issues and problems of the day. Naturally, they choose America, the symbol of the Free World, as the place they where may live as principled, upright citizens. However, they are disappointed to encounter poverty in the land of plenty. They find poverty too crushing a force to ignore though they try to maintain a noble, intellectual life. Boris slowly transforms into a "worn, wretched workingman" (216) sick with worry over basic necessities, and too tired at the end of the day to

improve his lot by continuing to teach himself English. Tatyana, protected from the harsher realities of life in America by her husband, who asserts he would commit suicide before he would allow her to work, (210) retains an immature perspective of life. Oppressed by boredom and poverty, she easily loses interest in her husband, and falls in love with their boarder, Dalsky. This story illustrates the dreadful social and psychological pressures modern America exerted on the immigrants to the point that even marriages were torn asunder.

Boris is proud of his intellectualism and his belief in social causes. He leaves Russia because he believes he and his wife are as good as anyone else although Russia may discriminate against Jews, and and that they have the right to reach for the best they can achieve. Young and idealistic, he is fearless, for example, in condemning anti-semitism in Russia. After a long hard search for work, he encounters a "high judiciary officer" who informs him "in a semi-jocular remark" that "the way to the bar lay through the baptismal font." Boris, although it is dangerous for a Jew to retaliate, stands up for the integrity of his Self and "[thunders]" at the official: "Villain!" ... his fists clenched and his eyes flashing" (205).

America, however, changes Boris drastically. Cahan takes this opportunity to illustrate how conditions in America played a significant role in disillusioning the Jewish immigrants to the point of bitterness and desperation. Boris' noble pursuits have to be crudely brushed aside as he concentrates on procuring the essentials of life. Because he has been in direct contact with the American way of life, he comes quicker than Tatyana to the realisation that the dialogue of becoming entails change and adaptation. He is just as eager as his wife to read an article on Guy de Maupassant, for instance, but rapidly loses interest in it as he has more pressing matters on his mind. He suggests that they take

in a boarder to help relieve their financial burden, realising that they cannot stand apart as social superiors when as immigrants, they must compete as and with other immigrants for economic stability. In America, the land of equal opportunity, Boris comes to the bitter realisation that intellectual superiority counts for little in the struggle to survive. The realisation comes fraught with pain and conflict for Boris; struggling against self-hate and desperation, he tries to explain their precarious situation to Tatyana. The sheltered Tatyana, however, will not take his words seriously:

> She listened to him with an amused air, and when he paused, she said flippantly: "We have heard it before."
>
> "So much the worse for both of us. If you at least took a more sober view of things! ..."
>
> ... "Every illiterate non-entity," he went on, letting the words filter through his teeth with languid bitterness, "every shop clerk, who at home hardly knew there was such a thing as a university in the world, goes to college here; and I am serving the community by supplying it with pearl buttons at six dollars a week. Would this were regular, at least! But it is not. I forgot to tell you, but we may again have a slack season, Tanya. Oh! I will not let things go on like this. If I don't begin to do something at once, I shall send a bullet through my forehead. You may laugh, but this time it is not idle talk...." (207-8).

Boris detests the negative changes in himself: poverty has reduced him even to servility to his boss. He remembers how he had bravely stood up to the Russian official, and how now "his manner with the foreman ... was assuming a rather obsequious nature": Boris, "in greedy expectation of work" is willing to please his boss since work is hard to come by and "the distribution of it

was, to a considerable extent, a matter of favoritism" (210). The story ends with Boris lonely and distraught after Tatyana has left him; "for the first time in many years," (223) he weeps, for all he has lost - his wife and his peace of mind. America humbles him, and realising his vulnerability, he must come to terms with it in order to overcome it if he means to succeed as an American.

Boris' encounter with America leaves him totally shaken. It ruins him first physically, then morally, and finally emotionally when his beloved wife leaves him. Boris is in a similar situation as Heyman, David, Nathan and Goldy, but the unique perspective of his Self is that of the intellectual, and his special vision of life reveals to him a different aspect of capitalist America: that of moral degradation and the defeat of idealism to harsh reality. Unlike David, who chooses as far as he can not to succumb to the system, and fights back in his own way, Boris allows himself to be somewhat altered by the perversity of the times. Whereas the simple David chooses to quit his job rather than cower before his bosses, Boris the intellectual is driven to compromise on his ideals in America to retain his job. He suffers inwardly, keenly aware of the irony of the situation. Boris, who would not tolerate discrimination in Russia, goes to the Land of Ideals only to have himself become morally weakened by his encounter with America. The encounter awakens him to aspects of America he had not known before. The meaning of his existence, Boris learns, is not within the sovereign control of his Self, but depends also on first, Russia, and then, America, his Others. By this Cahan demonstrates that the Self is not the author of meaning, but comes by meaning from its dialogue with the Other as the Other reveals to the Self aspects of its own personality not apparent to it before the encounter.

Cahan portrays Tatyana as an intelligent, capable young woman but with a romantic bent. She is attracted to Boris not so

much because he is an intellectual who is vocal, confident and knowledgeable about his beliefs and displays a concern for social causes as well as a desire to improve social conditions (204), but for superficial reasons, namely:

> ... his authoritative tone and rough sort of impetuosity upon discussing social or literary topics; ... his reputation as being one of the best-read men at the university, as well as a leading spirit in student "circles," and by the perfect Russian way in which his coal-black hair fell over his commanding forehead (204).

A cheerful, pleasant person, she is not always sensitive to Boris' predicament as provider of their family. Boris turns more morose and sickened at heart each day because of the pressures of working so hard yet earning so little. They cannot make ends meet, let alone realise their ambitions for social mobility. Tatyana, however, is dead-set against taking in a boarder. She would rather go out to work herself than sacrifice their privacy. But Boris, with his own romantic illusions, will not allow her to do this. Both must learn that succeeding in modern America requires a more realistic approach to life than what either is willing to admit as yet.

By insisting that Tatyana remain within the protection of their home, Boris prevents her from entering into the dialogue of becoming American. Perceiving America largely through his eyes, her responses are dulled, and her mind remains entrenched in the old way of thinking as she learns nothing new for herself. Tatyana has to directly encounter America as Other and engage herself in dialogue with this Other before she can know how to respond to it. Like Goldy in the last story, Tatyana's vision of life in America is also partial. Here, however, it is due to ignorance of the Other rather than to wilful blinding, as in Goldy's case. While Goldy

insists on perceiving America only from her own limited understanding. Tatyana has little conception of America as Other or herself as American because she has been prevented from dialoguing with America or for that matter acting for herself. As it turns out, then, Boris's Old World pride hinders rather than protects her, and so, her journey of discovering and acquiring an identity as an American is delayed. She is therefore unable to enlarge her understanding of life or of her inner resources with which she may hope for success in dialoguing with America. When she does go out to work after she leaves Boris, Tatyana finds it difficult to adapt to her new life. Away from the security of the familiar, she feels homesick and alienated from everyone:

> A cruel anguish choked her. Everybody and everything about her was so strange, so hideously hostile, so exile-like! She once more saw the little home where she had reigned. "How do I happen here?" she asked herself. She thought of Boris, and was tempted to run back to him, to fly into his arms and beg him to establish a home again (222).

Even then, she retains her romantic delusions, seen in her tendency to exaggerate her situation in the manner of a heroine in a romantic tale: "Everybody and everything about her was so strange, so hideously hostile, so exile-like!"

While still with Boris, Tatyana is more interested in intellectual pursuits rather than in present urgencies. When the latest issue of the literary magazine "Russian Thought" arrives, for example, Tatyana is in such a flurry to read a de Maupassant article that she forgets the soup boiling on the stove. She is also somewhat status conscious, and thinks of herself as belonging to the higher rank of Russian noblewoman rather than being the

daughter of a "merchant and Hebrew writer in Kieff, who usually lost upon his literary ventures what he would save from his business" (204). She prides herself on having gone to a Russian college, and thinks highly of her ability to speak in Russian. She feels this marks her off from the common grain; for instance, one day, after she leaves Boris and finally finds work in a garment factory, she is irritated to hear the girl beside her sing "one of the most Russian of Russian folksongs" with "such an un-Russian flavor, and pronounced the words with such a strong Yiddish accent, and so illiterately, that Tanya gnashed her teeth as if touched to the quick, and closed her eyes and ears" (222). Obviously feeling she could do better, she recalls her graduation day at the Kieff Gymnasium with her co-graduates, "a group of blooming young maidens" so different in manners, disposition and, apparently, in social standing from the immigrant girl beside her. Tatyana remembers how she and her mates had sung the same song that day in Kieff but "in sturdy, ringing, charming Russian," (222) a far cry from her shopmate's humble rendition.

When Dalsky, the "well-regulated young man" who, Cahan writes, "is at peace with himself and everybody else in the colony" (214) moves in with the Luries, it is not surprising that Tatyana, bored and lonely at home, missing the opportunity for intellectual discussion while forced to keep house on an insignificant income, finds herself falling for him. Cahan describes Dalsky as having "a certain dignity and nobleness of feature which consorted well with the mysterious pallor of his oval face, and to which, ... his moral complexion gave him perfect right" (212). Doubtless, Dalsky is a pleasing novelty to Tatyana. Dalsky appeals to her romantic sensibility in a way that Boris no longer does. Compared to the physically and emotionally diminished Boris, whom even Dalsky pities for his ruin, Dalsky is "a trim, fresh-looking college student" (216).

Tatyana tries to understand her conflicting feelings, but is too confused. The best she can do is refer to her literary experience for an explanation, a poor substitute for real life, but the only resource at hand for her because of her lack of experience of life: "she felt a vague reminiscence stirring in her mind. What was it? She seemed to have seen or heard or read something somewhere ... What could it be?" (217). Her desperate exertion to discover a role model from the world of fiction reveals her immaturity and lack of contact with the real world. She finally comes up with someone suitable enough for her social and literary pretensions, one of Russian literature's most famous romantic heroines, Anna Karenina: "A strenuous mental effort brought to her mind the passage in Tolstoy's novel where Anna Karenina, after having fallen under Vronsky's charm, is met by her husband upon her return to St. Petersburg, whereupon the first thing that strikes her about him is the uncouth hugeness of his ears" (217). When she suggests to Boris that they should separate for some time because she loves someone else, she does so in writing, again imitating Anna Karenina.

Dalsky, however, is more than just a physical or carnal temptation for Tatyana. In his quiet determination to succeed as a doctor in America, in fact it is with this "definite purpose" (214) that he emigrates, he is to her a symbol of success. Dalsky goes to America penniless, but within two years, "before his friends in the colony had noticed it," Cahan informs us, "[Dalsky] was in a position to pay his first year's tuition and to meet all the other bills of his humble, but well-ordered and, to him, gratifying living" (214). Dalsky has obviously learnt to manage himself well in order to achieve his deepest ambition; he seems well in control of the pressures heaped on the immigrant, and so far has prevailed over them in his pursuit of his goals. He is a direct contrast to Boris; Boris begins as one of the better known students in his university,

is extroverted and self-confident, but cannot seem to succeed in the New World. Dalsky, however, seems set for success in America despite his average qualities: although known for his tact, Dalsky has "nothing bright nor deep about him;" though he works hard to realise his dreams, yet "was never classed among the "grinds" (214). Dalsky seems to dwell in a realm of peace, being neither obtrusive nor reserved in his relationships, but succeeding in achieving a balance. Yet, Cahan's tone suggests disapproval of an underlying superficiality in Dalsky's relationships. Cahan concedes that while Dalsky is "endowed with a light touch for things as well as for men, and with that faculty for ranking high in his class," it is a faculty that "we all know, does not always precede distinction in the school of life." It is a trait of those "sort of people who give the world very little, ask of it still less, but get more than they give" (214). The peace Dalsky clothes himself in, then, seems the result of a kind of Self-ishness that allows him to surmount many of the distractions lining his road to success.

Much later, when finding herself utterly alone, Tatyana is tempted to return to Boris, it is Dalsky's image that changes her mind for her. With this image before her as she works, she "[falls] to her [sewing] machine, and with a furious cruelty for herself, she [goes] on working the treadle" (222). Having left Boris, Tatyana is finally able to grow into independence; she goes to work, and begins to like the challenges that her new life poses. Though it is a difficult, painful process for her as she misses Boris and has to struggle with her feelings for Dalsky, Tatyana begins to discover her Self. Having chosen as a unique, independent Self to finally engage herself in dialogue with America, Tatyana discovers much about her own Self to which she was previously blind. She finds that she is a sovereign being who is capable of exercising that independence well, and that as a sovereign being, she is ultimately responsible for her own choices, decisions and actions. She

chooses not to return to Boris as she realises that she has yet to know herself fully, and needs to continue this exciting dialogue she has begun with America before she can see her situation clearly enough to decide about Boris. Her dialogue of becoming American has finally begun, and Tatyana gains from the perspective of the Other because its different point of view leads her to fresh interpretations of her own Self.

Jules Chametzky ventures that Cahan "achieves just the right tone" of "wry compassion" in this story. He is charmed with Cahan's "wonderfully ironic touch" of having Tatyana communicate her reasons for leaving Boris through a letter, showing herself "literary and a student to the last" (1977, 80). Cahan's comic satire here, however, seems meant to point out the danger in Tatyana's leaning towards sentimentalism and romanticism. Alienated from the common folk, she certainly seems to have much to re-learn about herself and about life. To succeed in becoming an American, Cahan points out, she has to acquire a more realistic vision of life and an active role as a participant in American dialogue rather than remain a passive reader flicking the pages of books to learn about life. Being a unique Self, Tatyana is not only answerable for her actions, she is also responsible for creating a personal set of responses to America if she wants to survive the present and the future, since memory, by itself, would only keep her in the defunct past. This she may achieve only by herself entering the dialogue with America.

Chametzky, however, is right in praising this story as Cahan's "best-realized" work in the Yekl collection (78). Cahan has succeeded in achieving a balance between satire and sympathy for his characters. He skillfully captures the complexities of the situation and feelings of his two main characters as they try to find a balance between becoming

Americans and discovering their own Selfs. Cahan's use of abstruse expressions, however, as seen in many of the quotes above from "Circumstances," sometimes confuses the reader. His description of Dalsky for instance is quite distracting; is Dalsky finally meant to be upright or not? Cahan mentions Dalsky's "moral complexion" in connexion with his "dignity and nobleness of feature," (212) but later employs a tone which implies that Dalsky is self-serving and rather opportunistic: "This sort of people give the world very little, ask of it stil less, but get more than they give" (214). Or is the "mysterious pallor" cast over Dalsky's face meant to attach to Dalsky the inscrutability of goodness and wisdom? It would seem these discrepancies occur because Cahan was eager to explore the scope of his own writing ability, and so, freely experimented with language and technique in his short stories.

Unlike "A Ghetto Wedding" where the couple is united and find strength in their union so that they are able to transcend poverty, in this story, husband and wife succumb to the ugliness of poverty, and are separated. Boris and Tatyana change so drastically as a result of encounter with America that they are no longer compatible together. However, the fact that both are miserable rather than at peace after the estrangement suggests both are still very much the same Selfs they were before. This is evident in that both return to their earlier memories for comfort in their present suffering. The immigrants' survival in America, how well they responded to the different forces of Americanisation, depended largely on themselves, on how well they could adapt to New World conditions, and how willing they were to change in their dialogue of becoming American. Both stories illustrate that change was always difficult and conflict-ridden, and that there was much the immigrants had to learn and re-learn before they could pass into what Irving Howe terms the American condition.

It is apt that Cahan investigates the conflicts that inevitably accompany acculturation and assimilation through a close examination of the relationships between the immigrants. The survival or disintegration of former alliances was often a reliable gauge of the pressures exerted on the immigrants in the tension-filled drama of acquiring an American identity. Cahan's stories inquire into the strain placed on relationships as well as the personal quandaries that confronted the Jewish immigrants in their dialogue with America. One major area of conflict for the Jewish immigrant was, of course, religion.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Jewish immigrant found that in America religion had become a secondary thing, a peripheral concern, for many, Jew and non-Jew. Among the Jews, religion no longer played the central role it had in the Old World. There were undoubtedly individual as well as communal solutions to the crisis. One can only imagine the mental torture it put many through as they grappled with the question of their commitment to Judaism. In this respect, Cahan's short stories like "Rabbi Eliezer's Christmas," "The Apostate of Chego-Chegg" and "The Imported Bridegroom" are extremely helpful as they offer an important insight into how religion affected the individual in his search for an identity as an American.

"Rabbi Eliezer's Christmas" attempts to look realistically at the dilemma, in an honest appraisal of Rabbi Eliezer's deepest responses. Rabbi Eliezer keeps a cigarette stand and a small circulating library in a street of the ghetto. One Christmas Day, two women, an old philanthropist, Miss Bemis, and her companion, Miss Colton, who heads College Settlement, "where they fuss around with children and teach them to be ladies," (66) stop by his stand to speak to him. Rabbi Eliezer pours out his heart to them, telling them his unfortunate story and how after two years in America, he is "all alone in the world" (65). Miss Bemis

makes him a present of twenty dollars for a bigger, better-supplied library. The old man is ecstatic with the gift until one of his fellow peddlers remarks that the money is a Christmas present. Rabbi Eliezer is aghast, for a devout Jew may not accept "any presents in honor of a Gentile faith" (68). He finds himself in a dilemma as, being destitute, he needs to keep the money to create greater opportunities for himself in business, but his conscience warns him that the money is tainted. Finally, he takes it back to Miss Colton; laughing at the pathetic comedy of the situation, she suggests he give it to her, so that she may return it to him the next day, and the money will then not seem like a Christmas present at all. The old man is satisfied, but later begins to worry if he should have trusted the "Gentile lady."

For Rabbi Eliezer the crisis is hardly resolved, as deep inside he realises that he has compromised with his beliefs on a matter crucial to his Self-identity as a Jew:

> He was broken in body and spirit. That he should have been in a fever of anxiety, humiliating himself and deceiving his God - and all because he was so poor that twenty dollars appeared like a fortune to him - suddenly seemed like a cruel insult to his old age (70).

To have been faithful for so long to his God only to fall at this late stage in his life is certainly a malediction for him. He seems to have undergone so great and disturbing a change that even his "heart" prays "for tears," he feels at the same time that "hanging somewhere far away in the background was a disagreeable little question: Will the Gentile lady pay him the twenty dollars?" (70) Having `lost his innocence,' Rabbi Eliezer seems unable to return to a `pre-lapsarian' state of consciousness. It would appear that the dialogue he is engaged in with capitalist America in the

deepest recesses of his Self has exposed him to new conceptions of life essential to modern American reality. In America, the old man comes to realise with dismay, the emphasis is on commerce and industry as a means to success and material wealth.

With reference to Charles Leibman's thesis that Orthodoxy began to disintegrate in the Old World rather than in America as a result of modern pressures, the temptation in Rabbi Eliezer's case certainly does seem to have begun while he was still in the Old World. At "home, " he explains to the two ladies, "Was I not happy...? Did I want for anything? Bird's milk, perhaps. ...I was poor, but I never went hungry, and people showed me respect. And so I lived in peace until the black year brought to me a man who advised me to go to America" (65). Despite being poor in the Old World, Rabbi Eliezer had been content to stay on. In the ***shtetl***, though he was defined in large part by his membership in the community, and in this sense was bound by communal goals and objectives, he was still an individual, in possession of his dignity, and people recognised his individuality. It is the promise of accumulating material wealth in America that prompts Rabbi Eliezer to leave the stability of the Old World. If Rabbi Eliezer had been more "religiously motivated," as Leibman phrases it, he would probably not have given in to this temptation.[10] After all, as Rabbi Eliezer himself admits, he had wanted for nothing in the Old World.

The old man regrets the vanity that prompted him to act on the advice to go to America. The man who had encouraged him to

[10] According to Bernard Weinryb traditional Orthodox Jews avoided America because it was considered ***treife*** (unholy) and a corrupting influence. The traditionalists "feared to come" because they believed that in America ***Yiddishkeit*** (the Yiddish/Jewish way of life) was dying (16).

migrate had assured him that his skill in writing Scripture passages within circumferences as small as the brim of a tea-glass would be hugely rewarded in America. "'Rabbi Eliezer,'" the man says to him, "'you have hands of gold, but sense you have none. Why throw yourself away upon a sleepy town like this? Just you go to America, and pearls will be showered on you.'" (65). To an extent, it is the pride of proclaiming the work of his hands that leads Rabbi Eliezer away from the old way of life and worship. After two years in America, he has found not pearls but misery. "Well, here they are, the pearls," he pronounces with a "bitter smile," indicating his shabby stand and his forlorn collection of books to the women (65). The insight he gains as to the 'true' nature of America comes, as it does for Goldy and Tatyana, after he chooses to engage himself in first-hand encounter with America. Although Rabbi Eliezer, from his own admission, had no reason to leave his old village, he chose to do so based on his sovereign will, and now finds himself having to answer for his action.

The skill on which he had so prided himself and which helped define his Self-identity in the ***shtetl*** of the Old World counts for nothing in America where there are machines in abundance to imitate and reproduce effortlessly the work of his hands, and in greater intricacy and numbers. The aged Rabbi Eliezer finds that he has been made obsolete in the fast-paced world of mass production. It is a huge blow to his self-esteem, to have left his familiar old home where he had established an identity and created a sense of belonging for himself only to find himself reduced to a superfluous non-entity in America. The blow demoralises him totally, leaving him feeling dazed, humiliated and alienated in the sprawling land of freedom. His one skill in representing, painstakingly, "the words of life" in a uniquely creative and beautiful form is rejected and derided as an obstacle in the "land of hurry up!" (66). Having shattered the meaning of

his be-ing. America the commercial giant now threatens to consume him wholly. Capitalism has no regard or use for his knowledge of the "words of life," or for his art, and Rabbi Eliezer is silenced within his misery. It is no wonder that he grabs the opportunity to give vent to his sorrow when Miss Bemis and Miss Colton question him:

> "I sat up nights to make a [picture], and when it was finished I got one dollar for it, and that was a favor. My lions looked like potatoes, they said. "As for your Deuteronomy-it isn't bad, but this is America, and such things are made by machine and sold five cents apiece." The merchant showed me some such pretty pictures. Well, the lions were rather better than mine, and the letters even smaller - that I won't deny - but do you know how they were made? By hand? Not a bit. They write big words and have them photographed by a tricky sort of thing which makes them a hundred times smaller than they are - do you understand? "Ah, but that's machine work - a swindle," says I, while I make every letter with my own hands, and my words are full of life." "Bother your hands and your words! ... This ain't Russia. ... It's America, the land of machines and "hurry up!" (66).

The old man finds that in order to survive, he must create new meaning for his Self. Mikhail Bakhtin theorises that the meaning of the Self does not lie within the Self alone, but in what is obtained from the encounter between Self and Other. This is apparent in Rabbi Eliezer's case, when the old man realises that meaning is not absolute. In America, he must derive meaning from his Self in relation to the circumstances unique to America. He has already adapted himself to a new role, as peddler, within

the American context, and now he must learn how to deal with other important matters, such as religion. While poverty forces him to compromise on his spiritual vision, it is still Rabbi Eliezer's choice to keep the money offered to him, and his choice also, to come up with a solution to the crisis he finds himself in. Cahan shows that while Rabbi Eliezer's woes seem to stem from the poverty forced on him in America, they are also, to an extent, caused by certain inherent flaws. For example, Rabbi Eliezer shows himself to be rather materialistic when he allows himself to be tempted by the thought of the "pearls" he may earn in America.

Rabbi Eliezer comes to see that reality in America is defined by a totally different ambience, of the success of quick and efficient cloning. In America, money is the reigning principality, and in its kingdom, originality is a lost cause. So disempowered, Rabbi Eliezer in his "fine old age" feels himself only a step away from the rot of death:

> "Making letters smaller, indeed! .... Me too, they have made a hundred times smaller than I was. A pile of ashes they have made of me. A fine old age! Freezing like a dog, with no one to say a kind word to you," he concluded, trying to blink away his tears and to suppress the child-like quiver of his lips (66).

Rabbi Eliezer's predicament is that while he is aware of the dulled imagination and tastelessness of American society, he cannot stop the disease from infecting him as he too is contained within this society now. So, for instance, while he scoffs at the cheap romances he is forced to peddle, he is at the same time deeply mortified that he must compromise on his ideals by having to hawk them: "'Silly stuff, that,' he said with contempt. 'Nothing

but lies - yarns about how a lad fell in love with a girl and such-like nonsense. Yet I must keep this kind of trash. Ah, this is not what I came to America for.'" (65). When Miss Bemis presents him the twenty dollars, his sense of having compromised intensifies. He accepts the charity gratefully, blessing the respite the money promises him. Mingled in his gratitude in being able to increase his stock and library, is his very human pride and vanity:

> ...he could well afford a new praying shawl for himself [as well, now]. His old one was all patches, and how could he expect any attention at the synagogue? Wouldn't his fellow worshippers be surprised! "I see that you are doing good business, Rabbi Eliezer," they would say. Yes, he would get himself a new praying shawl and a new hat. His skullcap in which he worshipped at the synagogue was also rather rusty, but a new one cost only twenty-five cents, and this was now a trifle" (67).

Cahan, in exposing the old man's fallibility, reveals Rabbi Eliezer's basic human need for recognition and affirmation. We smile at the old man's vanity, but it is a smile of understanding. Suffering the trauma of displacement, he does not ask for too much in wanting to cling on to some shred of self-dignity. We note however, how having acquired a little purchasing power, Rabbi Eliezer's shopping list grows longer. We are amused too by his extreme anxiety about the safety of the money:

> Again and again he put his hand to his breast to make sure that the twenty dollars were safe. Now it occured to him that there might be a hole in his pocket; now he asked himself if he was positive that he had put the precious piece of paper into his purse. He distinctly remembered

> having done so, yet at moments his mind seemed to be a blank. "With these begrudging creatures around, one might truly lose one's mind," he complained to himself (67).

Rabbi Eliezer is unfortunately unable to staunch the corruption of materialism and money once it invades his life. The worst is when his religion becomes compromised as well. When he thinks that the money could be an unholy thing, a Gentile ploy to tempt him away from his God, he goes through a series of moral convulsions:

> The green and brown piece of paper now seemed to smell of the incense and to have something to do with the organ sounds which came from the Polish church in his birthplace. He was horrified. Nestling in his bosom pocket right against his heart, was something ***treife***, unholy, loathsome. And this loathsome thing was so dear to that heart of his - woe to him! ... (68).

He goes on to think: "What a misfortune that it should all have happened on Christmas of all other days! Had the good-hearted Gentile woman only come one day sooner, all would have gone well" (68). Cahan shows how Rabbi Eliezer has passed quite conclusively from innocence to wilful moral blinding. Poverty forces the old man to raise the importance of the money to a level where it is able to destroy his peace of mind. Before long he is justifying himself:

> Or, had there been nobody around to see him receive the Christmas present ... Anyhow, she never said it was a Christmas present, did she? Rabbi Eliezer also reminded

> himself of the Christmas gifts which thousands of American Jews exchanged with their Christian friends, and among themselves, but the thought had no comfort to offer him (68).

It is indeed a tough moral battle, and Rabbi Eliezer is badly shaken. Ashamed at his weakness, the old man chastises himself, realising that at his age, he already has "one foot in his grave" (68). We wonder however if Rabbi Eliezer would have been more ready to compromise were he not so aware of his mortality, as seen here and elsewhere in the story: "What if so-called Jews who shave their beards and smoke on the Sabbath do exchange Christmas presents? Shall he, an old man with one foot in his grave, follow their godless example. Woe to him, has it come to that?" (68). He finally goes to see Miss Colton, hoping "the good woman would understand his trouble, and whether it was a Christmas present or not, she would say that it was not" (68). Inside, "his heart sank with fear" (68) that Miss Colton might acknowledge the money to have been a Christmas present.

After seeing her, Rabbi Eliezer's first action is to "inquire of the Jews in the neighborhood" (69) about Miss Colton's trustworthiness. Only then does he regain his peace of mind to proceed to the synagogue, signalling a shift in his priorities. Rabbi Eliezer is forever changed by the dialogue of becoming American, and must live with the fruits of compromise. Cahan illustrates here how encounter inevitably changes the Self. Rabbi Eliezer's mind is now preoccupied with a new consciousness, so that even in the synagogue, "during the Eighteen Blessings he caught himself thinking of the twenty dollars and the Gentile God, and had to say it all over again" (69). In the symbolic passage that follows this account of Rabbi Eliezer's fall, Cahan depicts the old man as

being irretrievably branded in the American street by two symbols of Christianity, the cross and the fish:

> By the time he got back to his stand the markets were in full blast. The sidewalks and the pavement were bubbling with men and women and torches. Hundreds of quivering lights stretched east and west, north and south-two restless bands of fire crossing each other in a blaze and losing themselves in a medley of flames, smoke, fish, vegetables, Sabbath loaves, muslin and faces.
>
> "Fish, fish, living fish - buy fish, dear little housewives! Dancing, tumbling, wriggling, screaming fish in honor of the Sabbath! ... (69).

Though he manages to avoid accepting a present from a Christian on Christmas Day, the solution labels Rabbi Eliezer as having resorted to moral acrobatics to achieve his desire and maintain a form of righteousness at the same time. Everything about him now seems to proclaim the imprint of Christianity on his Jewishness. In the passage quoted above, Cahan not only employs Christian symbols, but his portrayal of a public place milling with people and torches is reminiscent of the scene of another betrayal, Gethsemane. Gethsemane, with its complicated interlocking of Jewish and Christian nuances, seems an apt metaphor for Rabbi Eliezer's troubled consciousness caused by his dealings with the two Christian women. The image of Gethsemane however goes on to recall the Christian persecution of the Jew throughout the centuries, the Jew being accused of deicide. The metaphor then paints Rabbi Eliezer as being both traitor to his faith as well as victim. It captures well the complexity of the old man's sorry situation. Placing the fish image beside the Judaic symbol of the lion -Rabbi Eliezer is often referred to in the

story as a lion (63, 64, 66), albeit a haggard one - however, does seem to call attention to the proximity of Christianity and Judaism in the New World. The juxtaposition seems to intimate that in the Christian New World (as in the Christian Old World), the Jew will need to come to terms with Christianity as he cannot avoid it.

The story ends with Rabbi Eliezer zealously muttering a psalm in remorse, but unable to feel penitent enough as he wonders if Miss Colton really will return the money:

> The reddish torchlight fell upon his waxen cheeks and white beard. His eyes shone with a dull, disconsolate lustre. As he went on whispering and nodding his beautiful old head, amid the hubbub of the market, a pensive smile overspread his face. His heart was praying for tears. "I am so unhappy, so unhappy," he said to himself in an ecstasy of woe. And at the same time he felt that hanging somewhere far away in the background was a disagreeable little question: Will the Gentile lady pay him the twenty dollars? (70).

Cahan's depiction of the old man in this passage is a truly arresting moment in this story, as he has drawn out splendidly the pathos of the old man's alienation in America. Like the Old World itself, the pale old man, aged and beaten, caught in this most ancient of Jewish poses, and with the encroaching city threatening to invade on his time with God, seems like a fading institution clutching on to the last vestiges of a cherished former life. The sinister red of the torchlight which bathes the old man seems to signal the end of this way of life. With his waxen cheeks and white beard, Rabbi Eliezer seems like one of the old patriarchs, long dead and now fossilised as if in stone, valued not for its meaning, but as a reminder of a way of life that once was. Indeed, for Miss

Bemis, Rabbi Eliezer is only an aesthetic object with soulful eyes and a beautiful head.

By exploring the changes in Rabbi Eliezer, Cahan illustrates how an encounter between Self and Other is bound to change the participants, no matter how imperceptibly. While America has quite obviously been changed by the arrival of the Jews, Rabbi Eliezer too has been irrevocably changed, especially psycho-emotionally. Bakhtin submits that a living organism changes as a result of any encounter; the Self and Other engaged in an encounter end up learning about one another and, whether consciously or not, are influenced by the unique personalities of one another. We see how Rabbi Eliezer, in spite of himself, ends up being 'tainted' by America's materialistic spirit.

Among the five stories analysed in this chapter it is in this story and the next, "The Apostate of Chego-Chegg", that Cahan illustrates clearly that although the Jewish Self was changed by encounter and dialogue with America, it retained its basic Jewishness. In America, the Orthodox Jew like Rabbi Eliezer could not always practise his faith as he used to, and had to take the American context into consideration. In spite of his efforts to be true to his "words of life" and to his art, Rabbi Eliezer finds that he needs to take note of economic contraints.

Cahan also proves an effective ironist in this story. He aims his satire at both Rabbi Eliezer, though he reveals at the same time a sympathy for the old man's human vulnerability, and the old philantropist, Miss Bemis. Rabbi Eliezer is a pathetic character drawn in tragi-comic overtones. Unlike Heyman and Goldy who are ***schlemiels*** (that is, comic failures who are responsible for their woes), Rabbi Eliezer fits the pattern of ***schlimmazzel*** (a comic failure who is a victim of circumstances). He certainly seems caught in a perverse series of events quite beyond his reasonings or capabilities, beginning with the disintegration of the Old World

itself. Through Rabbi Eliezer, however, Cahan criticises the fettered life of the Old World ***shtetl*** (town or village) that based its whole meaning on the weight and import of the ***Torah;*** a lifestyle that often seemed to revolve around extremely legalistic and ingenious, intricate interpretations and reasonings.[11]

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[11] According to Zborowski and Herzog in their study of ***shtetl*** culture :

> [The learned Jew's] task is to translate historic obligation into current fulfilment by an appropriate interpretation of eternal law in the light of ephemeral conditions. If the interpretation is ingenious enough it can eliminate hardship for all concerned, and at the same time, remain true to the spirit.
>
> ... to help humanity is an absolute good. This human editing of divine precept often appears paradoxical to a mind not schooled in the tradition. On the one hand there is a legalistic preoccupation with the letter of the Law, a verbalistic exercise that reaches extremes of virtuosity until often it seems to be pursued for its own sake. On the other hand, there is an underlying concern for the spirit of the Law as expressed in the Holy Books.
>
> Whatever the subject of discussion may be - the receiving of mail on Sabbath, a business dispute, the correct form of the text folded inside the phylacteries - the ultimate reference will be to a quotation from the Pentateuch. No matter how intricate the reasoning, how far-flung and far-fetched the allusions, citations and syllogisms, all revert finally to the belief that the divine will is actuated by intelligence and reasonableness and that under extreme exigency the letter of the law must yield to the spirit which dictates always the preservation of human life and the fostering of human welfare (113).

Rabbi Eliezer prides himself on being able to "crowd the whole of Deutronomy into a circle the size of a teaglass" (65) but his skill in confining the Law within so tiny an area is transferred in America to his 'skill' in justifying his acceptance of money on a Christian holy day. It seems that despite his piety and knowledge of the Law, the Law is not supreme for the old man who manages to find a way to get around it. The Law seems more an obstacle, especially in America, which is governed by Gentile rather than Judaic law. Rabbi Eliezer feels the money he receives is tainted, but accepts an arrangement that lessens the burden on his conscience.[12] The miniature ***misrach*** the old man makes signify how the Law, skilfully encapsulated, is enshrined as a kind of spiritual ornament that the Orthodox Jew may always carry in his heart as an assuring reminder that he is ultimately defined by God's Law. The beautiful and carefully made ***misrach*** however, also indicate a narrowing of the old man's vision to one little area. The orthodox Jew was so familiar with the Law that he knew it by heart, but in trying to follow it to the letter, he often confined himself in an area metaphorically no larger than the circle of Rabbi Eliezer's tea-glass.[13] Rabbi Eliezer's creativity then seems to be not the genius of sublimity but the product of a cultivated imagination.

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[12] His reasoning, according to Zborowski and Herzog, reflects the Old World practice of selling off grain and its products to a non-Jew before Passover and buying it back after Passover as Jewish Law specifies the Jew "must sell such products before the holiday begins" (115). In this instance, "... it is correct to interpret the Law in such a way that a man's livelihood is not jeopardized" (114-5).

[13] It is well worth noting, however, that if Jews had not been so meticulous and scrupulous about keeping the Law, they probably would not have survived to this day.

Through Miss Bemis, Cahan mocks the eccentricities of charity-givers who sometimes give not out of a sense of humble charity but because their idiosyncracies dictate that they should. Cahan uses exaggeration and comic caricaturisation to satirise Miss Bemis' motives in wanting to help Rabbi Eliezer. Though Miss Bemis is genuinely moved to hear Rabbi Eliezer's story through Miss Colton, who interprets his Yiddish for her, she is initially drawn to him by his likeness, to her, of a "lion in distress," with his "waxen face [shaped] ... out of [a] ... sea of white hair and beard" (64). Miss Bemis is distanced from Rabbi Eliezer by her ignorance of his language; she cannot communicate with him directly though she wishes to shower him with her gift. She also has little understanding of his sorrows, except for a general hint that the old man is "in distress": "'Look at that man!' she said, with a gasp of ecstasy, as she pointed out an elderly Jew who sat whispering over an open book behind a cigarette stand. 'Don't you think there is a lion effect in his face? Only he is so pathetic.'" (63). Miss Bemis, Cahan informs us, "had recently become infatuated with a literary family and had been hunting after types ever since" (64); when she comes across Rabbi Eliezer, "her effervescent enthusiasm was not exclusively philanthropic" (64). She studies Rabbi Eliezer as if he were a museum piece, neatly formulating him within a category of types she is familiar with. She decides at once that his looks and manners present a classic study in tragedy. In this, she seems as guilty as Rabbi Eliezer of functioning within a restricted imagination. At the same time, it is an ironic comment on Rabbi Eliezer's cribbed spirit, that even a stranger to his language and psyche is somewhat able to formulate him at a glance. The conversation below is worth reproducing in full for its brilliant comedy, and because it captures well Cahan's skill as a satirist :

> The other [Miss Colton] agreed phlegmatically that the man was perfectly delightful, but this was not enough.
>
> "You say it as if the woods were full of such faces," the nrevous little woman protested. "A more exquisite head I never saw. [A surprisingly Yiddish rhythm for Miss Bemis, perhaps?] Why, it's classic, it's a perfect-tragedy. His eyes alone would make the fortune of a beginning artist. I must telegraph Harold about him."
>
> "Yes, there is pathos in his eyes," the head worker of the College Settlement assented, with dawning interest.
>
> "Pathos! Why, they are full of martyrdom. Just look at the way his waxen face shapes itself out of that sea of white hair and beard, Miss Colton. And those eyes of his-doesn't it seem as if they were looking out of a tomb a mile away? We must go up and speak to him. He looks like a lion in distress." (64).

While "Rabbi Eliezer's Christmas" is an anecdotal view of firstly, the disillusionment of discovering that America is not to be the paradise it was often touted to be, and secondly, of the clash of Orthodoxy with American commercialism, "The Apostate of Chego-Chegg" is a much more complex story. Here, Cahan focuses on a different angle of the Jewish dialogue with America. He looks at the straitened Jewish Self, but probes into more fundamental questions unearthed in the search for identity. Michalina, the apostate of the title, finds herself dealing not so much with the dilemma of which faith she finally belongs to, Judaism or Christianity, but with the more essential riddle of the meaning of her Self. We see her in the beginning of the story "yearning for her father's house and her Jewish past," (94) after having converted to Catholicism, but ultimately, what pervades her consciousness is the striving of her Self to understand itself. In

this sense, this is more of an American or universal tale rather than a specifically Jewish American one. Michalina's is an extremely delicate and challenging situation to analyse, and Cahan shows himself quite adept at probing the different and confusing responses that plague his protagonist. He offers no simple equations for her quandary but in the same honest way he considers Rabbi Eliezer's conflicting feelings, devotes his skill to understanding Michalina and her predicament. The story also shows how despite her change as a result of encounter and dialogue with America, Michalina retains her basic Selfness as a Jewess and as an individual.

One shortcoming in this story however is Cahan's hasty outlining of Wincas, Michalina's Polish husband and his quick caricaturisation of Rabbi Nehemiah which give the story a somewhat limp feel. Both Wincas and Nehemiah seem placed there merely as props against which Cahan may draw out Michalina's predicament. Had he explored in full the relationship between Wincas and Michalina, and treated Nehemiah as a slightly more serious character, Cahan could have come up with a tense and rivetting drama. His analysis of Michalina's predicament too would have been sharpened. Wincas, for instance, is hardly presented as a force in the story. It appears at times that Michalina genuinely loves him, and at others, that she merely used him to escape an unbearable domestic situation. This is indeed one of the conflicts she does deal with, assessing her true feelings for her husband. However, because Cahan sketches Wincas as a dim silhouette far in the background of Michalina's life, the tension hinted at in this relationship is lost as quickly as it is produced. The story ends with Wincas reduced to a pathetic state as he wanders the street searching for his wife "like a cow looking for her calf" (104). As we are hardly allowed to consider Michalina's

relationship with Wincas in any depth, her deep searching where it collides with this relationship loses much of its impact.

"The Apostate of Chego-Chegg" begins on a note of double estrangement: "'So this is America, and I am a Jewess no longer!" brooded Michalina" (94). Michalina ponders on her sense of displacement in America as well as on her new identity as a Catholic convert. Obviously it is an identity she is still alien to, as she expresses her new state in the negative, in reference to her former identity as a Jewess rather than in her present one as a Catholic. Her Self appears as if in exile both as an immigrant in a strange new land and especially as a convert. Michalina is keenly aware that "She was a ***meshumedeste*** - a convert Jewess, an apostate, a renegade, a traitoress, something beyond the vituperative resources of Gentile speech" (94). Michalina's father, when she married Wincas, "had sat seven days shoeless on the ground, as for the dead, but death was what he naturally invoked upon the 'defiled head' as the lesser of two evils" (94). Cahan explains further: "Atheism would have been a malady; ***shmad*** (conversion to a Gentile creed) was far worse than death, " and so, Michalina feels herself "buried alive" (94). She is only too conscious of the meaning of the "terrible untranslatable word (meshumedeste)" (98).

Michalina marries Wincas to escape her cruel "sorceress of a stepmother, whose "cruel treatment" drives her "into the arms of the Gentile lad and to America" (94). It is no surprise then that after the chance encounter with Rabbi Nehemiah, she secretly follows him to his Jewish settlement not far away. The Jewish Americans there revile her as a ***meshumedeste*** and pelt her with stones. She flees back to her lodging, dreadfully frightened and yet strangely reassured: "Michalina was frightened to death. And yet her pursuers and the whole Jewish town became dearer to her heart than ever" (98). Ironically, Michalina finds a rough sort of

meaning in their rejection of her, as their contempt at least allots her a role within the Jewish community, even if only as ***meshumedeste***. This is important as without a role or an identity, Michalina is prevented from entering into dialogue with America, since, according to Bakhtin, dialogue between two organisms presupposes the clearly defined uniqueness of each entity as separate, individual beings governed by their sovereign wills. Michalina, on the other hand, seems at this stage truly alienated and stateless; her Self at this point is a mere shadow of be-ing.

She takes to spending time, with her new-born, Marysia, at the railroad-station to watch the Jewish passengers, and there, six months later, she bumps into Nehemiah again, who has by now renounced Judaism because, he explains to Michalina, "'Religion is all humbug. There are no Jews and no Gentiles, missus. This is America.'" (100). Michalina frequents Burkdale after that, and becomes friends with some of the Jewish women there. The people begin to accept her and Nehemiah the atheist as "representatives of two inevitable institutions;" Cahan writes with ironic wit, "Burkdale without an atheist and a convert seemed as impossible as it would have been without a marriage-broker, a synagogue, or a bath-house ..." (101). His comment, which affirms Michalina's new role within Jewish group identity, suggests that although she stands outside formal Jewish identity, Michalina remains intrinsically Jewish. Indeed, as we soon see, Michalina is told that nothing can erase her Jewishness, and is accepted back into the fold. This clearly illustrates the immutability of the basic "building block" of the Self that shapes and influences its personality. The story shows that despite her conversion and whether or not she is accepted by the Jewish community, Michalina will always remain Jewish at heart.

Michalina's inner conflicts are forced into the open when Nehemiah confesses his love for her, and tells her that according

to the Talmud, her marriage to a Christian "does not count," making her therefore, "a maiden, as free as the birds in the sky" (102). Michalina travels to New York to consult a rabbi, and he proclaims her marriage to Wincas null and void "in the eye of our faith," explaining: "'You were born a Jewess, and a Jewess cannot marry a Gentile. Now if your marriage is no marriage-what, then, is it? A sin! Leave the Gentile, if you want to return to God. Cease sinning, and live like a daughter of Israel.'" (103). With this, Michalina takes up again her past identity as a "daughter of Israel". Here, Cahan suggests that the Self remains intrinsically itself irregardless of how dialogue may change it. If this were not true, Rabbi Eliezer, for instance, would not suffer pangs of remorse when he discovers how America is distorting his spiritual vision. It is because he remains essentially himself that the changes in him upset him and make him feel guilty. Through Michalina's story, Cahan proves Bakhtin's thesis that the Self is a sovereign being whose "fundamental building block" is "unique as an experience".

The women of Burkdale seem to understand the uniqueness of the Self that allows it to retain its special vision of life despite the changes it undergoes, proclaiming in disgust that "'A ***meshumedeste*** will be a ***meshumedeste***.'" (104) when Michalina decides at the last minute to return to Wincas with her baby. However, they do not realise that based on this reasoning, they actually affirm Michalina's Jewishness, proclaiming her to remain what she always was, essentially, a Jewess.

For Michalina the conflict is not easily reduced to a matter of having abandoned her faith. Her choice to leave Judaism turns out to be a non-choice as she does it to spite her step-mother. At the same time there seems to exist a genuine tenderness between Michalina and Wincas that complicates the matter for her. Cahan points summarily to the affection between Michalina and Wincas

as revealed: after their quarrel when she is late coming back from Burkdale and they sit together contemplating their fears and anxieties about life in America, and Michalina tenderly soothes her husband's mind (99); when Nehemiah questions her love for Wincas, and she flares out in defence of her husband (102); by her touch of pride when she secretly takes note of the resemblance between her baby daughter and her husband while pretending to listen to Nehemiah (100); and by her final decision not to abandon Wincas. Having begun a new life with Wincas, Michalina is bound to consider her husband in her decisions, especially since she appears to love him. Also, she cannot so easily leave him behind when he seems to love and need her so badly in his own assimilation into mainstream American life.

Michalina's choice to embrace Catholicism then is based on her inner confusion and a lack of understanding of her own Self. She circumscribes herself by choosing escape rather than confrontation during a moment of intense pressure. As a sovereign being, however, she finds she is answerable for this choice, and must bear its consequences. She attempts to act independently, but finds that after having formed a relationship with Wincas and produced a baby, she cannot act on her own, but must take these two other individuals into account. Through this, Cahan shows how the Jewish Self's encounter with America changes it quite definitely as it finds itself influenced by the new environment. Paradoxically, the Self remains essentially unaltered and still recognisably Jewish. Michalina is certainly still strongly motivated by her Jewishness. At the same time, although her encounter with Wincas has given her a new role with new responsibilities, it is finally Michalina's individual choice to remain with him.

Marrying Nehemiah and reverting to Judaism, Michalina seems to feel, would reduce her once again to fleeing

circumstances rather than facing up to them, as she did with her step-mother. It would leave her, again, with non-identity, and she would continue to see herself in negative terms. In the 'neutral' arena of America, where one is neither Jew nor Gentile, she realises the question of her identity lies with her finally, and not with anyone else. America allows her the possibility to chart her own growth and create her own meaning as a Jewish American. Also, as badly as she wants to be Jewish again, the desire remains a fantasy for her, as she seems to realise:

> Suppose I had never become a meshumedeste, and Nehemiah, or some handsomer Jew, had married me at home....Would not the sorceress and her daughter burst with envy! Or suppose I became a Jewess again, and married a pious, learned, and wealthy Jew who fainted with love for me, and my stepmother heard of it, and I sent my little brother lots of money-wouldn't she burst, the sorceress!...And I should live in Burkdale, and Sorah-Elka and the other Jews and Jewesses would call at my house, and eat, and drink. On Saturdays I should go to the synagogue with a big prayer-book, and on meeting me on the road people would say, 'Good Sabbath!' and I should answer, 'A good Sabbath and a good year!'"
> Michalina began to cry (102).

Michalina's baby daughter symbolises her own rebirth in America with a new identity as an American. She rejects her daughter when Marysia is born, viewing her as a "heap of defilement" and a "shikse (Gentile girl)," (99) but is soon utterly devoted to the child. The baby, who unites the Jewish, American, and the Christian within herself, is a manifestation of Michalina's Self now as a Jewish American, and illustrates another possibility

for Michalina in America. Feeling herself "buried alive" (94) as a ***meshumedeste***, Michalina accepts the possibility of regeneration in America, and chooses to resurrect herself in her commitment to develop roots in America rather than to uproot herself once again when she chooses to remain with Wincas.

The Jewish women of Burkdale cannot understand Michalina, whose confused gropings towards independence are foreign to their own conception of life defined by a strong sense of communal living. Michalina, though afraid, bewildered and uncertain even of herself, displays admirable courage in deciding to stand alone and create her own meaning in America based on her personal dialogue with America rather than through the intervention of the community. Her sense of pioneerism, though come by somewhat inadvertently, seems an aptly American response in the search for identity. Even before Cahan conceptualised David Levinsky as a model for his tale of the making of an American, Michalina appears, Cahan's first real (Jewish) American. Indeed, Michalina possesses more strength of character than Levinsky does.

Cahan is sensitive in his consideration of Michalina's character. He takes time to look into her thoughts, feelings and responses, for instance, in the way he captures her, very naturally, stealing glances at her baby daughter while pretending to listen to Nehemiah propound on his new-found wisdom, this time against all religion. In contrast, Cahan merely caricaturises Nehemiah. The rabbi turned atheist appears as a comic figure from the beginning. We see him already in the process of abandoning Judaism as he conducts an imaginary debate with the devil, warning the devil that he cannot be tempted, and the very next minute falling into temptation when he admires Michalina's beauty a little too readily (97). He is the butt of the Burkdale loafers, who show no respect whatsoever for his learning, piety or knowledge. Like Michalina,

he is a figure forced to create a niche outside the clearly defined boundaries of his community. It is clear he is an idealist, first encapsulating all truth and wisdom within Jewish Law, and then, when he loses faith in this Law, transfering his whole zeal to preaching the collapse of religion in America. He becomes now a prophet of Nature and egalitarianism: "'This is America, missus. All are noblemen here, and all are brothers - children of one mother - Nature, dear little missus. ... Go forth, dear little missus! Go forth, O thou daughter of Zion, and proclaim to all those grovelling in the mire of Judaism'" (100). Predictably, Nehemiah falls in love with Michalina, another ostracised as he is. Again, he idealises this new passion, comparing himself and Michalina to Petrarch and Laura.

Michalina is unsure of her feelings for Nehemiah. She does not seem to take him entirely seriously. Certainly, he seems shallow, quoting platitudes and living in the rarified atmosphere of pure ideals. Cahan again reveals a sensitive understanding of Michalina's character by referring to her uncertainty about Nehemiah. "'Another sinner!' Michalina thought, with a little thrill of pleasure" (100) when Nehemiah tells her he has abandoned Judaism. When he speaks to her, though it is of atheism, his words "were echoes from the world of synagogues, rabbis, purified meat, blessed Sabbath lights. ... she gathered from his monologues ... that he was a fellow-outcast. Of herself she never spoke. Being a mystery to him made her a still deeper mystery to herself, and their secret interviews had an irresistible charm for her" (100). His significance for her seems to be the collective memory of community that both share. When he mentions love, he becomes "repulsive" to her, yet, for a brief moment, she clings on to him as the only recourse to her past identity. Nehemiah shows her another view of herself; his point of view of her

situation highlights for her her discontentment as a non-Jew and her lack of knowledge and understanding of her own Self.

Just as he does in "Rabbi Eliezer's Christmas," Cahan satirises here the complex nature of Jewish Law and the subjectivity of interpretations of the Law. Cahan is also critical of false religiosity. As Nehemiah, Cahan's mouthpiece in this instance, observes ironically, "the same fellows who used to break my bones for preaching religion now beat me up because I expose its idiocies" (100). It is obvious that it is not religion or Michalina's conversion that bother such people, but their own need to appear in control of themselves and of others. Cahan also criticises the narrow vision of Orthodoxy through Nehemiah. Coming from a clown like Nehemiah, Cahan's criticism on this rather delicate topic is somewhat blunted:

> "When my coat and my side-locks were long, my sight was short, while now-why, now I am so saturated with wisdom that pious Jews keep away from me for fear of getting wet, don't you know? Well, joking aside, I had ears, but could not hear because of my ear-locks; I had eyes, and could not see because I had them closed in prayer. Now I am cured of my idiocy...." (100).

Another example of prejudice is when the Jews of Burkdale, who come to some kind of acceptance of Michalina, will not eat food prepared by her as they fear it may not be ***kosher*** (acceptable according to Jewish dietary laws) (101). What comes across quite clearly about Orthodoxy in this story is its exaggerated and even aggressive intolerance of the individual who steps out of its fold. Michalina and Nehemiah are cruelly abused both verbally and physically because they are not seen to conform to the Jewish way of life.

Jules Chametzky compares this story to Philip Roth's "Eli, the Fanatic," and suggests that Cahan is addressing the question of "the proper attitude for Jews in the American paradise to have towards the Jewish past." Cahan, he adds, "shows much that is good in the old ethos, some bad, and nothing much better to replace it" (93). Chametzky also highlights an important point Cahan makes in this story to his Christian readers, namely "the wisdom known to every Jew in Christendom: that there are two answers, or ways, to see every question" (93).

The five stories analysed here together present a record of the inner turbulence that accompanied the transition from immigrant to American. The protagonists attempt to achieve a balance they may live by, but realise that they can only do this after becoming aware of the change within themselves. These stories also illustrate how this dialogue changed the immigrants, and focuses on the disillusionment that set in when the immigrants came face to face with America themselves. They discovered then that America was very different from the tales of endless opportunity and abundant riches they might have heard from others.

While Cahan shows that this change, as a result of dialogue, is inevitable, he also stresses how it is the individual who chooses, first, to change and, then, how to change. He explores the singular, unique personalities of his 'greenhorns' to show that each individual responded differently in his private dialogue with America. Despite the change in their personalities, however, Cahan's protagonists remain intrinsically Jewish as Jewishness forms their "fundamental building blocks". Cahan also emphasises that while the immigrants may have lost their spiritual vision in America due to inherent flaws within their make-up, poverty and other depressing, dreary, social conditions contributed to their bitterness with America.

Despite the flaws in his writing and the weaknesses in the stories analysed above, it is obvious that Cahan reveals a keen understanding of the sense of displacement and alienation that clung to the immigrants as they worked hard to craft a new identity, sometimes in spite of and sometimes because of the disparities between expectation and reality. It is this depth and insight given to the exposure of the Jewish Self to an American public that prompted writers like William Dean Howells, Saul Bellow and Isaac Rosenfeld to acclaim Cahan's works, especially The Rise of David Levinsky.

CHAPTER 3

'JEWISH HEART AND AMERICAN EGO'[1]: CAHAN'S JEWISH AMERICANS AND THE DIALOGUE OF SUCCESS

> Reb Avrom Leib jerked the words out, as though calling his congregation to arms. The "joyful noise" came with a cordial outburst. Zalkin was thrilled. It was as if the corners of the house of God, the holy ark, the glistening chandeliers and the shimmering letters on the omud, broke forth singing of his childhood to him.[2]

While the previous chapter considered the choices made by the Jewish Self at the beginning of its encounter with America, this chapter focuses on the Jewish Self at a phase in that same encounter which prompts it to reconsider its dialogue in order to make fresh choices. The themes of disillusionment and discontentment in America which Cahan introduced in his 'greenhorn stories' are further developed and elaborated on in these stories. Unlike the greenhorns, these Jewish Americans have

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[1] This quote, about David Levinsky, is taken from David Martin Fine's essay in Handbook of American-Jewish Literature. The full quotation reads:

> ... Levinsky becomes ... a betrayer of his own people. Unable to reconcile the opposing mandates of the self - Jewish heart and American ego - he remains, despite his wealth, the unloved, hungry, lonely New World seeker (Fried ed. 26).

[2] Cahan, Abraham. "The Daughter of Reb Avrom Leib," p. 53.

already achieved the painful transition from poverty to wealth and power in America. The protagonists in the three works considered in this chapter, "A Providential Match" (1895) and "The Imported Bridegroom" (1898) and "The Daughter of Reb Avrom Leib" (1900), are shown engaged in a different dialogue with America, where the stress is on formulating a response to success already achieved in America. The first two stories are from the Yekl collection, while the third is from Cosmo (May 1900).

Compared to Asriel Stroon ("Bridegroom") and Aaron Zalkin ("Daughter of Avrom Leib"), Rouvke Arbel ("Providential Match") is still in the early phase of his assimilation and financial success in America. His focus, then, is still very much on making as much money as he can, as fast as he can. Rouvke is also bent on erasing his Jewish past in an effort 'to become an American.' Asriel and Zalkin on the other hand, have already made their fortunes, and their wealth and power as successful businessmen have won for them the higher social standing which Rouvke still craves. Unlike Rouvke, therefore, both men, who are also much older than Rouvke, feel they have arrived at a moment in their striving where they need to reconsider and evaluate the experience, thus far, of becoming Americans. Rouvke, on the other hand, is still in the throes of becoming an eminent and wealthy, Anglicised, American. Cahan's treatment of Rouvke also differs sharply from his portrayal of Asriel and Zalkin. Whereas Asriel and Zalkin are treated as serious characters, Cahan deliberately draws Rouvke as a bungling ***schlemiel*** (comic character who attracts trouble) who sets up his own failures.

However, although Rouvke seems to be in a different category from Asriel and Zalkin, he is included in this chapter because he is clearly on the road to financial and material success in America. Rouvke's shrewdness and desire for material gain certainly do seem to assure us of his eventual financial success in

America. Rouvke, we feel, despite his different temperament and personality, will also eventually come to typify that sense of frustration that we see in Asriel and especially Zalkin. He is already, for example, given to bouts of loneliness and yearning when his heart "stretches" for companionship and scenes of the familiar. Rouvke, then, marks a significant point in the journey from greenhorn to American; in Rouvke, Cahan presents another moment in the dialogue of becoming American before he moves on to consider the eventual outcome of that dialogue as seen for instance in Asriel and Zalkin.

No longer concerned with the dark fears and anxieties of the confused greenhorn, Cahan's Jewish Americans seem now to be troubled by another kind of deep and unsettling worry, a consequence of their single-minded assimilation and deliberate distancing from the Jewish milieu. They sense that their dialogue with America has caused a significant loss within their Selfs, and are caught yearning for the something they had earlier chosen to sacrifice in the process of acquiring an American consciousness. Their new vision is at best a murky one, with their present stranded somewhere between the past and future as they try to find a balance they may live by as Jews and Americans. They carry on with the present, but in varying degrees of regret and frustration, still somewhat bewildered at how it has all turned out in the land of possibilities. This chapter considers the unique choices they make as individuals at this particular point of their dialogue with America, the consequences of those choices, and the ultimate unalterability of their Selfs at the same time they do inevitably change as a result of that dialogue.

As established in the first chapter, the Self, a sovereign being whose separateness is absolute, changes as it encounters an Other, but remains essentially motivated by what has always made it uniquely itself. So, while it grows in experience and becomes newly

formulated by each new encounter, it does not shed, or does not shed completely, its older orientations. Instead, because the Self sojourns within its memory, it travels back and forth from past and present as well as future, which it also attempts to accommodate in trying to define itself and live by this ever-refined identity. The Self's point of view, we remember from our discussion of Bakhtin's theses in Chapter One, is monological, and therefore the Self needs the different perspectives of past, present and future alliances and experiences to arrive at meaning of its own self. The synthesis of these times and spaces, or failure of which, marks the Self's response at any one time of its be-ing. For Cahan's greenhorn, who is ever conscious of the pressing need to create a new identity, past, present and future all seem to converge climactically, and the Self is left somewhat reeling from the impact, so that, as we have seen Irving Howe suggest, the Self loses an elemental part of its being as a result of this trauma.

The trauma of physical and psychical dislocation forces Cahan's immigrant to dwell in the shadowy realm of doubt, guilt and yearning, suspended between moving forward and looking backward, not fully certain of his identity. When he does come by an identity as an American, he is still uncertain as to the full meaning of his Self, for he had earlier cast off a significant definition of himself, as a Jew. Cahan's Jewish Americans, then, proceed in their dialogue with America aware of a void within their Selfs. Rouvke, Asriel and Zalkin suffer from an inner vacuum because they have not allowed synthesis of their Jewishness and Americanness, forcefully keeping asunder both these strands of their Selfs, so that, lacking a truly integrated Self, they seem to be governed by American heads and Jewish hearts. While Rouvke is seen fully engrossed in this endeavour and only approaching the crisis of Self, Asriel and Zalkin are clearly at that moment of crisis, and aware of the void in their Selfs. Both Asriel and Zalkin look for

new understanding of their dialogue with America by reconsidering their older orientation as Jews. Their dialogue of becoming American, it would appear, returns them to their Jewish past and heritage; they, especially Zalkin, realise that they can no longer ignore and neglect their Jewishness, which remains a fundamental aspect of their Selfs. They revisit their earliest memories, hoping to reconcile their Jewish past with their American present, and so, create a more endurable future as Jewish Americans.

"A Providential Match," Cahan's first published story in English, was originally named "Mottke Arbel and His Romance" in its 1891 Yiddish version. "Mottke Arbel" was Cahan's first work of fiction. Cahan seems to be at his ironic best in "A Providential Match." Although his treatment of Rouvke Arbel is comic and satiric, and he rarely takes his 'hero' seriously, Cahan is sensitive to Rouvke's plight. As much as Rouvke proves to be a typical ***schlemiel***, the insight into his character and condition which Cahan offers us, though deliberately shallow, casts Rouvke in quite a sympathetic light. In this sense, Cahan succeeds well in creating narrative tension between ridicule and sympathy for Rouvke.

The story, which Jules Chametzky praises in From the Ghetto for showing "real talent," (48) is about the shrewd and ambitious but foolish Rouvke, who four years after his move to America, seems to have achieved a quick, smooth transition from "greener" to American. Anxious to re-write his history, he snipps off the ***peieths*** (sidelocks) dangling over his ears and modifies his whole appearance, and more significantly, changes his name to indicate renascence in his new homeland. He becomes Robert Friedman, prefering Robert to Reuben "on the ground that the former appellation seemed to have less of Kropovetz [his old hometown in the Pale] and more of a 'tzibilized' sound to it," (165) betraying an underlying snobbery and pretensions to a finer

sensibility than he actually possesses. 'Friedman,' refers to his new status as a freed man in the land of freedom.

Early in the story then, Cahan indicates the great irony of Rouvke's situation. Cahan, in pointing out Rouvke's mispronunciation of 'civilised,' mocks at the pretentious young man for his exaggerated self-importance, and notes that Rouvke, trapped within his own vanity, is hardly at all a freed man. In casting off his name for a more "tzibilized" one, Rouvke puts on instead class snobbery, ironically missing the point of freedom in America. Being an American is to Rouvke merely the acquiring of money and ostentatious manners. When Reb Feive comes to visit him one Saturday for instance, Rouvke welcomes the old ***melamed*** (teacher of elementry Jewish subjects) and ***shadchen*** (matchmaker), but is inwardly annoyed that the old man, in Old World warmth and familiarity, had simply barged into his room without knocking. Reb Feive apologises for his "greenhorn" manners, and Rouvke pardons him verbally, but in his typically cowardly and hypocritical way, thinks to himself: "'How dare these beggarly greenhorns beset me in this manner?' ... 'Indeed, what business have they to come to America at all?'" (174). Rouvke chooses to forget that he was once a greenhorn, and assumes the airs of someone purportedly from a higher social class, not realising that it is those very airs that undermine the growth of freedom and equality in America. Ironically, these are the two ideals most important to the Jew, the Jewish immigrant's flight to America being propelled not only by economic reasons but also by the hope of social emancipation in the New World.

After a hard, determined climb up the social ladder from peddler to custom peddler, Rouvke is deemed successful enough to woo Hanele, the "pet daughter" of his former master, the much-respected Reb Peretz, the Kropovetz distiller who is also "the first citizen of Kropovetz" (166). Becoming an American, Rouvke

gleefully finds, overturns the old social order and gives him instant social leverage. When Reb Peretz finally agrees to the match, Rouvke is overjoyed at the social ***coup*** he has pulled off, and, although pained by Reb Peretz's "remote allusions to money which Hanele would want for her dresses and to pay her way," (183) Rouvke agrees to bear all expenses. In a Chekovian twist of events, however, Hanele arrives safely but only to anounce to the shocked Roukve that she has met her true 'predestined one,' a ***Gospodin*** (Mister) Levinsky, on board the ship; it is Levinsky she must marry, and not Rouvke, as Levinsky is her "Providential match" (186). Rouvke is left pathetically crying out for a refund of the money he has spent on Hanele and for a "politzman," (186) but it is Rouvke who is threatened by a hotel courier to leave Hanele and her ***choson*** (bethrothed) alone. The courier escorts the young couple away, and Rouvke can only "[stare] as if he were at a loss to realise the situation," (186) while the young men who have accompanied him to the immigrant landing station to welcome Hanele "[whisper] jokes" (186) at his expense, and Reb Feive, the old matchmaker who had arranged the match, laments the disaster: "Ai! ai! ai!" (186).

Cahan's opening of this story matches that of any accomplished writer; he captures reader interest immediately and skilfully in the conversational style of the folk writer:

> He is still known among his townspeople as Rouvke Arbel. Rouvke they call him, because this name, in its more respectful form of Rouven, was bestowed upon him on the eighth day of his life, at the ceremony which initiated him into Israel (162).

Introduced in this way, Rouvke appears to us as a type of mythic figure with a significant past behind him recorded from the moment of his birth. His 'mythic stature' however is quickly diminished as Cahan dexterously cuts him down to size immediately after this introduction:

> As to the nickname of Arbel, which is Yiddish for "sleeve," he is indebted for it to the apparently never-to-be-forgotten fact that before he came to America, and when he still drove horses and did all sorts of work for Peretz the distiller, he was in the habit of assigning to the sleeves of his sheep-skin coat such duties as generally devolve upon a pocket-handkerchief (162).

As it turns out, Rouvke, far from being a folk hero, is best known as the factotum of the "first citizen of Kropovetz" and for his rather unpolished manners.

Cahan's satiric introduction of Rouvke not only paints the young man in broad, comic strokes, it, more importantly, creates a sense of ambiguity about Rouvke's identity, as if to suggest that Rouvke lacks a truly coherent Self. Cahan explores this in greater detail in his examination of Rouvke's change in America. He suggests that Rouvke's transformation in America is only a superficial one; his account of Rouvke's metamorphosis, for instance, records a smooth and too-rapid transition from simple rustic to refined 'gentleman' in just four years. While Rouvke's appearance and manners may have evolved dramatically into a more sophisticated front, he seems in essence the same clumsy ***schlemiel*** he was in Kropovetz. He retains the total expression of his being, having only exchanged certain peculiarities for others, for example, the flannel muffler that had identified him in the Old World for a gay necktie in the new (164). Rouvke has not achieved genuine

synthesis in his encounter with America; he has not been able to reconcile his Jewishness with his Americanness. His choice is to discard his Jewishness in favour of an American sensibility and lifestyle. Such a transformation is of course superficial as it does not seek to understand the spirit and idea of America. Rouvke ignores his spiritual development and choosesd instead to concentrate on his material development only, and this jeopardises the possibility of his achieving inner peace. There appears to be a clear split between his Jewish heart and the American ego he anxiously acquires. Cahan's description of the new Rouvke focuses on this split; it highlights the change in Rouvke's exterior, while noting that the young man's face is "precisely the same," indicating that Rouvke remains unchanged within:

> That was only about four years ago; and yet Rouvke is now quite a different young man in quite a different coat and with a handkerchief in its side pocket. The face is precisely the same: the same everlasting frown, the same pockmarks, hollow yet ruddy cheeks, snub nose and little gray eyes, at once timid and sly. But for all that, such is the dissimilarity between the Rouvke of four years ago and the Rouvke of today that recently, when his mother, who still peddles boiled potatoes in Kropovetz, Government of Kovno, had been surprised by a photograph of her son, her first impulse was to spit at the portrait and to repudiate it as the ungodly likeness of some unknown Gentile (162).

Cahan, in mocking tone, plays on the word "different," subtly changing its meaning so that Rouvke, despite the new set of manners he parades himself in now, appears to us ironically and emphatically unchanged. Cahan goes on to parody Rouvke's

acquired gentility in America, ridiculing the veneer of respectability that Rouvke clutches on to as evidence of his successful evolution:

> Rouvke's hair is now entirely free from the pair of sidelocks, or peiths, which dangled over his ears when he first set foot on American soil; it is parted in the middle and combed on either side in the shape of a curled ostrich feather. He wears a collar; and this collar is so high and so much below the size of his neck that it gives you the uncomfortable idea of its owner having swallowed the handle of the whip with which he used to rule over Peretz the distiller's mare. The flannel muffler, which seemed never to part company with him while he lived in Kropovetz, has been supplanted by a gay necktie, and the sheepskin by a diagonal "cutaway" (164).

Clearly, Cahan suggests despite his conscious change in America, Rouvke retains the essential expression of his Self that sets him apart as a unique being. Outwardly at least Rouvke changes so greatly that his own mother cannot recognise him, and rejects him totally. It is a symbolic moment as Rouvke is now left without a 'creator,' and so, is free to carry on his re-creation of himself in the New World, just as Michalina the apostate of Chego-Chegg is free to do in America after her father disowns her. The two characters are thus symbolically re-born in America. There is a huge difference, however, in the choices the two individuals make in America. Cahan illustrates the uniqueness of the Self by pointing to the different choices of two Selfs caught in a similar situation. Because both Michalina and Rouvke are governed by their individual "buiding blocks" of personality, both respond differently to the same dialogue of becoming American. While Michalina stumbles forward in humility and honest ignorance, guided only by

her independence and courage to realise her full Self, Rouvke is foolish and wilfully blinds himself to truth. While Michalina finds her Self in America, Rouvke seems to lose his, as he continually chooses the corrupting influence of wealth and false self-importance. When Michalina sheds her fears to stand up for Reb Nehemiah when he is attacked by a group of young loafers on the Sabbath, for instance, she acts out of compassion, just as she does later when she chooses to stay with her lost and lonely husband. Rouvke, however, in his dialogue with America seems to lose whatever compassion he may have possessed; when he learns of Reb Peretz's decline, for instance, his sympathy for his former master quickly dissipates into triumph:

> Rouvke was moved with profound pity for his old employer, who had been kind to him, and to whom he had been devoted. But this feeling of commisseration was instantly succeeded by a vague sense of ttriumph. 'What have I lived to see!' Rouvke seemed to exclaim. 'I am now richer than Reb Peretz, as sure as I am a Jew!' And at this he became aware of the bankbook in his breast pocket (171-2).

Seen in the light of his moral decline, Rouvke's mother's denial of her son, recalls Frankentein's rejection of his monster, and once again throws Rouvke's fluid transformation into serious doubt.

Freed from all attachments to the Old World, Rouvke single-mindedly pursues wealth and power in America. His new motivation is the only enterprise that offers him any meaning in America, so that, when he tries to re-create his Self in America, the endeavour results in such pathetic confusion. Although Rouvke wants desperately to accumulate wealth in America, for instance, he finds it extremely difficult to spend money when he finally makes

some because he chooses to place importance on the amount of money he possesses rather than on gaining a better quality of life. He stinges to the extent that he can so proudly wear an oversized cutaway actually tailored for a bartender who was late in payment. It is no wonder that he is not taken seriously, as he presents himself as a misshapen oddity, a grossly unfinished product whom members of his ***landsleit*** refer to not as Robert Friedman "as his business card reads," but as "'Rouvke Arbel-what do you think of that slouch!'" (165). Rouvke's transformation, far from turning him into a sophisticated businessman as he desires seems only to have mutated him into a grotesque specimen. Physically, Rouvke seems a study in contrariety, as evidenced by his hodge-podge appearance. Morally and emotionally, he seems to lack depth, for he has yet to achieve synthesis between his Jewish heart and his American heart. By emphasising this fragmentedness of Rouvke's Self, Cahan once again demonstrates that Rouvke remains essentially Jewish despite his change in America.

Having chosen material gain and social eminence as his goals, Rouvke quickly distinguishes himself as one of "the most diligent and most successful of ... students" in the Jewish American "school of peddling," showing "no mind for anything else in the world" (166). Rouvke's tenacity, however, though admirable to a point, hints of something fundamentally insidious and unpleasant. He seems to be one thing, but turns out to be something else. He supplants his own bold actions by his cowardly and deceitful method, for instance, in getting back the cutaway from the bartender. He tricks the man into giving up the cutaway, promising him a better replacement, but has no intention of keeping his promise. Rouvke has every right to repossess the garment, the bartender being at fault, but cowardly, chooses to dupe his customer rather than confront him. In this way, Rouvke's purposefulness is blunted by the suggestion that his actions are

prompted by chance and conniving rather than personal conviction. When he finally gives in to Reb Feive's suggestion that he marry Hanele, for instance, it is because of the "powerful element" (179) of being thought by others to be inferior in every way for Hanele. The photograph of himself which he finally sends to his old mother is taken not for the sake of his mother, but because the photographer, who owes him money, is not eager to settle the debt, and so, Rouvke settles for a barter trade. Even his desire to marry Hanele is clouded by the thought of the huge sum he will have to spend on her and the wedding, and the grand dowry he might get if he married instead "the daughter of some Division Street merchant" (176).

Rouvke's attempts at charity are governed by the same strict spirit with which he pushes himself up the social rungs; he will only give exactly what is required. When he "[conceives] the vague idea" of sending Reb Peretz fifty dollars, "the generous plan" is quickly "lost in a labyrinth of figures, accounts of his customers, and reflections upon his prospective store," and his "dollar-ridden brain" finally decides against the gift (173). Religion, like the miss-matched clothes he wears, is just an outer garb that may seem to define him, but expresses only a garbled message of who he finally is, because he chooses to compromise on that religion. The rituals of his 'new religion' bind phylacteries and commerce together; a compulsory rite for him in the New World is, for example, the banking transaction on the Sabbath, although Jews are forbidden the handling of money on this holy day. To Rouvke, however, "bishness is bishness" (164), and he will not compromise on his finances in any way. "Otherwise," Cahan sarcastically states, pointing again ironically to Rouvke's 'honest' double dealings:

> he is quite a fine fellow. His bills he pays promptly. On the Day of Atonement he subscribes a dollar or two to the funds

> of the synagogue ... and has been known to start a newly arrived townsman in business by standing his security ... to the amount of two dollars and a half. Nevertheless he visits the Bowery Savings Bank on Saturdays with the same punctuality with which he puts on his phylacteries and prays in his room every morning on weekdays ... (164).

In his loose cutaway and gaudy tie, Rouvke seems more of a clown than an American gentleman, but Rouvke is in effect still in the traumatic process of formulating a response to America. Cahan shows him very slowly coming by a consciousness of who he is as he dialogues with America, through his own eyes as well as through others':

> He gradually became a new sort of Rouvke. Formerly when he was subjected to the tortures of an introduction to a "young ladda," the ordeal could result in a mere blush, accompanied by one or two minutes' violent throbbing. Whereas now, every time a similar accident befell him, he would, after the calamity was over, hasten to find himself in front of a looking glass, and fall to inspecting his glaring necktie and more particularly the pockmarks on his nose (168).

Despite his growing self-consciousness, Rouvke's effort to know himself does not go beyond the superficial, mirror-image of himself. It is still his external self only that he sees clearly and chooses to change, as seen when he fantasises about the impression he would make as as American gentleman were he to visit Kropovetz:

> What a glorious time it would be to let them see his stylish American dress, his businesslike manners and general air of prosperity and "echucation!" (173).

Unfortunately for Rouvke, the image he beholds in the mirror does not reveal his distorted moral self to him. It makes no difference if Rouvke thinks of hmself as Robert Friedman, as he remains only a "new sort of Rouvke." Interestingly, Cahan refers to Rouvke throughout the story not as "Robert" but as "Rouvke," clearly underlining that Rouvke has only changed externally. While his encounter with America certainly does change him, Rouvke's choice to pursue material wealth produces only a superficial change, and he remains ambiguously both a success and a failure at the same time.

The story ends on the pathetic note of Rouvke and Reb Feive's cries of despair. Rouvke finally loses not only Hanele, but the money he spent on her. He is at first stunned by the outcome, and when he finds his voice, he can only wail: "'I want my hundred and fifty dollars back!' And then in English: 'I call a politzman. I vant my hoondered an' fifty dollar!'" (186). Although he is an exemplary disciple of the commercial gods of America, Rouvke finds that they are finally false gods. He appeals for justice, calling out for a "politzman," in English but is himself threatened rather than protected. He learns that in America, it is indeed the fittest who survive, and these may not always be those who go by the book; his loss is the immigrant hotel's gain, his pain his friends' entertainment. The best he can do is take stock of his loss and move on. As a business enterprise, the bid to win Hanele has proven to be a heavy loss.

Although Cahan's treatment of Rouvke is comic, the ending leaves us feeling sorry for the young enterpreneur. He has afterall, played the commercial game according to the rules: follow "the

regular peddler course" (167), work hard and tough, and sacrifice present pleasure for future stability. In his confused, bumbling way, Rouvke slowly climbs the social rungs, patiently taking all the knocks and disappointments along the way. Cahan informs us:

> "The curriculum of ... ['the school of peddling'] includes the occasional experience of being sent head foremost down all the 'stairses,' of then picking oneself up and imperturbably knocking at the same door on the ground floor, only to come face to face with the janitor and thus get into fresh trouble, and so on" (167).

It seems a ghastly tableau of life itself, a little like the interminable wait for Godot that seems only to begin afresh more acutely each time it appears to end. Chametzky in From the Ghetto notes that Cahan's ending records a "real sense of [Rouvke's] loss" which Rouvke is unable to express, firstly, because of the shock of the incident and, secondly, because he is forced to communicate in a language essentially foreign to him, English. Although Rouvke's first concern seems to be for his money, Chametzky adds, this is clearly a "displacement" of his true anguish at having lost Hanele and being humiliated in public, and certainly "not the real or central loss" he feels (51).

In Rouvke, Cahan demonstrates the sovereignty of the Self as well as the essential unalterability of the "fundamental building block" that governs each Self and sets it apart as unique. Rouvke is essentially Jewish at heart; however much he tries to alter his appearance and mimic 'American' dressing and manners so that even his mother cannot recognise him, Rouvke remains intrinsically himself; even people who used to know him in Kropovetz treat him with the same derision as always, although they may now do so behind his back "out of sheer envy" for his money (165). Rouvke

finds he cannot simply erase his Jewish past, or overwrite his personality with American ways and manners as Jewishness is an elemental part of his Self. Indeed, he decides to marry Hanele from his old village not only because he is still in love with her, and is afraid of Jewish American girls, whose modern outlook and vocal independence intimidate him, but mainly because a huge part of himself still receives its impulse from his old Jewish way of life. Pondering on how much he would rather marry Hanele than an American-born or "nearly American-born" Jewish girl, Rouvke debates with himself:

> What are they good for anyway? They look more Christian than Jewish, and are only great hands at squandering their husbands' money on candy, dresses, and theatres. A woman like that would domineer over him, treat him haughtily, and generally make life a burden to him. Hanele, dear Hanele, on the other hand, is a true daughter of Isarel. She would make a good housekeeper; would occasionally also mind the store; would accompany him to synagogue every Saturday; and this is just what a man like him wants in a wife (177).

What is obviously more important to Rouvke is that

> An English-speaking Mrs. Friedman he would have to call "darling," a word barren of any charm or meaning for his heart, whereas Hanele he would addresss in the melodious terms of "***Kreinele meine! Gold Meine***!" [My little crown! My gold!]. Ah, the very music of these sounds would make him cry with happiness! (177).

Cahan clearly shows how Rouvke comes to life at the very thought of his Yiddish roots. Hanele is probably more precious to Rouvke

To a large extent, it appears that the sum of Asriel's dialogue with America is his striving to become an American. So great has been the energy invested into this striving that Asriel is unable to ***be*** apart from it. Once the need for striving is removed, his Self seems to collapse back into an earlier expression of being, one that, as in Rouvke's case, has left a deeper and more enduring imprint. The Self, as discussed elsewhere, re-formulates itself as it encounters an Other, but retains the essential slant in its consciousness that allows it to stand apart as a unique and separate entity. It is that individual slant that decides the degree of change or non-change in each encounter with an Other. While Rouvke changes only superficially so that he is American only in dressing, manners and behaviour, Asriel has become the embodiment of American success. In attempting to change back into an Old World Jew, therefore, Asriel's effort seems superficial. At the same time, Asriel, like Rouvke and Zalkin, remains very much a Jew at heart, as seen in his calculated effort to regain something of that lost world. In Asriel, then, we see how the Self remains inimitably itself despite the changes it inevitably undergoes in its encounter with America. While both Rouvke and Asriel have obviously made the same choice to conquer wealth and power in America, the consequences of their choice differ for each man as both are unique individuals managed by Selfs that are driven by separate and sovereign wills and desires.

Cahan investigates an interesting development in Asriel's dialogue with America, where the Self, in moving forward actually retreats backward in its dialogue with the Other. Asriel's encounter with America finally takes him back, not to where he started, but further, to a time and space beyond his own memory, originating in the history of his people. In acquiring an American consciousness, Asriel does not relinquish his earlier experiences; these, including those that make up his ethnic awareness, are, in fact, his guides in

determining his subsequent actions. Finding his present, and therefore his past, which led him to the present, both reduced to meaninglessness, he believes he can continue the realisation of his Self only within the collective memory of the Jewish past, and therefore, seeks removal to Israel itself.

Asriel's resolve to go to Israel seems a retrogressive step because his flight appears to be a form of escapism from the present rather than the outcome of a well thought out decision. Like much of his response to life, this resolution too is impulsive and a spontaneous, emotional reaction to immediate disappointment. It is unlikely that Asriel will find Self-fulfilment in the Holy Land as, to a large degree, Asriel is as yet uncertain of his own identity, and this is likely to keep him discontented even in Israel. His choice then is really Self-exile; so that rather than releasing his Self to ***be***, he would only be locking it away in the Holy Land. He would merely subject himself to the irony of being in ***galut*** (exile) in Israel. Although to Asriel, whose name, incidentally, is an obvious anagram of 'Israel,' Israel may seem the fulfilment of Jewish identity, he is still very much entangled with America, as it is only now that he has chosen to explore his Jewishness within the American context. It is indeed difficult to believe that Asriel will finally be able to disengage himself from his dialogue with America, for in re-examining his Jewishness, Asriel merely continues the same dialogue of becoming but in a different tone.

Despite his shuffling backwards to re-embrace Orthoxody, Asriel still perceives himself as a business entrepreneur. He has learnt well the value of money and the power it brings to its owner, and still thinks in commercial terms even after re-dedicating himself as a pious Jew. Indeed, the American god, the dollar, is never quite out of his mind. For instance, when he returns from the synagogue on the Day of Atonement, exhausted after having fasted all day, and Flora tries to dissuade him from going to Pravly because he may be

arrested by the Russian police, Asriel scorns her fears with the classic reply: "The kernel of a hollow nut! Show a ***treif*** gendarme a ***kosher*** coin, and he will be shivering with ague. Long live the American dollar!" (97). The 'lull' in his dialogue with America is merely a plateau necessary for the Self to evaluate its journey up to that point before it can re-align itself with its present, and decide on a future course. Asriel however does not allow himself this 'respite,' but settling on his disappointment in America, hastily and impulsively decides to abandon the country for another. He mistakenly believes that a geographical change alone will heal him.

Asriel's quandary has little to do with religion or Judaism, as his piety originates from his sudden fear of death rather than from any profound revelation from heaven. For long, Asriel, Cahan writes, "had never been seen at the synagogue on week-days," attending only the mandatory Sabbath services. Even then, "enveloped in his praying-shawl," Asriel "would pass the time drowsing serenely and nodding unconscious approval of the cantor's florid improvisations, or struggling to keep flour out of his mind, where it clung as pertinaciously as it did to his long Sabbath coat" (98). Religion is obviously just another ritual of life for Asriel, and as such, it is natural for him to weave it into the fabric of the most important influence of his life, his business. Just as Asriel's Sabbath coat bears the mark of his trade, his mind seems tainted with the mark of commercialism. It is his commercial success that seems to finally define and give meaning to his Self.

It is only after the "fiery exhortation" of a preacher newly arrived from the Old World that Asriel is jolted into considering his mortality. Cahan in a typical dig at religion hints that the "preacher" himself is zealous only because he is "newly landed," (98) and will probably end up like the other preachers who patch up their sermons with "florid improvisations." As a result of that sermon, the Asriel, giving in to guilt, completely recants his identity as a

modern Jew in America, and grows "a pair of bushy sidelocks, [and] ceased trimming his twin goatees" (98), reversing his actions thirty-five years ago when he landed in New York as a greenhorn. At the same time, he cannot fully transcend his worldly attachments, as Cahan is quick to observe with irony: "with his heart divided between yearning after the business he had sold and worrying over his sins, [Asriel] spent a considerable part of his unlimited leisure reading psalms" (98). As a direct consequence of his anxiety that while "his valuable papers lay secure between the fireproof walls of his iron safe," his soul is "utterly exposed to the flames of Sheol [hell]" (98), Asriel in fact becomes more pious than he even was in the Old World. As "Asrielke Thirteen Hairs," he was known in Pravly as "a daredevil of a loafer," (102) and recalls how his father had "once chased him for bathing during the Nine Days" (101). In fact, he had had to give up religious study early, to work with his father (99). His current piety in the New World, then, is not the expression of what he used to be, but of what he believes should be the image of a pious Jew. For such an image, he refers to his vague recollections of his father and how the old man used to pray. Indeed, Asriel appropriates his father's attitude and manner in prayer, making his reconciliation with Orthodoxy seem the influence of sentimentality and homesickness rather than of real piety:

> What a delight it was to wind off chapter after chapter [of the psalms]! And how smoothly it came off now, in his father's (peace upon him!) singsong, of which he had not even thought for more than thirty years, but which suddenly came pouring out of his throat, together with the first verse he chanted! (99).

When Asriel comes home from the synagogue and prepares to break his fast, he has to first check with his housekeeper, the devout Tamara (95) on the correct `procedure' involved. Asriel's attitude towards Orthodoxy is guided by his awareness of its being a religion; as an observer of this religion, he is scrupulously conscious of the role he must play, and insists on observing the Law to the letter. Before performing his ablutions, for instance, his "gnarled face [takes] on an air of piety," (95) suggesting that his piety comes not naturally from within, but results from a prescribed ritual which he has programmed himself to obey. His awareness of God is restricted to the idea of punishment and servitude. When he recalls his "sins" for instance, he realises that "it is not so easy to settle" with God, and that one "can never be through serving the Uppermost" (95), portraying God as a businessman and a tough taskmaster.

Asriel's religion appears a grim affair; the only joy he seems to derive from religion is a sentimental one that has much to do with his memories of his childhood and his old village, Pravly. It is not the meaning of the psalms that delights him but the sound of the Hebrew words as they "wind off chapter after chapter," flowing "smoothly" off his tongue. Cahan informs us:

> Not that Ariel Stroon could have told you the meaning of what he was so zestfully intoning, for in his boyhood he had scarcely gone through the Pentateuch when he was set to work by his father's side, at flax heckling. But then the very sounds of the words and the hereditary intonation, added to the consciousness that it was psalms that he was reciting, `made every line melt like sugar in his mouth,' as he once described it to the devout housekeeper (99).

Even the simile Asriel uses here, unlike his usual quaint, original figures of speech ("The hollow kernel of a nut!"), is secondhand, borrowed from Ezekiel's description of the Word of God,[3] making it therefore the 'authorised' description he should use. Cahan adds: "[Asriel] grew more pious and exalted every day, and by degrees fell prey to a feeling to which he had been a stranger for more than three decades, " but finally, and quite simply put, "Asriel Stroon grew homesick" (99).

Asriel's anxiety to be an Orthodox Jew has also much to do with his tendency towards extreme responses; it is as if he believes that only excess will purge all trace of previous neglect. When it comes to giving charity, for instance, Asriel is overly generous. He makes lavish donations to the synagogue in Pravly, and to Reb Lippe, spares no money in educating Shaya, and takes back to America many expensive Hebrew books, "portly and resplendent in a superabundance of gilding and varnish" as "accessories" for Shaya (125). He 'wins' Shaya, the religious prodigy, by pledging a higher dowry than can Reb Lippe, the rival contender for whose daughter Shaya was originally intended until Asriel and his American dollars made their appearance in Pravly. Asriel's behaviour is the reverse of Rouvke Arbel's; whereas Rouvke is miserly and counts his pennies even when he gives alms, Asriel splashes abundantly. However, it would appear that Asriel's generosity is directly linked to his guilt at having neglected his spiritual growth for so long. Unfortunately, Asriel, who believes in the power and strength of the American dollar, fails to see that money cannot buy peace of mind. When he discovers Flora and Shaya's deceit, Asriel again resorts to the extreme in abjuring

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[3] "Then he said to me, 'Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.' So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth" (Eze. 3:3).

America, and embracing Israel instead as the perfection of Orthodoxy. With this proclivity for the extreme it is no wonder then that Asriel chooses Orthodoxy rather than a more liberal form of Judaism as his ideal in America.

Dynamic and energetic, Asriel is certainly a man of action. Obviously a shrewd and intelligent businessman, his impulsiveness however interferes with his be-ing, as he rushes forward without giving sufficient thought to his decisions. While whatever spiritual malaise he may be suffering from may be a genuine cause for worry, he fails to see that his present obsession with religion is due mainly to his troubling sense of displacement and disorientation produced by his retirement. Predictably, Asriel, for so long a busy, hardworking entrepreneur, succumbs to bouts of loneliness and homesickness, and then, in anxiety and confusion, retreats into a religious life to counter them. The truth, very simply, is as Cahan recounts:

> When Asriel Stroon had retired from business, he suddenly grew fearful of death. Previously he had had no time for that. What with his flour store, two bakeries, and some real estate, he had been too busy to live, much less to think of death (98).

Cahan's wry humour and straightforward language clearly register the dubious motives for Asriel's reformation. At the apex of his success in America, Asriel is neatly quantified by his material acquisitions and property rather than an indication of who he is. In fact, he is a man who has whizzed past life itself, neglecting to ***be***.

Asriel finds at this juncture in his dialogue of becoming American that he has failed to achieve genuine synthesis between his Jewishness and his Americanness. He has not allowed both these strands of his Self to merge as one. Having achieved Americanness

as he had desired, Asriel relaxes in his headlong pursuit, and discovers not wholeness or harmony as he had expected, but a void within his Self. He realises that in order to fill it, he must retrace his steps into his Jewish past and heritage since these form a fundamental aspect of his Self. By this we see clearly the essential unalterability of the individual Self: deep inside, Asriel remains irreversibly a Jew. At the same time, we also note how Asriel has inevitably changed in becoming an American. This becomes apparent when he visits Pravly.

Asriel's return to Pravly is a sentimental, romantic, exercise, and again, we see him respond in extremes. Cahan's long description of Asriel's immediate response to Pravly on his return (99-105) reveals Asriel indulging in nostalgia and reminiscences. He tries hard to reclaim his old alliance with the people and the place, even exaggerating his feelings at times, but fails, as much, himself included, has changed. He remembers his childhood friends and some of the citizens of Pravly, but few of them remember him. His friend Shmulke, for instance, is embarrassed when Asriel exuberantly attempts to strike a chord from the past (104).

The countryside too seems a new experience; he only vaguely recognises it. Though he appreciates its beauty and freshness, he remains essentially detached from it. He does not even remember the Yiddish names of the local flowers he sees growing in abundance, and has to settle for the general term, ***tzatzkes*** (100). In fact, rather than affirm his identity as an Orthodox Jew or a citizen of the Old World, the Pravly countryside reduces him to a state of psychological and emotional confusion:

> Echoes of many, many years ago called to Asriel from amid the whispering host [of flowers]. His soul burst into song. He felt like shutting his eyes and trusting himself to the caressing breath of the air, that it might waft him

> whithersoever it chose. His senses were in confusion: he beheld a sea of fragrance; he inhaled heavenly music; he listened to a symphony of hues (100).

Instead of reassuring him of meaning by taking him back to his initial be-ing, Pravly revisited only accentuates Asriel's anxiety over his mortality and his identity:

> At one moment he felt as though he had strayed into the other world; at another he was seized with doubt as to his own identity. "Who are you?" he almost asked himself, closing and reopening his hand experimentally. "Who or what is that business that you call life? Are you alive, Asriel?" (101).

Indeed, as if returned to infantile state, Asriel glances about him with a "wistful babyish look," (100) and becomes ambiguous over his identity: "... Stroon feels like Asrielke Thirteen Hairs, as his nickname had been here. Then he relapses into the Mott Street landlord, and for a moment, he is an utter stranger in his birthplace" (103).

When Asriel attempts to capture the rustic scene for himself, he can only come up with exaggerations: "He felt as if there were no such flowers in America, and that he had not seen any since he had left his native place," and trite, flat metaphors: "The whole scene appealed to his soul as a nodding, murmuring congregation engrossed in the solemnity of worship" (100). Asriel's response is partly pre-meditated even: "During his first years in America, at times when he would surrender himself to the sweet pangs of homesickness ... his mind would conjure up something like the effect now before his eyes" (100-1). The whole experience seems, even to Asriel, unreal: "everything was the same as he had

left it; and yet it all had an odd, mysterious, far-away air-like things seen in a cyclorama" (103). Cahan's reversal to the present tense partway through the narrative not only illustrates this cinematic effect, it suggests an unreal quality about the experience, and this sense of being in an illusion further distances Asriel from his birthplace.

After such a heightened response to Pravly, it is surely a total letdown when Asriel soon feels disillusioned with Pravly. After his distressing experience at the local synagogue, he feels the romance and sentimentality of his nostalgic reunion with the old place quickly replaced by a more realistic view:

> It was as if, while he was praying and battling, the little town had undergone a trivializing process. All the poetry of thirty-five years' separation had fled from it, leaving a heap of beggarly squalor. He felt as though he had never been away from the place, and was tired to death of it, and the same time, his heart was contracted with homesickness for America (111).

Now it appears it is America that Asriel pines for. As much as Pravly affirms his Jewishness, Asriel discovers that he has given up so much of the Old World in becoming an American that he cannot now take it all back. He remains essentially Jewish, but he is also an American now. Cahan illustrates through this the inevitability of change in dialogue between the Self and Other. The Jewish Self in its encounter with America adopts something of the American experience into its consciousness, and becomes changed by this. All its future experiences are conditioned by this new consciousness. In this way, Asriel as Jew and American deals with the world through his dual vision.

Asriel's visit to the cemetery is another self-indulgent moment. Cahan states that Asriel goes to "pay his respects and tears" (117) to the dead in his family, and points out Asriel's ambiguous motives for the visit through this ironic expression. Although he genuinely feels the pathos of such a moment, Asriel's excessive tears and lamentations seem due more to sentimental hysteria than to actual felt emotion. They jar against the "inarticulate tragedy" (115) of the cemetery. He seems more aware of his own imminent death. Though he sincerely misses his father, we remember that in thirty-five years, this is only his first visit back when he could surely have afforded to travel back to Pravly before.

In the same way that Asriel is rather selfish in his new attitude towards Orthodoxy, as it is fear and guilt that drive him rather than the purity of the teachings of Orthodoxy, Asriel is selfish in his dealings with Flora and Shaya. His insistence that Flora marry, for instance, a "God-fearing business man," and that "no fellow deep in Gentile lore and shaving his beard need apply" for his daughter's hand (94) is more for his own satisfaction rather than for his daughter's happiness. "'She will have to marry him, and that settles it ... . It's for her good as well as for mine,'" (115) he assures himself. Interestingly, Asriel's behaviour, his tough-mindedness and his 'buying' of Shaya, parallels that of the pious Old World Jew Reb Peretz, Hanele's father, who, in "A Providential Match" continuously sacrifices his daughter's happiness for prospects of a more sizeable dowry (181). The parallel between Asriel and Reb Peretz mocks at Asriel's anxiety to mimic the Old World Jew in his religious devotedness and reduces Asriel's expectation of a 'purer' life in Israel to flimsy hopes, as Reb Peretz's cupidity suggests that it is not geography but integrity of the Self that decides purity of action and thought. Similarly, Asriel views his acquiring of Shaya as a personal triumph. Shaya is an investment for him; by 'possessing' Shaya, the most intelligent

and best Talmudical scholar the Old World can furnish him, Asriel has once again done his extreme best to improve his spiritual standing in his own eyes as well as those of his community. Asriel has also acquired someone to say ***Kaddish*** (prayer for the dead) for him when he dies.

Asriel is so blinded by anxiety that he cannot perceive his selfishness. Too late, he learns that neither he nor his money can control all things. Shaya begins his own dialogue with America quite apart from Asriel, and formulates his own response to his new community. Flora too asserts her independence and breaks away from Asriel's hold. Shaya's transformation from religious prodigy to ***apikoros*** (atheist) is, paradoxically, Asriel's fault. Although Asriel wants to protect the boy from secularism in America, it is Asriel who initiates him in all things American. The first thing he does on his return to New York with Shaya is to have the youth "completely transformed," (120) by buying him new, American clothes:

> Instead of his uncouth cap and the draggling boots which had hidden his top boots from view, he was now arrayed in the costliest 'Prince Albert,' the finest summer derby, and the most elegant button shoes the store had contained. This and a starched shirt-front, a turned-down collar, and a gaudy puff-tie set into higher relief the Byronic effect of his intellectual, winsome face (120).

Asriel is delighted by the change in the boy's appearance: "He thought him easily the handsomest and best-dressed man in Broadway" (120). Asriel exclaims, too dull to note the irony or his blindness, "'It is the Divine Presence shining upon him!'" (120). It is obviously the effect of Asriel's money rather than spiritual illumination that emanates from Shaya. Garbed already in Gentile

clothes not of his choice or liking, it seems impossible that Shaya can totally avoid an encounter with America. As they walk back to Asriel's residence, Shaya looks around him at the marvels of the modern world, which are certain to leave an impression on him because of their strangeness to him. Cahan actually strikes a warning note here to hint that Shaya will not long remain a religious prodigy in America. Cahan's description of Shaya's first response to America shows the boy trying to relate to what he sees by intrepreting it in the only way he knows how, through religious imagery, which reveals his childish and unrealistic view of God and religion:

> Shaya saw in the enchanting effect of sea, verdure, and sky a new version of his visions of paradise, where, ensconced behind luxuriant foliage, the righteous-venerable old men with silver beards-were nodding and swaying over gold-bound tomes of the Talmud. Yet, overborne with its looming grandeur, his heart grew heavy with suspense, and he clung close to Asriel (119).

Shaya has obviously not confronted either God or Judaism for himself, but has merely imbibed what has been told him about them. With such a naive attitude towards life, it is inevitable that Shaya's encounter with America will open him to new horizons. But even Shaya, despite his naivete, has a presentiment that change awaits him in America, and that this change might pose a threat to his theology. Asriel has Shaya introduced to Western learning, but warns the tutor not to "take [Shaya] too far into those Gentile books of yours. He does not want any of the monkey tricks they teach children at college" (134). To the inexperienced and childlike Shaya however, the "novelty of studying things so utterly out of his rut was like a newly discovered delicacy to his mental palate"

(135). His superior memory and intellectual powers drive him on until, with his tutor's secret help, he begins to study Geometry and visit the public library. Cahan's summary is as foreboding as it is sarcastic: "The forbidden fruit was furnished, and the prodigy of sacred lore applied himself to it with voracity" (136).

Much later, when he discovers Shaya's apostasy, Asriel secretly follows the boy and his tutor to a non-***kosher*** restaurant. The dialogue between the betrayed Asriel and the guilty but unrepentant Shais one of Cahan's brilliant strokes in this story. He succeeds in holding both pathos and comic irony:

> Asriel took a vacant chair at the same table.
> "Bless the sitter, Shaya!" he said.
> The two young men were petrified.
> "How is the pork-does it taste well?" Asriel pursued.
> "It is not pork. It is veal cutlet," the teacher found tongue to retort.
> "I am not speaking to you, am I?" Asriel hissed out. Murder was swelling in his heart. But at this point the waiter came up to his side.
> "Vot'll you have?"
> "Notink!" Asriel replied, suddenly rising from his seat and rushing out, as if this were the most terrible sort of violence he could conceive (153).

Asriel is left feeling impotent and helpless; indeed, it seems a cruel joke of fate when the waiter of the non-***kosher*** restaurant so curtly and nonchalantly demands an order from the old man, brushing aside Asriel's carefully cultivated air of Old World piety. It was, however, foolish of Asriel to have thought he could have prevented Shaya from undergoing the same Americanising process that he himself had experienced. Asriel hopes for re-birth through Shaya's

experiences in America; he hopes that he may relive his own life through Shaya's by seeing to it that the boy avoids the `mistake' he had made in discarding Orthodoxy. Asriel plans to re-write his dialogue with America by dictating Shaya's, but he does not realise that both men possess two, distinct, Selfs that may not be tampered with in this way. Although both men choose assimilation, the method and consequences are different for each, as each is uniquely motivated by what makes him a sovereign, independent, being. It is easy for Asriel now to condemn the ***treife*** (unholy) influences of American society, after he has himself sampled it and reaped its benefits. He is also unwise in thinking that Shaya can lead a secondhand life detached from the savourings of his own Self. At the same time, Shaya's apostasy cannot be all Asriel's fault, as Shaya himself chooses to deceive Asriel.

In the light of his deception, Shaya's religious learning seems only skin deep; although he may be able to argue with logic and ingenuity, he seems to lack the spirit of generosity, honesty and noble behaviour that informs and inspires Judaism. He thoughtlessly and cunningly tricks his generous benefactor, while his transformation from Talmidical scholar to atheist is achieved with hardly any misgivings, or battling with himself, so that we wonder at the true significance of the Jewish Scriptures in his life. It would appear that the words of the devout Reb Tzalel when he chastises Asriel for having led Shaya to corruption are true only to an extent:

> "Why should I [shut up]? This is not your house. It is God's dwelling. Here I am richer than you. I only wanted to say that it is not you that I pity. You have been a boor, and that's what you are and will be. But the boy was about to become a great man in Israel, and you have brought him over here for bedeviled America to turn him into an appikoros. Woe! woe! woe." (148).

Having rapidly disposed of this veneer of piety and religious scruples which was not exactly his personal choice but a way of life that was thrust upon him, Shaya is lured on by the excitement and romance of secular intellectualism, and joins an elite and cosmopolitan group of intellectuals. He is so caught up in his own dialogue with America that he finally grows apart even from Flora. However, although Shaya is changed by his dialogue with America, it is clear that he retains his basic, innate Jewishness, which we see surfacing especially in his new-found love for intellectualism. His love and skill for debate, argument and intricate reasoning which he developed as a Talmudical prodigy are obviously what lead him to his new, intellectual friends.

Flora is Cahan's first American-born heroine who possesses wealth, social standing and a certain intellectual cast of mind. Having been born into her class and position, Flora's preoccupations are worlds apart from the humble strivings of the greenhorns, or even of her father, who had begun his dialogue with America as a "greener." Flora's social and psychological refinements however, are conscious acquirements, for she chooses to chase after American standards of behaviour. Flora, despite being born an American, is deeply aware of the 'stigma' of ethnic traits and roots, and tries to wipe it off by consciously cultivating an air of Americanness, which she hopes to underscore with acquired social and intellectual tastes. Later, however, we see her true Self emerge in the sneaky way she cheats her father. The story opens with Flora reading Dickens, (one of Cahan's favourite and, therefore, recommended authors) in the back parlour, "which she had appropriated for a sort of boudoir" (93); Cahan's expression here, "a sort of," suggests Flora's own uncertain fumblings in making herself seem a lady of polished breeding. She is conscious that she is the

> only girl of her circle who would read Dickens, Scott, or Thackeray in addition to the *Family Story Paper* and the *Fireside Companion*, which were the exclusive literary purveyors to her former classmates at the Chrystie Street Grammar School. There were a piano and a neat little library in her room (93).

Although Flora attempts to distance herself from her friends, she retains the essence of her Self, and finds that despite her literary pretensions she still maintains links with more popular, homespun literature such as the *Family Story Paper* and the *Fireside Companion*. Cahan's casual inclusion of the piano and the library at the end of this paragraph seems a jarring addition here; it illustrates as well as captures Flora's ambition and anxiety to appear socially accomplished in every way, possessing all the trappings of social refinement.

As Flora desires to climb to the peak of American cultured society, she plans well, and this includes marrying right:

> Flora was burning to be a doctor's wife. A rising young merchant, a few years in the country, was the staple matrimonial commodity in her set. Most of her married girl friends, American-born themselves, like Flora, had husbands of this class-queer fellows, whose broken English had kept their own sweethearts chuckling. Flora hated the notion of marrying as the other Mott or Bayard Street girls did. She was accustomed to use her surroundings for a background, throwing her own personality into high relief. But apart from this, she craved a more refined atmosphere than her own, and the vague ideal she had was an educated American gentleman, like those who lived uptown. ...

> Flora pictured a clean-shaven, high-hatted, spectacled gentleman jumping out of a buggy, and the image became a fixture in her mind. "I won't marry anybody except a doctor," she would declare, with conscious avoidance of bad grammar, as it behooved a doctor's wife (94).

Her attitude however reveals her underlying crassness. She lacks the fine sensibility of the really cultivated in spirit, so that she places her worth on social ambition rather than on herself. She reduces something so intimate as marriage to just another social achievement, another social norm on which she may compliment herself. The social distance she places between herself and her friends is mere illusion as Cahan indicates; though Flora may in her mind refer snobbishly to her friends as the Mott and Bayard Street girls, Cahan's phrase "the other Mott and Bayard Street girls" reminds us that Flora is one of them. Though she craves for a "more refined atmosphere," and to be seen as an individual, Flora's basic commonness joins her to her friends. She is willing even to deceive her father, whom she attests she loves very much, to grab an opportunity for rapid social mobility. Morally, she certainly seems no different from her friends who marry upwardly-mobile young man in spite of their uncultivated manners but later laugh at their faulty English.

Like her father, Flora too selfishly uses Shaya to achieve her own ends, blind to Shaya's individuality. Just as she consciously directs her Self in everything, scrupulous even to avoid bad grammar as she 'trains' to be a doctor's wife, she attempts to control Shaya's dialogue with America. Asriel and Flora demonstrate how the Self can be focused to such intensity on itself that it does not even apprehend the Other, assuming the Other to be an extension of itself. Like Asriel, Flora too comes to realise that Shaya is ultimately guided by his own unique Self in the choices he

finally makes. Shaya in fact turns out to be quite independent and bold, as we see when he braves the intimidating strangeness of America to visit the public library, which Flora, despite her self-proclaimed independence and apparent love for literature has never done. The story ends with Flora feeling totally alienated from Shaya as she watches him fully engrossed in an intellectual debate, completely sufficient within himself and not needing her:

> A nightmare of desolation and jealousy choked her-jealousy of the Scotchman's book, of the Little-Russian shirt, of the empty tea-glasses with the slices of lemon on their bottoms, of the whole excited crowd, and of Shaya's entire future, from which she seemed excluded" (162).

Ironically, although Flora now finds herself well within the intellectual, literary circle she always sought to ally herself with, she feels displaced and threatened. Because of her inability to be content with her Self but looks for outer embellishments, Flora edges herself to the outside although she begins as the rightful insider.

Like Asriel Stroon, whose basic impulse is unmistakeably Jewish for all his conscious sense of Americanness, Aaron Zalkin in "The Daughter of Reb Avrom Leib" also remains essentially and irrevocably Jewish at heart despite his American ego. In this story, Cahan demonstrates the uniqueness of the Self and the inevitability of change as a result of dialogue although the Self retains the basic differences that set it apart as a unique entity. The story opens on a note of disturbing alienation. The New York ghetto gets ready to welcome the most important day of the week, the Sabbath, traditionally referred to as the 'Bride.' At the time when the Jew, together with his family, customarily lays aside worry, and labours to honour and revere God, Aaron Zalkin, the wealthy manufacturer,

finds himself besieged by "a great feeling of loneliness" (53). Zalkin is deeply aware that while his workers are "enjoying their homes" at that very moment, he is "homeless" (53); while his workers have succeeded in creating a home in the New World, Zalkin, despite his wealth and social position is reduced to the stereotypical image of the exiled and wandering Jew. Driven by loneliness, and hungering for "the Jewish quarter, his old home" in the Lower East Side which he has long outgrown since his emergence as a wealthy manufacturer, he decides to visit it. He goes to the synagogue where the innovative Reb Avrom Leib is cantor, and is immediately enchanted by the cantor's pretty daughter Sophie. He and Sophie soon become engaged much to Reb Avrom's delight, but Sophie's misgivings about marrying Zalkin cause the sensitive businessman to break off the engagement. The two eventually reconcile, but once again the engagement is called off. After Reb Avrom's death the following year, Zalkin finds he cannot be without Sophie, and she, lonely and mourning her father's loss, gladly accepts Zalkin's renewed proposal. The resolution however is hardly satisfactory as Sophie still seems discontented with Zalkin:

> "Yes, yes," she answered, impetuously. The street was dark. From the synagogue came the hum of muffled merriment. It sounded like a wail. "Yes, yes," she repeated in a whisper. And as if afraid lest morning might bring better counsel, she hastened to bind herself by adding, with a tremor in her voice: "I swear by my father that I will." (64)

Zalkin, like Levinsky and Asriel Stroon, has obviously had to sacrifice an essential element of his consciousness to achieve social and economic success in America. The price for possessing this material stability however seems to be a secure sense of identity. While he was frantically acquiring the peripheral

components of an identity in America, Zalkin, like Asriel, was concerned only with becoming a successful American businessman. Exiled from memory and history, however, his Self has dwelt in the present only, not able to merge with the past. When his present changes, that is, when the social and economic pressures to focus on the present situation cease, he is left carrying a void in his immediate past that can only be filled with the memory of his earlier orientation. The memory of his origins, far too elemental to the Self to discard completely, resurfaces, and the conflict between past and present encounters, leaves him desperate to redefine his Self. The story clearly illustrates the irreversibility of the basic impulses of the Self, which, no matter how it changes in an encounter with an Other, retains at all times the "fundamental building block" of its personality.

Alienated from mainstream Jewish life in America but still very much in possession of his "Jewish heart," as Reb Avrom points out (57), Zalkin attempts to recover the history of his people which he had chosen to shrug off in his pursuit of an American identity. He discovers that the breach between his past and himself is not as great as he feels, proving that his Jewish heritage is an uneraseable part of his Self. His visit to the synagogue turns out to be an enriching experience; although he does not seem to seek the full meaning of his Self within religion or Judaism, Zalkin revives himself on the familiar and vigorous outer experiences of Judaism, proving that he is essentially Jewish at heart. Significantly, when the "first flush of exultation" at being in a synagogue again after fifteen years dies down, Zalkin "felt as if he had never left off going to synagogue" (54). Like Asriel, Zalkin too responds, understandably, to his re-entry into Jewish consciousness with enthusiasm and relief at re-discovering the familiar and at being easily accepted back. But because both Asriel and Zalkin are two different, unique individuals, the choices they make are also different, although they

may find themselves in the same situation. While Asriel chooses to respond in extremes because such is the motivation of his Self, Zalkin, who is essentially quieter and more practical, chooses to be more reserved, and proceeds at a more moderate pace. But like Asriel, Zalkin comes to cherish the symbols of Judaism and Jewish identity that adorn the synagogue-the ark, the Star of David, the omud-all of which he had at one time made "the subject of banter" (53). Now, however, he goes looking for them due to replace the emptiness he feels due to a sense of estrangement and guilt at having strayed from his Jewishness.

Zalkin's dialogue with America eventually leads him back to the significant past of his people; he begins, appropriately, at the synagogue, from which much of the essence of Jewish identity emanates. Within this context, he encounters Reb Avrom and his daughter. Although both the old cantor and Sophie seem to be more American than Jewish, to Zalkin, the old cantor symbolises the preciousness of the Old World while Sophie typifies the essence of Jewish womanhood. Both are united in his mind, so that the image of one merges with the other: after his first visit to the synagogue for instance, Zalkin keeps hearing "Reb Avrom Leib's hymn [ringing] in his brain," but the melody "had sparkling eyes, a healthy girlish face, and a pre-occupied `housewifely' smile" (54). In Reb Avrom and his daughter, Zalkin finds the fulfilment of Jewish American identity, so that forging a union with them becomes his priority. His discovery thrills him to respond in a basic, elemental way: "It was God who brought me hither!" (55) as the cantor and his daughter represent to him the possibility of successful dialogue between the Jew and America, because in them, Zalkin seems to sense the merging of both Jewishness and Americanness. He is immediately aware that Reb Avrom's "original compositions" are heavily influenced by the melodies flowing out of New York's dynamic Yiddish theatre, but he is, in time, after

getting to know the old cantor, able to look beyond this 'flaw,' this taint of worldliness, in Reb Avrom to appreciate the old man's creativity and zest for life. Zalkin comes to recognise that it is Reb Avrom's imagination and innovativeness that have led the old man to find a balance in America. In his fusion of traditional Orthodox hymns and the irrepressible Yiddish theatre tunes, Reb Avrom has united two strong influences on as well as responses of Jewish life in America: Orthodoxy, which resonates with the history and memory of the Jewish people, and Yiddish theatre, which in spirit captured the drama of the transportation of the Old World to America as well as the resulting shifts in Jewish identity.

Cahan portrays Reb Avrom as a man with a large appetite for life, and full of the joy of living:

> The cantor came in-a plump, narrow-shouldered, florid-faced, bustling little man with a massive grizzly beard ...
>
> The cantor took a seat by the side of the rabbi near the holy ark, and at once fell to talking with ringing merriment, often bursting into a hearty laugh which caused him to throw back his head and slap his knees (53).

Significantly, Reb Avrom's first song in this story calls the congregation to "sing unto the Lord," and to make "a joyful noise" to Him (53). Reb Avrom is known as the "biggest Rejoicing of the Law romp" (60) to the congregation, and on the day of the Rejoicing of the Law on which the Orthodox Jews traditionally celebrate with loud noise and dancing, it is Reb Avrom who, despite the crushing disappointment that Zalkin has broken off his engagement to Sophie, best typifies the temper of rejoicing, in the spirit of the old Hasidic masters; indeed, Reb Avrom seems to epitomise the Hasidic teaching, glorifying God as he does by rejoicing in His gift of life:

> "What makes you so jolly, Reb Avrom Leib? Brandy has not yet come within four ells of you," somebody jested.
>
> "No matter," the cantor answered, gasping for breath, as he stopped spinning. "I like strong wine and old, but the Law is the strongest and oldest wine there is. Even Vanderbilt could not afford it, could he? Here is health!" he said, tossing off an imaginary goblet, and was off again. To be drunk on the Rejoicing of the Law is a good deed. The next best deed is to imagine oneself befuddled, and Reb Avrom Leib's was quite a lively imagination. "Hi-da-da! Hi-da-da!" (60).

Reb Avrom transforms the flavour of the traditional service with his musical innovations. Obviously in love with music and singing, Reb Avrom has raised both from their mere function to the embodiment of his whole Self so that when he sings in the synagogue, he displays his Self in communion with worshipful singing. He puts all of himself in his singing, so that he is fully present in his worship of God. He finds his meaning of existence in the living of life to the fullest, and worship itself becomes for him the enactment of be-ing:

> Reb Avrom Leib warmed up to his song of welcome. At first it was all an extemporaneous recitative, and he gave himself free rein. He bellowed, he moaned, he trilled, he sighed. Once or twice he puckered up his lips into the fond smile of a mother cooing to her baby, and dropping into a falsetto he sang with quiet ecstasy. Then, suddenly, his voice would blaze out again, bidding defiance, threatening, crying for help (53).

Reb Avrom succeeds in transcending ritualistic form to focus on the spirit and tempo of life itself as revealed to the Jew in America. In the age of multi-culturalism, the trend of social movements appears to be towards pluralism rather than monologism, and Reb Avrom, in his re-interpretation of Orthodoxy in the New World, has succeeded in acquiring this balance by merging Self and Other.

Zalkin at first finds the cantor's admission of popular tunes into the ancient ritual a jarring and disturbing note in the service:[4]

> Reb Avrom Leib jerked the words out, as though calling the congregation to arms. ...
>
> As the whole congregation burst out chanting the refrain in the traditional melody, Zalkin found it more impressive than the cantor's own tune. He reflected that Reb Avrom's song had little or no bearing on the text. Some of his gesticulations inclined him to laughter, while his abrupt transitions jarred upon his nerves. As to the cantor's composition, Zalkin thought he could point out in it Hebraized snatches of popular operas and recent street music (54).

In spite of this conscious awareness, Zalkin's subconscious retains a lingering flavour of the cantor's irrepressible melody. Like most popular strains, Reb Avrom's composition seems familiar enough to recall, but only faintly, as it lacks a distinct, individual quality. Zalkin soon enough forgets the synagogue, Reb Avrom and Sophie, but the following Friday evening he instinctively remembers the Sabbath eve, and proceeds to Reb Avrom's synagogue. After that, he seems to succumb to the charm and novelty of the melody:

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[4] Indeed, many may consider such a transformation a profaning of the sacred.

> Reb Avrom's hymn rang in his brain. ... He seemed to hear every note of it, yet, try as he would, he could not recall it. His heart craved to hear it once more. Even when his attention was absorbed in business, the synagogue song seemed to dwell in him, filling his every limb and whispering to his heart as the soul of something living, femininely lovable, luring, unrelenting (54).

Obviously, it is not so much the melody itself that is significant, but Reb Avrom's singing, the presence of his daughter, and the synagogue setting as wellas the ambience of Yiddish life flowing from the song and the surroundings that consecrate it for Zalkin.

In the same way that Reb Avrom in himself merges the traditional and the modern, Sophie too, as illustrated below, merges Jewishness and Americanness:

> Zalkin could see that her playing was a sorry performance, but he had never heard a Yiddish melody from a piano before; much less one played by an old-fashioned maiden like his sisters and cousins at home; and the room was so redolent of 'heaven-fearing' peace and affection, so full of the ancient Judaism and the family warmth to which he had been a stranger since a boy (55).

Just as he is aware of Reb Avrom's use of popular theatre tunes in traditional hymns, Zalkin is also aware of Sophie's inadequacies, but he looks beyond her scanty formal training in music, and appreciates her creativity, for instance, her natural ear and memory for "memorizing a light tune and picking it out on her piano" (55). Zalkin is also delighted with the novel and pleasing experience of watching and listening to Sophie play the piano, as the image

demonstrates to him a successful encounter between the Jew and America.

The homeless and displaced Zalkin finds in the Leib home a resting place. Their home echoes with all the familiar rhythms of the Old World, in harmony with strong American resonances. Aided by this familiarity, Zalkin rediscovers within his own Self his early memories and attempts to reconcile them with the changes wrought in his Self by his encounter with America. It is as if Zalkin travels back to the past, so that on his engagement day when he reads from the Jewish Scriptures, he quickly regains the lost inflections of his past:

> "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God," intoned Zalkin at the reading-desk of Reb Avrom's synagogue. "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned."
>
> He had not chanted the Prophets for years, and as the old intonation came back to him his voice rang out with confidence and relish (56).

Significantly, Zalkin's portion comments on his own renewed state; having discovered Reb Avrom and his daughter, Zalkin is indeed comforted and returned to his people after his long, lonely period of suffering and seeking for meaning.

Reb Avrom later 're-instates' Zalkin as a Jew by pronouncing on his essential Jewishness: "you have a Jewish heart and a Jewish head" (57). Reb Avrom's statement underscores the basic uniqueness of the Self; no matter how far Zalkin may have 'strayed' from his Jewishness, or whatever the degree to which he may have allowed his dialogue with America to eclipse his Jewish consciousness, Zalkin cannot lose that which within his Self sets

him apart as uniquely himself. Having regained a sense of his Jewish identity, Zalkin can reclaim his place within the family, an institution central to Jewish social life. On the eve of the Day of Atonement, which calls for repentance and restitution, and when sinners are welcomed back into the fold, Zalkin joins Reb Avrom's family for supper. After Reb Avrom exchanges forgiveness with his children and blesses them, Zalkin goes up to the old man to be blessed as well, as if he too were Reb Avrom's son:
"Bless me, too, Reb Avrom Leib."

> "Of course, my son," answered the cantor, as he rested his hands on him. "What is the difference between you and Sophie? Both of you are my children. God grant that you live out your lives in happiness together ..." (57).

It is a significant moment for Zalkin, as the ritual signifies his re-entry into Jewish life; rather than standing apart on the periphery as a solitary, alienated and fragmented figure, he now possesses a legitimate identity as a Jew as well as an American, within the boundaries of the community. Zalkin regains a family, finding in Reb Avrom a substitute father, and in Sophie, who also plays the role of mother in this family, not just a wife, but a substitute mother. Sophie's two younger brothers provide the youthful element; indeed Zalkin, after Reb Avrom's death, stands in the potential role of their father/elder brother.

Zalkin's return to an explicit form of Jewishness brings to him a more wholesome identity as a Jewish American; for a while he acquires a sense of tradition, symbolised by Reb Avrom, as well as of the modern, symbolised by Sophie. However, Zalkin's new sense of identity and belonging proves to be something fragile and still to be wrested with, as he soon discovers. The source of his conflict is his relationship with Sophie, which reveals to him that he cannot hope to recover the past he had chosen to give up.

Sophie, in reaching out to Zalkin in this way, obviously responds to certain cherished ideals to make up for the yearning and disillusionment that accompany her awareness of her lost youth. While Flora presumes to aspire to social and intellectual superiority and seems refined and socially accomplished, Sophie is more down-to-earth and practical, tied-down to looking after her father and two younger brothers, the capable and efficient mistress of her father's house. Flora seems more self-centered and driven by her ambition to improve her social status and prestige, but Sophie appears quite satisfied to rule the roost in her father's house. Confident of her role and indispensability to her father and brothers, she is also proud of her image as a good girl and a good daughter: "Sophie was a good girl, but she knew it and talked too much" (55). Her self-consciousness, and her awareness that she plays her role well, likens her to Flora, who consciously attempts to raise her social position. While Sophie does not seem socially-motivated, she, like Flora, has her ambitions, but unlike Flora, Sophie tightly suppresses her desires within herself, and keeps her longings so private that we only observe glimpses of them, in her "care-worn" (53) and "'housewifely'" (54) smile, for instance, and in her somewhat peevish nature, for example, seen in her complaints to Zalkin on their very first meeting:

Sophie was a good girl, but she knew it and talked too much. She complained to Zalkin how helpless her father was and how she had to take care of him and the whole house.

> "If I didn't play for him he could not remember a bit," she said, with a resigned air. "He is good at thinking up tunes all right, but he is so quick to forget them." (55-56).

Hidden behind her outward calm then is a vague sense of discontentment, of which neither Cahan nor Sophie allows us more than a hint. One indication of her discontentment is her inability to

Irrevocably changed as a result of his dialogue with America, he learns that his present now is fully entrenched in America, and he must accept himself as a Jew and an American. As a Jewish American, Zalkin carries with him the guilt of having 'betrayed' his Jewishness which places him in the precarious state of not belonging fully to either Jewishness or Americanness. The note of frustration and discontentment which ends this story suggests that Zalkin finally resigns himself to living in this state of mental exile. Along with this resignation, comes the realisation that as an individual, unique Self, Sophie is responsible for making her own choices, and that his own sovereign will alone cannot determine the outcome of their relationship.

Sophie is a more complex character than she at first appears to be. Sophie, like Flora, is American-born, and therefore does not suffer the burden of becoming American. Sophie and Flora, two separate, sovereign beings in similar situations, prove the uniqueness of their Selfs by choosing different responses. Like Flora, Sophie's social and economic positions are secure, so that her main concern is her personal betterment. Sophie, still unmarried at twenty-six, has her ideals as to the man she will marry, but these are left largely undefined, unlike in Flora's case. Compared to Flora, Sophie is less assertive in this matter; while Flora objects violently to Asriel's choice of a husband for her, Sophie is willing to consider Zalkin although her first reaction to him is negative: "'Not good-looking at all, and oh, what a figure!'" she thinks to herself. However, she is quite attracted to "his pale intellectual face" which "had something meek and peculiarly attractive in it" (56). In the same way Asriel responds to the idea of religiousness, Sophie responds to Zalkin not for himself, but for the idea of intellectualism that she finds attractive and which he represents for her. In this, she responds not to his Self, but only to a fragment of his Self , and so impedes any meaningful encounter between them.

relate to reality despite appearing to be in control; when she first meets Zalkin for instance, she is disappointed, but persuades herself that she will "get used to him," and that they will "live like a couple of doves" (56). Her simplistic solution is of course escapist and unrealistic, signalled by her use of a glib and conventional romantic picture of married life.

Sophie is unable to relate to Zalkin on a romantic basis, and even finds his endearments and attempts to be intimate with her repulsive and bothersome (60). Indeed, Cahan informs us:

> As long as Zalkin, like the 'bashful Talmud student' that he was, held himself at a respectful distance, Sophie took his presence and his love-lorn eyes as part and parcel of the great change which was coming over her. When, with throbbing heart, he finally ventured to take her by the hand, however, her whole being revolted. She was angry with herself. The feeling seemed like something unholy breaking in upon the sanctity of her present state of mind, and she told herself it was all imagination, but she knew that it was not (57).

When Zalkin first proposes, she distances herself from him as a possible lover, and instead, re-defines their roles to suit herself. She hides behind the facade of an older woman, and treats him as an old friend rather than as a prospective suitor:

> She [spoke] ... with a confidential heartiness of manner and voice, as though the visitor were an old friend of the family and she herself were much older than she actually was. Zalkin sat, vainly trying to study her face and weigh her every word, but little by little his embarrassment wore off

> and he fell into the familiar, friendly tone which she took with him (56).

On the day of the engagement, she "hovered about the guests, smiling and jesting like a happy mother at the engagement party of her daughter rather than as the bride" (57). Sophie again distances herself from the reality of the situation, displacing herself from her rightful role as bride, able to participate in the festivities only as a detached actor. In the synagogue, while Zalkin reads from the Scriptures, Sophie sits in the women's gallery aware that everyone is watching her, the bride-to-be. With Zalkin's present, a "huge" diamond brooch, "flaming at her throat," Sophie drinks in the admiring glances thrown at her, basking in the attention that this new role has given her; in reality, she is totally estranged from Zalkin himself: "Her heart swelled with the warmth and joy with which Zalkin's recitation filled the synagogue, but she never thought of him. 'So I am a bride and everybody is looking at me and my brooch,' she said in her heart, as if all this had nothing to do with the man at the reading-desk" (56). Clearly, Zalkin exists for her only as an abstraction; she is glad to be a bride, but Zalkin himself is incidental in her new role. When Zalkin breaks off the engagement, Sophie is relieved, and finally accepts him after her father's death out of a mixture of grief, guilt and self-pity. Indeed, she has to swear by her dead father to accept him this time, binding herself as if by covenant lest she change her mind again.

Sophie's frigidity and her attitude of giving herself to Zalkin as a sacrifice suggest that their marriage may run into trouble. Zalkin's idealising of Sophie as something "living, femininely lovable, luring, unrelenting" (54) is ironic in the face of her frigidity, and this too suggests that he will be disappointed in his marriage. It appears that with Reb Avrom's death, the centre of Zalkin's peace

is shattered, and his sense of belonging is again threatened. The Old World then, which Reb Avrom symbolises, seems finally just out of Zalkin's grasp. Neither able to totally give up his Jewishness nor to fully embrace his Americanness, Zalkin seems again marooned within his fragmented Self, his Jewish heart and American ego still separated by what he has finally become in America. Sophie's perspective of their relationship leads Zalkin to realise that he cannot live vicariously through Reb Avrom, who is a separate, independent Self, and that he must create his own balance as Jew and American. In the end, Zalkin chooses to re-unite with Sophie, signalling his willingness to acknowledge that he will always bear within his Self the strands of a dual identity as Jew and American. In his acceptance of and resignation to his dual identity, Zalkin is aware that he will always carry discontentment within him.

In Rouvke Arbel, Asriel Stroon and Aaron Zalkin, Cahan shows the Jewish Self in exile within its own consciousness; despite their material success, the three men fail to reconcile their identities as Jews and Americans. It is a complex, complicated situation. They are fettered by the strict demands of Jewish Law, communal living and history, but in accepting the American, they fear becoming totally Gentile, so that although they had at first pursued Americanisation enthusiastically, they later guiltily attempt to rediscover their Jewishness: Rouvke in sending off for a Jewish wife from the Old World, Asriel in adopting the Orthodox lifestyle, and Zalkin in wanting a typically Jewish family life. In these stories, Cahan highlights the inevitability of change as a result of dialogue between Self and Other as well as the indestructability of the Self's fundamental building block. We see these themes more clearly illustrated in the two works considered in the next chapter, Yekl and The Rise of David Levinsky.

CHAPTER 4

YEKL PODKOVNIK AND DAVID LEVINSKY: THE UNEASY PRIVILEGE[1] OF JEWISH-AMERICAN DIALOGUE

> "Don't you like it? I do," Jake replied tartly. Once I live in America," he pursued, on the defensive, "I want to know that I live in America. *Dot'sh a' kin' a man I am!* One must not be a *greenhorn.* Here a Jew is as good as a Gentile. How, then, would you have it? The way it is in Russia, where a Jew is afraid to stand within four ells of a Christian?"[2]

> I can never forget the days of my misery. I cannot escape from 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.[3]

As in the previous chapter, this chapter examines the theme of the Jew's discontentment in America despite his acquisition of an American identity. Whereas the last chapter focuses on Cahan's

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[1] This phrase is taken from Richard J. Fein's essay "Jewish Fiction in America," 1975 (415) and is considered in detail elsewhere in this chapter.

[2] Cahan, Abraham. Yekl and the Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories of Yiddish New York. (5).

[3] Abraham Cahan. The Rise of David Levinsky. (530).

short stories, this chapter considers his novels Yekl (1896) and The Rise of David Levinsky (1917). It is in these two works, especially David Levinsky, that Cahan explores this theme in great detail, clearly illustrating that the assurance of identity goes beyond the mere adoption of a certain appearance or way of life. Like Rouvke Arbel, Asriel Stroon and Aaron Zalkin, both Yekl and Levinsky provide an insight into one outcome or possibility of the dialogue between the Jew and America: inner vacuum despite power and wealth in America.

This chapter examines Yekl and David Levinsky together as it often seems as if the two eponymous (anti-)heroes are one and the same person. Yekl, who like Aaron Zalkin, foreshadows David Levinsky, is, however, coarser, more impatient and headstrong, and perhaps less dishonest than Levinsky, whose calculated shows of honesty are totally repulsive to the reader. While Yekl does not seem too concerned about his unscrupulousness, Levinsky often attempts to whitewash *his* underhandedness by confessing his misdemeanours and, in this way, tries to ingratiate himself with his readers. Yekl and Levinsky make similar choices and share certain intrinsic qualities: both have immense belief in themselves and their ability to succeed; are fiercely determined to rise in commercial America; are extremely selfish, think nothing of lying and cheating to get their way, whatever the cost; and choose wealth and power as the expression of their being.

Like many of Cahan's Jewish stories which seek out the inner life of his Jewish Americans, Yekl and David Levinsky indicate that it is the growth of the inner being or the Self that truly determines the individual's development, and not any outward show of behaviour or manners.[4] Cahan also shows that it is their intrinsic

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[4] Cahan's own advocation of Anglo-Saxon ways and manners as an Americaniser of the Lower East Side, however, indicates that he was ambiguous on this point; like Levinsky, he was obviously

Jewishness that makes Yekl and Levinsky unique as individual Selfs; to attempt to strip it away is not only impossible, but also disastrous for them. In choosing to slough off their Jewishness, they become American in the conventional, widely-accepted Anglo-Saxon way they had expected to but, also gradually lose their internal equilibrium, becoming spiritually disorientated. This is why David Levinsky, whose rise we witness, remains bereft even after having achieved great wealth and social status.

Levinsky has certainly changed in many ways, seen, for instance, in the new language, appearance, manners and behaviour that he has (consciously) acquired, as a result of his encounter with America, but he obviously remains unshakeably himself in temperament and thought. Levinsky's brooding nature, for example, has much to do with his Jewishness as he himself acknowledges when he confides to his readers that there exists a "streak of sadness" in the "blood of [his] race" that has been "amply nourished" by the "persecution of many centuries" (4). Levinsky accepts this melancholia as being Jewish in essence as he was immersed in it from the cradle. He is hardly three when he is introduced to the 'tradition of suffering' after his father's death: his mother carries him to the synagogue to have someone say ***Kaddish*** (prayer for the dead) with him for his father. This is probably why Levinsky, whose inner experience remains that of loss and exile, comes to accept loneliness and unfulfilment as his burden, if not duty. As a successful American entrepreneur looking back on his life, he realises that he cannot change so elemental an aspect of his personality as his Jewishness as this remains an irreversible component of his Self. Even Yekl, who is just beginning the journey

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aware that the Jew's loss of his Jewishness violated the integrity of his unique and special Self at the same time he seemed to have believed in the superiority of the American Way.

of acquisition, and can see only the blinding glare of success ahead of him, has his moments of regret and looking back, as for instance when his father dies, Yekl's "native home came back to him with a vividness which it had not had in his mind for a long time" (29). Indeed, Jules Chametzky notes that if Cahan "reveals hints of greater depths [in his characters]," they are invariably cultural carry-overs from the ***shtetl*** past" (1977, 64). This observation underlines the essential Jewishness of Cahan's characters, which is an innate quality they cannot destroy.

Yekl is a fine portrayal of the beginning stages of moral deterioration while David Levinsky, which considers the entire dialogue of becoming American, faithfully documents the dismal outcome of blind chasing after wealth and power. Both novels deal with the troubling issue of Jewish American identity, but follow opposite movements: as a new immigrant Yekl is giddy with the excitement of Americanisation, and so, chooses to ignore the warning signals of spiritual trauma ahead of him, while Levinsky, on the other hand, having journeyed well beyond the distractions and tumult of making it in America, finds that assimilation does not guarantee spiritual satisfaction, and chooses in his quieter years to listen to the voice of his Jewish past. Yekl begins on a positive note but ends with the main character's sense of guilt, frustration and personal degradation; David Levinsky begins and ends on a brooding note of depression, yearning and discontentment. Yekl's choice to convey himself as far away as possible from his Jewishness, however, strongly suggests that while the protagonist may achieve his ambition of wealth and power, like Levinsky, he will probably end up embittered, dissatisfied and disillusioned. What is interesting about the two novels is that Yekl, one of Cahan's first stories in English, and David Levinsky, his final literary achievement, both review the uncertainties of Jewish American identity. It would seem that Cahan was as troubled about the issue

of Jewish American identity in later life as he was in his early years in the US.[5] Indeed, the niggling sense of guilt and self-doubt that troubles Yekl (when he allows it to) as he ruthlessly blazes ahead to become American is greatly magnified and evoked in the unsavoury tale, written about 20 years later, of Levinsky's rise.

Alvin H. Rosenfeld observes that Jewish culture, as portrayed in Jewish American Literature, was "a thing easier to discard than to maintain," as "when confronted by the allure of possibilities in America," it "could not successfully compete for the primary energies and loyalties, the major work of mind and spirit, of the immigrant generation and its immediate offspring" (1975, 142). Given this situation, Rosenfeld perceives, the Jew's "reinvention" of himself in America has "tended to create a complex new creature," who is paradoxically "more enriched and [at the same time] more deprived" than before, (145) a persona riven by doubt, frustration and guilt. Rosenfeld elaborates:

> [The Jew] is now monolingual where he had been bilingual; is neither altogether without a history nor in possession of one; has largely removed himself from the devotional life of the past to assume, without fully knowing their value, the debts and duties of a secularized present, and is on the whole bemused, ambivalent, and ironic about the intertwinings of success and failure he knows as citizen, neighbour, intellectual businessman, lover, anxious parent, harried daughter or bounded son. The largest questions that face him are the ones framed by David Levinsky, his major prototype, half a century ago: 'Who am I ?' and 'Who am I

[5] This once again raises the question of Cahan's ambiguity and uncertainty over the issue of assimilation, and his realisation that although Americanisation may have given much to the Jews, there was much too that it had deprived them of.

> living for?' His answers most often also seem to be some form of Levinsky's: "I am lonely ... [and] feel the deadly silence of solitude.... My present station, power, the amount of worldly happiness at my command, and the rest of it, seem to be devoid of significance." (145).

Indeed, Cahan's fiction, "The Imported Bridegroom" for instance, suggests that in becoming American the Jew has acquired a sense of guilt at having 'betrayed' his people. Among other things, Jewish identity is a corporate experience that encompasses millennia of solidarity as a defense against ***galut*** (exile), suffering and persecution. The Jews had striven for centuries to remain a people bound together by communal priorities, one of which is the belief that Jerusalem is their sole, rightful home. The Jew's personal achievement of home and belonging in America suddenly lifts him out of this shared experience. He rejoices at having won a legitimate home in the fabled land of freedom, but laments the new exile from his people and his intrinsically Jewish Self. The result, Richard J. Fein proposes is that the Jew, now in possession of a home but unable to forget ***galut***, internalises the insecurity of the Diaspora experience (1975, 145) as personal ideology, expressing the ethos of ***galut*** in his new way of life and thinking. Exiled within the memory of his Jewish past, he is, therefore, unable to fully participate in the new life in America. David M. Fine notes that Cahan, for instance, resorts extensively to ***galut*** in his fiction to explain the socio-psychological condition of his Jewish Americans (1973, 54). Cahan's focus is on the Diaspora as a "central and definitive historical fact" in Jewish experience. Cahan's heroes are "painfully aware of their exile, and whatever outer success they achieve in America, they are never permitted to forget what they have lost" (54).

Levinsky, for instance, finds himself increasingly more intent on the beauty and meaning of his former life as an Orthodox Jew in the Old World and so cannot relish the wealth and power he has finally won in America. He confesses at the conclusion of his autobiography: "... .There are merry suppers, and some orgies in which I take part, but when I go home I suffer a gnawing aftermath of loneliness and desolation. ... No, I am not happy" (526). It is largely his guilt at having given up his Jewishness that produces here what Richard J. Fein refers to as "nervous psychological energy," (415) something Levinsky, and Yekl, share with many other Jewish American protagonists. Yekl's "most intense suffering," according to Sanford Marovitz is caused by his "hunger for reconciliation" of the "charming dream of the past" with the "painful and banal activities" of the present (1968, 200). Yekl, however, Marovitz adds, sees "no possibility" (200) of such a reconciliation, and it is this sense of hopelessness that at once causes and sharpens his deep yearning and frustration. Although Yekl finally chooses to end his marriage to his Old World wife Gitl, signifying his final severance with his Jewish past, he is secretly uncertain and uneasy over his decision.

Perhaps what also troubles the Jew, subconsciously at least, is his fear that having given up his Jewishness, he has or will become a Gentile. Although his American success proves to him what he has always known, that there *is* no real difference between Jew and Gentile, he is painfully aware that the Gentile world refuses to concede the point, as even liberal America houses her anti-Semites. Perhaps then, to completely bring down the barriers under such a circumstance would be to desecrate not only the Jewish collective memory of centuries of persecution and suffering, but also the millions actually destroyed by that persecution. David Levinsky alludes to this "mediaeval prejudice against our people,"

the cause of Jewish suffering, as the reason why he will not marry a Gentile:

> In my soliloquies I often speculated and theorized on the question of proposing to her. I saw clearly that it would be a mistake. It was not the faith of my fathers that was in the way. It was that medieval prejudice against our people which makes so many marriages between Jew and Gentile a failure (527).

Levinsky, like Asriel and Zalkin, has consciously embraced the American way of life, but suddenly realises that he will lose himself if he were to become 'too Gentile'. For him, marrying a non-Jew is the line that he cannot and will not cross.

Levinsky and Yekl share with Rouvke, Asriel and Zalkin what Richard J. Fein terms the "uneasy privilege" of becoming Jewish American: having gained Americanness only to lose their Jewishness. Fein believes that this "privilege" is "less earned or knowledgeably achieved" than "simply unavoidable," (1975, 415) since once the Jewish people agreed to Americanisation, it was inevitable that they be changed by that encounter. Fein, in pondering on Jewish American identity set against the larger framework of Jewish history in which the Jew is the archetypal Outsider, cannot be certain if "some condition other than that of the stranger" finally "defines the Jew" (415). Jewish American Literature, an active vehicle for the debate on Jewish American identity, Fein asserts, is ambiguous about the question of identity as it displays as its main feature its characters' uncertainty of their own identity (414). From Levinsky onwards, Fein submits, the "struggle" for "meaningful Jewish life" seems to have become a primary preoccupation for the Jewish American protagonist, so that throughout his dialogue with America, the protagonist remains

puzzled and uncertain about his identity. His identity presents itself to him as an enigma, one that "neither disappear[s] nor reveal[s] itself on a level of some gratifying self-knowledge" (414). Fein further states:

> What is this uneasiness, this nagging sense of betrayal that surrounds these characters but a collective, floating sense of having betrayed some vital part of themselves by being in the Diaspora? ... What is this unease in all these characters ... but a sense that they are out of place in the Diaspora, and from that troubled sense begins their clumsy, honest sense of who they are? (414-5).

This certainly seems to prove true for Levinsky, whose discontentment it is that prods him to re-examine his Jewishness. Levinsky finally acknowledges that it is his Jewishness that contains the deeper meaning of his Self.

One of the ironies of Jewish American identity, and there seem to be many ironies and paradoxes apparent in Jewish American identity, Fein concludes, is the Jew's "rich poverty," his "unhappy fortune," of "[n]ot belonging" - neither to the security of Jewishness which he had chosen to reject nor to American life which he finds he cannot fully accept due to his sense of guilt at having betrayed his people by that very choice to reject his Jewishness. His distress over his identity, or lack of one, prompts him to either "change [his] half-Jewish [life]" by "shedding [his] Jewishness entirely" or by "making a new claim" upon it (414-5). Pointing to such prominent characters as Levinsky, Henry Roth's David Schearl, Saul Bellow's Asa Leventhal, Philip Roth's Eli Peck and Bernard Malamud's Gentile Jew Frankie Alpine, Fein links their doubts and anxieties centering around the integrity of their Selfs to the "strange, pervasive sense of guilt" they find themselves

encumbered with once they take on their new identity as Americans (414).

Yekl and David Levinsky effectively capture the disintegration of the Jewish milieu in the New World, but its main focus is the protagonists' individual choice to give up their Jewishness in America. Cahan attempts to trace the relationship of the unique action of the Jewish Self to the general state of American Jewry. Cahan suggests through close examination of character and motive that Levinsky and Yekl were well on their way to discarding their Jewishness even when they were still in the Old World. Cahan's Jewish Americans, however, seem more absorbed in their immediate, external worries to notice that they are drifting away from their Jewishness until it is too late. Their driving force is to become Americans, modelled after the common perception of Americans as white, Anglo-Saxon persons. The rapidity with which Levinsky and Yekl lose their Jewishness in America suggests that they are not, as individual Selfs, strongly motivated by their Jewishness. Paradoxically, although as members of a discriminated race, they see themselves as being Jewish, in mind and spirit they hardly seem contained by the external religio-cultural differences that set them apart as Jews in a Gentile world. Being young, restless and ambitious, they respond more naturally and eagerly to the lure of the material world rather than to the sedate pace of the spiritual. In the relative freedom of America, where they are allowed to explore their own individual Selfs and to become what they choose, the excitement of Self-discovery as well as the possibilities open to them, seem to further weaken their loose sense of Jewishness. Quite clearly, Cahan's Jewish Americans are more concerned with their personal development and destinies as unique, individual Selfs in the opportunity-filled modern world than with their roles as members of any one community, especially when the burden of belonging to a

community that seems to attract acrimony from all quarters is suddenly removed.

While Cahan does document the disintegration of Jewishness in America, it would seem then, that he was less interested in emphasising the Jewishness of his Americans, than in capturing their essence as individual Selfs trapped in the predicaments of the modern world. There is no doubting their intrinsic Jewishness, and that the clash between their Jewishness and their new, modern, Gentile environment is responsible for much of their psychical trauma, but Cahan's Americans also seem to be the prototype of the alienated, tortured modern man. Their loneliness, brokenness, inability to move, their very complexity, liken them to Hamlet, that perplexing, intricate, ruined, figure of the Renaissance world, and his brooding over the fundamentals of being. It is this universal condition, rather than one specifically Jewish, that Cahan tends to highlight in the stories of his straitened Jewish Americans, especially that of Yekl and Levinsky, by moving away from the 'Jewish issue' *per se* to delve into the emotional life of his characters, and to look at various other themes such as romance, marriage and sex, modernisation and capitalism, moral decay and spiritual hunger, loneliness and yearning. Cahan, then, treats Jewishness in a way that anticipates later American writers such as Bellow and Malamud, whose focus is the condition of universal man.

However, although Cahan treats his protagonists as Selfs awakening to their uniqueness as individuals, he does make it clear that it is the Jewish American's Jewishness that complicates his experience in the New World. If the Jew were an immigrant from any other communal group, his accommodation would not have been as traumatic, as he would not have had to worry about the centuries-old rejection of his Self, he would not have had to ponder over the integrity or reality of his Self, or to wonder how to win, if

he should win, non-Jewish acceptance. It is his awareness of his Self as Universal Outsider that urges him to cast off his Jewishness the minute it becomes possible to do so in order that he might take on a more widely-accepted personality. What comes across clearly in Cahan's stories, then, above and beyond the ambiguity of Jewish identity or the difficulties surrounding Jewish-Americanness, is the sheer complexity of Jewish identity and of the dialogue between the unique, individual Jew and America.

Yekl and David Levinsky, like Asriel and Zalkin, are certainly complex personalities; apart from the duality of their Jewish-American vision, they seem to be carrying the burden of an earlier double vision that stems from the trauma of being Jewish in a non-Jewish world that discriminates against the Jew. For Levinsky, this duality, this sense of ambiguity, has become part of the Jewish ethos, so that Jewish identity both attracts and repels him in a complex, profound way he is not able to clearly fathom, much less articulate. It is an ambiguity that he feels is rooted in the ancient Jewish writings he used to pore over in his youth, as he recalls:

> It is with a peculiar sense of duality one reads this ancient work [the Talmud]. While your mind is absorbed in the meaning of the words you utter, the melody in which you utter them tells your heart a tale of its own. You live in two distinct worlds at once. [Levinsky's friend] Naphtali [for instance] had little to say to other people, but he seemed to have much to say to himself. His singsongs were full of meaning, of passion, of beauty (35-36).

Whatever he has chosen to become in America, Levinsky in his later years is still paradoxically, inexplicably attracted to Jewishness. Although he chooses initially to give up Jewishness as a way of life in America, he cannot annihilate his Jewish Self as it is an intrinsic

feature of his innermost being. Later, in his loneliness and disillusionment, he feels he must return to Jewishness to find any kind of fulfilment. In the past, as a Talmudic student, he reminisces how:

> ... the very reading of the Talmud was apt to dispel my gloom. My voice would gradually rise and ring out, vibrating with intellectual passion.
>
> The intonation of the other scholars, too, echoed the voices of their hearts, some of them sonorous with religious bliss, others sad, still others happy-go-lucky. Although absorbed in my book, I would have a vague consciousness of the connection between the various singsongs and their respective performers. ... All those voices blended in a symphonic source of inspiration for me. It was divine music in more senses than one (37-8).

Looking back, Levinsky now sees the individuality of each student although all are involved in the same commission. Cahan suggests through this that the Jewish world, for all its insistence on rules and regulations, still allows its people to stand apart as special, unique, Selfs. Even at its most profound, it upholds the quaintness of the individual spirit at the same time it encourages communality. On the other hand, American mercantilism, the most obvious fuel of modern American life, endorses mass production as the quickest, cheapest and most convenient means of achieving economic strength, and encourages homogeneity. Levinsky's examination of the past leads him to believe that it was really the ancient world of the rabbis that awakened him to the uniqueness of his self while America on the other hand had led him to discover his material side:

> Added to the mystery of that world [of the ancient rabbis of the Talmud] was the mystery of my own singsong. Who is there?-I seem to be wondering, my tune or recitative sounding like the voice of some other fellow. It was as if somebody were hidden within me. What did he look like? (38).

He is aware of the complexity of his Jewish Self, and the fact that he has yet to know this Self.

The ambivalence inherent in his Self is apparent in other areas of his life. His attitude towards things 'American' and 'European,' for instance, betrays his confusion over the basic question of his Self identity. While he spares no effort to acquire an American identity, even looking down on those who are not as American as he has become, Levinsky is, at the same time, convinced that Europeans are superior to Americans. He himself, however, is bent on erasing his European inheritance to acquire an American identity. He attempts to explain:

> I knew that many of the professional men on the East Side, and indeed, everywhere else in the United States, were people of doubtful intellectual equipment, while I was ambitious to be cultured "in the European way." There was an odd confusion of ideas in my mind. On the one hand I had the notion that to "become an American" was the only tangible form of becoming a man of culture (for did I not regard the most refined and learned European a "greenhorn"?); on the other hand, the impression was deep in me that American education was a cheap machine-made product (167).

A European identity, however, also proves problematic for Levinsky because of his Jewish heritage. Because he is Jewish, Levinsky is cut off from the wealth and 'privileges' of European tradition, history, culture and education, so that he cannot really claim the 'superiority' of European culture. His 'Europeanness,' unfortunately, is limited to the backward, ***shtetl***-culture of his little village.

Before we look at David Levinsky in detail, we look first at Yekl. Sanford Marovitz believes that Yekl, although "not particularly well-written," nevertheless "marks a noteworthy stage" in Cahan's development as a fiction writer as it introduces two "central elements" of Cahan's later work: the realistic portrayal of the sweatshop system and the "spiritual hunger" of the Jewish immigrants (1968, 196-7). Yekl is about Yekl Podkovnik, "the first of Cahan's woebegone victims of alienation" (199) who leaves his old village, Povodye, when the Russians step up economic restrictions against the Jews. Yekl leaves alone with the intention of earning enough money to send for his wife and son, but encounters difficult circumstances that delay the reunion. Three years later, Yekl has become the popular and easy-going "Yankee" Jake, the ladies' man who is a favourite at the local dance school. When he receives word that his father has died, Yekl is full of remorse, and vows to send for his family immediately. Yekl, however, has changed too much to accept his wife, Gitl, in all her Old World Jewishness, and soon divorces her to marry the shrewd, vulgar Mamie Fein, an Americanised Jewess whose money he counts on to rise in America. The story ends with Yekl's inarticulated guilt over the loss of his Jewish Self, expressed in his misgivings over the loss of his hard-won and short-lived freedom and independence when he marries Mamie. "The burden of [this] tale," Jules Chametzky comments, is that the "new American experience" has destroyed the

better part of Yekl, leaving him "naked" to his "partially understood and only half-articulated desires and fantasies" (1977, 64).

Yekl, like Levinsky, believes in the possibility of reinventing himself in America. In fact, it is more than just a possibility for him; he believes it is his right and duty to re-create himself in the New World. Having stumbled upon the opportunity to be a new man, Yekl, young and brimming over with restless energy, sets this as his rightful course in America, and philosphies to his sweatshop colleagues:

> Once I live in America ... I want to know that I live in America. *Dot'sh a' kin' a man I am!* One must not be a *greenhorn.* Here a Jew is as good as a Gentile. How, then, would you have it?" (5).

It is interesting to note that our first encounter with Yekl finds him in the middle of conversation, in which he attempts to prove his Americanness to his co-workers as well as to himself. Yekl speaks himself into be-ing, but it is not only the act of speaking, the first act of creation, that is important in his conceptualisation of himself as an American but what he says and how he says it. In portraying himself as American, Yekl's manner is that of the worldly-wise insider intimate with all the rules of American life and behaviour. He boasts the 'right' attitude of sophisticatedness and urgency to succeed. He parades his knowledge of the intricacies of typical American rituals such as baseball and boxing, thus proving that he 'belongs'. Cahan's first sketch of Yekl shows him confident and in control of his appreciative audience:

> He had been speaking for some time. He stood in the middle of the overcrowded stuffy room with his long but well-shaped legs wide apart, his bulky round head aslant, and one

> of his bared mighty arms akimbo. He spoke in Boston Yiddish, that is to say, in Yiddish more copiously spiced with mutilated English ... (2).

To underscore his new image and establish his role as instructor to the new Jewish immigrants, he splices his braggadocio with English words and phrases. The acquisition of a new language, of course, signalled to the immigrant that he was coming within control of the foreign culture, that he shared the thought processes of its adherents, and so, was becoming one of them.[6] To Yekl, this is the first sign of success in his becoming American.

The opening dialogue between Yekl and his colleagues delves right away into the question of Self identity in America. Yekl seeks Self-realisation in modern, fast-paced, commercial America rather than in Jewishness, and so, with his small court of admirers, advocates the "American cause," while Bernstein, his foil in attitude and behaviour, and two other workers are not fully convinced of the superiority of America over the Old World. Their identity and destiny, they believe, is still tied up in their Jewishness. The topic of conversation is boxing, with Yekl eager to convince his fellow workers that for all its apparent brutality, the sport does have its beauty, seen for instance in the boxers' skill and mastery of technique. The opinion from 'the other camp,' however, is that American boxing is no different from the brawling of "drunken moujiks [peasants] in Russia" (3). Bernstein pronounces wittily: "I do think that a burly Russian peasant would, without a bit of grammar, crunch the bones of Corbett himself; and he would not *charge* him a cent for it either." (4). The debate, with the subject having changed to baseball, soon takes on a more belligerent tone,

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[6] Cahan, himself, in his speeches and advice to the Jewish immigrants exhorted them to learn English as quickly as they could.

and the workers' underlying doubts, conflicts and frustrations over their choice to migrate and over their new identity are exposed:

> "A nice entertainment, indeed! Just like little children -playing ball! And yet people say America is a *smart* country. I don't see it."
>
> "'*F caush* you don't, *becaush* you are a bedraggled *greenhorn*, afraid to budge out of Heshter Shtreet." ...
>
> "Look at the Yankee!" the presser shot back.
>
> "More of a one than you, *anyhoy*."
>
> "He thinks that *shaving* one's mustache makes a Yankee!"...
>
> Jake turned white with rage. ...
>
> After a slight pause Bernstein could not forbear a remark ... . "Look here, Jake; since fighters and baseball men are all educated, then why don't you try to become so? Instead of *spending* your money on fights, dancing, and things like that, would it not be better if you paid it to a teacher?"
>
> ... "*Never min'* what I do with my money," [Jake] said; "I don't steal it from you, do I? Rejoice that you keep tormenting your books. Much does he know! Learning, learning, and learning, and still he cannot speak English. I don't learn and yet I speak quicker than you!"
>
> A deep blush of wounded vanity mounted to Bernstein's sallow cheek. "*Ull right, ull right!*" he cut the conversation short and took up the newspaper (6-7).

In Yekl and Bernstein, Cahan juxtaposes the two unique choices of two individuals caught within similar situations. As separate, sovereign beings, it is natural that Yekl and Bernstein choose different paths as dictated by their sovereign wills and

desires. While Yekl comes by his Americanness through practical means and in a more haphazard manner, by observing and imitating Americans, Bernstein approaches assimilation more systematically, for instance, by sacrificing time and effort to learn the correct English with the help of a dictionary. It is because he is unsure of himself and doubtful as well as anxious over the troubling issue of Americanisation that Bernstein is cautious, and proceeds towards assimilation at a more realistic pace than Yekl. Bernstein still believes in the beauty and power of his Jewishness and the Old World, and so, cannot confront his new identity in America without confusion and conflict. Yekl, on the other hand, rushes towards assimilation as in his immaturity he believes that only an Anglo-American identity will best express his Self. Indeed, Cahan informs us, "the thought of ever having been a Yekl would bring to Jake's lips a smile of patronizing commiseration for his former self" (12).

Yekl is so totally absorbed in the act of recreating himself that he is able to ignore and push aside the stabs of guilt he occasionally feels about the carefree, deceptive life he leads, allowing people to believe that he is unmarried and without responsibilities. Sometimes, however, it would seem that Yekl allows himself to feel guilty as this 'catharsis' enables him to carry on in his deception. Guilt allows him to acknowledge his dishonesty, and this seems sufficient enough to ease his conscience so that he does not need to actually do anything. He leads a double life that allows him to feel a certain way but behave in another. For instance, although he "never even vaguely abandoned the idea of supplying his wife and child with the means of coming to join him," (24) he is also "at the bottom of his heart" somewhat "glad of his poverty" because it allows him to delay the moment (27). He remits money to his wife promptly every month and visits the draft and passage office regularly, but as soon as he leaves the office, Cahan

tells us, Yekl "consciously" lets his mind "wander off to other topics" (24).

One reason for this split in his consciousness is that when Yekl goes to America, he is aware of only certain aspects of his Self, but once in the new environment, discovers other facets of his personality. It is as Bakhtin argues, that while both Self and Other retain their unique perspectives in an encounter, they are at the same time inevitably changed by that meeting. Each reveals to the other what the other cannot see about itself. As each is a unique being, each sees only certain points of view, and needs the special sight of the other to show it a different view of itself. Yekl is clearly an incomplete Self in the process of discovering new facets of his personality. America is the mirror that allows him to see himself in a different light; the strength, power, determination and tantalising prospect of success he sees reflected there is compelling enough for him to choose to realise the potential he sees. Discovering that he possesses drive and ambition, intelligence and shrewdness, as well as an attraction towards and talent for glamour and flamboyance, Yekl is certain he belongs in modern America.

What finally motivates Yekl in America, then, is the pursuit of freedom to be and do anything he wishes. Everything else is subordinated to his personal and Self-ish desires. Even his love for women stems from Self-ishness rather than from any true regard for women collectively or individually. For instance, Yekl, who declares that he is not "'shtruck on nu goil'" but that he is "dead stuck on all of them in 'whulshale'" (25) does nurse a "lingering tenderness" for his wife (25) but still pursues other women: having women around him is the obvious sign of his charm and power, which he needs to have affirmed. This is clearly illustrated in the incident where Joe the dance school principal asks Yekl to persuade Mamie to dance with a pupil; Yekl remonstrates that Mamie "vouldn't lishn to me neider, honesht," (18) but almost immediately

after, "once more protesting his firm conviction that Mamie would disregard his request," begins "to prove that she would not" (18).

Yekl finds that things are decidedly different in America, however. Yekl discovers that in America he may have what he desires if he is willing to pay the price for it. It is a heady feeling for him to realise that he is now an individual in control of his own destiny. He can finally act as he desires, and so, desiring his independence and freedom above all, divorces his wife to be a new man, a modern American with a new, modern, American wife. This, however, does not cure his restlessness or frustration; Yekl only adds to his confusion over his identity as he deliberately moves away from an essential part of himself, leaving a huge gap in his memory and knowledge of his Self. Cahan again reveals the complexity of Jewish identity: as much as Yekl seems modern in attitude and philosophy, he is still bound by his Jewishness. As much as Cahan hoped to treat the Jew as a modern persona, he had to acknowledge the difficulties and problems that Jewish identity posed. Indeed, Cahan could not ignore the "fundamental building block" of the Jew which shaped and coloured his responses to America: his Jewishness.

The Jews' ability to metamorphose has always guaranteed their continued survival as a people and as individuals. But it may also have finally contributed to their sense of uncertainty and unease over their identity as individuals. Yekl is shown to go through three major rebirths: when he is 'saved' from military service, when he goes to America, and when he divorces Gitl to marry Mamie. Re-adapting to new conditions, this time in America, is, therefore, not an entirely new experience for Yekl. Outwardly, he is able to transform himself rapidly, and we are amazed at his fluid transformation in America in just three years. Cahan's account of Yekl's change underlines the speed and ease with which Yekl manages the transition:

> The broken Russian learned among the Povodye soldiers he had exchanged for English of a corresponding quality, and the [ironsmith's] bellows for a sewing machine - a change of weapons in the battle of life...
>
> ... Jake, following numerous examples, had given up `pants' for the more remunerative cloaks, and having rapidly attained skill in his new trade he had moved to New York, the center of the cloak-making industry (11).

To Yekl, as a Jew and from his personal experience, change is a matter of survival; the question is not that he is forced to change, but what he must change into next. As a Jew in a Gentile world, he has to be alert and adaptable. It is the same for Asriel Stroon, Aaron Zalkin and David Levinsky, who, after they have achieved wealth and power in America feel the loss of their Jewishness as a result of all this changing.

The need to be continually reborn has caused Yekl to lack a definite governing centre. However, this protean quality, is not just something he has `inherited' as a Jew, it is also part of his unique, individual Self as well, for Yekl, despite the fact that Jewishness forms an intrinsic portion of his Self, is not strictly bound by Jewishness, or any communal or even national identity. At the core he is simply an individual, modern, presumably eager to seek out other forms of being, rebelling against the suppression of his Self. His dialogue with America allows him the opportunity to rebel, and to explore the new-found possibilities within himself. Yekl, then, does not lose his sense of Jewishness only after his Americanisation begins; his detachment from Jewishness begins in the Old World, as proven by the hurried impatience with which he peels off his Jewishn ways in America. Cahan narrates that in his early days in America, Yekl had been reluctant to violate

Orthodoxy's strictures such as observing the Sabbath as a day of rest, but his "tender religious feelings" (11) soon led him to break the Law in the US. Cahan testifies: "Soon after his arrival in Boston [Yekl's] religious scruples had followed in the wake of his former first name; and if he was still free from work on Saturdays he found many another way of 'desecrating the Sabbath'" (11-2).

The sense of alienation and the uncertainty that Yekl later feels as a result of abandoning his Jewishness is a familiar state of being for him. As a Jew in Tsarist Russia, he was cut off from the mainstream, his prescribed and socially acknowledged status that of the unwelcome Outsider. Alienation has become a 'legitimate' element of his Self, and because it remains a lingering strand in his make-up, comes to define him, to an extent, in America as well. The difference is that, in America, Yekl feels alienated as an individual Self, rather than solely as a member of a communal group. In this sense, what Richard J. Fein suggests, that the Jewish American is perhaps best defined by an ingrained sense of uncertainty and unease, is true. Unease has become part of the Jew's "fundamental building block," and therefore, an elemental aspect of his Self as a modern individual who has chosen by his sovereign will to make his dwelling place in the New World. This, then, is the ethos that comes to influence his perspective, attitude and behaviour.

Yekl, like any other Self, continues to grow with each new experience that adds to his knowledge and consciousness of his Self. As he learns more about himself and America through his dialogue with America he becomes uneasy when he realises that becoming an American has not trimmed his restlessness. His race towards assimilation, commercial success, and personal freedom from responsibilities has added a troubling sense of guilt and betrayal to his psyche.

Cahan captures Yekl's anxiety and uncertainty in his relationships with Gitl and Mamie, who respectively symbolise the

Old and New Worlds. Yekl finally sends off enough money for Gitl to journey to America after his father dies. His father's death not only signals Yekl's break with the Old World, it is a presentiment of his split with Jewishness as an overt way of life. With his father gone, Yekl's reasons to return to the old village lessen. With the arrival of his wife and child, Yekl has finally no need to return to the Old World. Yekl vows to himself that he "will begin a new life!" (31) when his wife and son join him in America, and indeed he does. As it turns out, however, Yekl's desire to get his wife to America is to enable himself to completely break ties with the Old World. His incompatibility with Gitl `proves' to him that he has little more in common with the Old World. It is obvious right from the moment of Gitl's arrival that the marriage is doomed. When he goes to Ellis Island to meet his family, Yekl is embarrassed at his wife's "uncouth and un-American appearance," as Cahan tells us:

> Jake had no sooner caught sight of her than he had averted his face, as if loth (sic) to rest his eyes on her, in the presence of the surging crowd around him, before it was inevitable. He dared not even survey the crowd to see whether it contained any aquaintance of his, and he vaguely wished that her release were delayed indefinitely (34).

Cahan informs us further:

> ... husband and wife flew into mutual embrace and fell to kissing each other. The performance had the effect of something done to order, which, it must be owned, was far from being belied by the state of their minds at the moment. Their kisses imparted the taste of mutual estrangement to both. In Jake's case the sensation was quickened by the

> strong steerage odors which were emitted by Gitl's person, and he involuntarily recoiled (35).

The reunion only stresses the new distance between the couple:

> For a moment the sight of her, as they were both crouching before the boy, precipitated a wave of thrilling memories on Jake and made him feel in his own environment. Presently, however, the illusion took wing and here he was, Jake the Yankee, with this bonnetless, wigged, dowdyish little greenhorn by his side! (36)

Yekl is aghast that he must now take on the responsibility of wife and child, and must give up his carefree ways:

> That she was his wife, nay, that he was a married man at all, seemed incredible to him. The sturdy, thriving urchin [his son, Yossele] had at first inspired him with pride; but as he now cast another side glance at Gitl's wig he lost all interest in him, together with his mother, as one great obstacle dropped from heaven, as it were, in his way (36).

Because Yekl is uncertain of his own identity, he also appears ambiguous in his feelings for others. Just as his "tender" feelings for his wife are suspect, his 'love' for Mamie, too, seems dubious at times. Where Mamie is concerned he does seem to experience a "strange, hitherto unexperienced kind of malady, which seemed to be gradually consuming his whole being" (60) but the attraction is enhanced by the fact that she is an escape for him, both emotionally and financially. Even when he leaves his home in distress and anger to see Mamie and to tell her that he loves her and

will divorce Gitl to marry her, Yekl, for all his mental torment, is still able to wonder about Mamie's money:

> When she had started to produce the bank book from her bosom he had surmised her intent, and while she was gone he was making guesses as to the magnitude of the sum to her credit. His most liberal estimate, however, had been a hundred and fifty dollars; so that the revelation of the actual figure completely overwhelmed him. He listened to her with a broad grin ... (80).

When he finally gets Mamie at the end of the story, Yekl is overjoyed, but his love for her and his happiness are dampened by a nagging sense of failure and regret, as Cahan reveals:

> He was painfully reluctant to part with his long-coveted freedom so soon after it had at last been attained, and before he had had time to relish it. Still worse than this thirst for a taste of liberty was a feeling which was now gaining upon him, that, instead of a conqueror, he had emerged from the rabbi's house the victim of an ignominious defeat. ...
>
> ... Each time the car came to a halt he wished the pause could be prolonged indefinitely; and when it resumed its progress, the violent lurch it gave was accompanied by a corresponding sensation in his heart (89).

Yekl is clearly troubled by a sense of foreboding that he has made a grave mistake. He imagines Gitl's future to be the exact opposite of his: "bright with joy," while his own "loomed dark and impenetrable" (89). While Gitl has progressed ahead in her own Americanisation, she still seems very much within the Jewish world, unlike Yekl. She will marry the sensible, stable, Bernstein, and

together with little Yossele, will retain a strong sense of family despite the loss of her husband and father to her child. Added to all this is the material gain she has won from the divorce: she and Bernstein plan to start a grocery business with the divorce settlement. Yekl is keenly aware of Gitl's 'victory' compared to his own loss. The knowledge exacerbates his sense of disappointment and frustration.

Part of Yekl's anxiety arises from his guilt at having abandoned his responsibilities as a Jewish husband and father. He realises that his choice to divorce the homely, Old World Gitl for the modern, Americanised Mamie veils his choice to give up his Jewishness. Perhaps this is what bothers him the most, and causes him to consider returning to his former role at the very moment he is on his way to City Hall to marry Mamie:

> What if he should now dash into Gitl's apartments and, declaring his authority as husband, father and lord of the house, fiercely eject the strangers, take Yosele in his arms, and sternly command Gitl to mind her household duties? (89).

Yekl's misgivings demonstrate that as much as his dialogue with America has changed him, he still retains his Jewish consciousness despite his unique, individual choice to give it up. Yekl cannot 'escape' his Jewishness as it is his "fundamental building block" and forms the essence of his Self. In trying to escape it then, he finds himself trapped within it, and becomes distressed.

Cahan's examination of Yekl's situation is an excellent portrayal of the complexities of Jewish American identity. In The Rise of David Levinsky, Cahan turns once more to this theme, and again, his comment seems to be that the Jew's choice to pursue commercial success in America paralyses his spirit because it takes

him far away from the Jewish ideals of home, family, community and spiritual development. David Levinsky's dialogue of becoming American entails his giving up, of his own free will, the better part of his Self while he chooses to hone and develop his less pleasant qualities. Despite his transformation from Talmud scholar to 'cockroach manufacturer', however, Levinsky retains his basic, individual, unique, Self.

In David Levinsky we see the consequences of the choice that Yekl makes, for Levinsky makes the same choice: to rise in America at any cost. The result is loneliness and a sense of loss. Levinsky is naturally shrewd and ambitious, determined to succeed at everything he does, and because his dialogue with America encourages the growth of this aspect of his character, of which Cahan gives us glimpses in his tale of Levinsky's early life in Antomir, Levinsky evolves into a cunning and ruthless entrepreneur. David Levinsky is the first immigrant novel in English to consider another aspect of the American Dream: the corruption of the immigrant as a result of his material success in America. According to Sam Girgus in The New Covenant, Cahan explores and examines how the "emphasis in the idea of being American" has changed from a matter of "values, ideals and strengths" to one of "images" (76) for the Old World immigrant who finds himself having to cope immediately with the hustle bustle of fast-paced, industrialised America on his own. Imitating what he sees and perceives as the goals and realities of American life, he rushes ahead to acquire these 'requirements'. Thus Levinsky becomes self-conscious of his Jewishness, and begins a life-long struggle to erase his Jewish ways and replace them with what he believes are proper American mannerisms. Alvin H. Rosenfeld believes that Levinsky "By heart and by training ... is no worshipper of foreign gods," but is "so blinded by his prospects in America ... that he lets slide his Jewishness and willingly or not, comes to bow before the American

idol [of success]" (1975, 139). The outcome of such capitulation, according to Girgus, is that Levinsky finds his Self "shackled" and "stifled" (76); as a result of his dialogue of becoming American, Levinsky has overlooked the development of his spiritual side, choosing instead to focus on the attainment of his material desires. Levinsky, Girgus notes, "struggles to grow into Americanness," because he feels "deformed" as a Jew; indeed, as Rosenfeld points out, Levinsky is "acutely sensitive" of his "foreign birth" from the start (139). But Levinsky is intrinsically Jewish, and cannot annihilate this essential trait of his Self, so that his fighting against himself only leaves him "feeling always out of place and inferior," (76) and he comes to realise that he will always remain Jewish at heart, whatever his head may dictate. His sense of defeat and inferiority is compounded by his guilt at his renunciation of his Jewishness, which is in effect a rejection of his own Self, and therefore leaves him with a sense of non-being. As Girgus perceives, Levinsky, with his "deep sense of ethnic inferiority," is "Literally a man divided against himself," and is therefore constantly "at war with himself" (76).

David M. Fine acknowledges that Levinsky's rise is "ironic" because it is "achieved at the expense of what is deepest and truest in him" (1973, 53). Fine adds:

> [Levinsky] has realised the American dream of material success, but the victory is hollow. His life has been a dismal failure, he recognizes from his millionaire's perspective, because his outer achievements fail to satisfy his inner hunger (53).

Fine explains: "The conditions of Levinsky's present life have made it impossible for him to bridge the gulf to the past he yearns for, yet, paradoxically, he is never far removed from the past" (55). Even the

loneliness and alienation which have come to define him in the present may be traced back to his past, as Fine suggests: "Loneliness, hunger, and alienation have been so firmly stamped on [Levinsky's] character since his boyhood, they seem the most authentic parts of him" (55).

Isaac Rosenfeld suggests that Levinsky's character is indeed formed by hunger and that all the "individual experiences" of Levinsky's life "contain, as their common element," a "core of permanent dissatisfaction" (Solotaroff ed. 1962, 276) fuelled by this hunger. Levinsky's spiritual dissatisfaction, Rosenfeld elaborates, drives Levinsky to obtain as substitutes such peripheral things as wealth, dignity, intellectual liberty and sex. Dissatisfaction becomes "an organic habit" which "determines" Levinsky's "apprehension of experience in general," and channels "the flow of experience his way," so that he is not "merely the result of what has happened to him but on the contrary, the events in his life are predetermined, in large measure, by what he has already become" (276). Rosenfeld adds that Levinsky's dissatisfaction is "unending," (276) that is, "instead of providing the urge to overcome privation, it returns every fulfilment, by a way no matter how roundabout, to the original tension," effectively ensuring that "no satisfaction is possible" (276). Rosenfeld details:

> ... Levinsky is a man who cannot feel at home with his desires. Because hunger is strong in him, he must always strive to relieve it; but precisely because it is strong, it has to be preserved. It owes its strength to the fact that for so many years everything that influenced Levinsky most deeply - say, piety and mother love-was inseparable from it. For hunger, in this broader, rather metaphysical sense of the term ... is not only the state of tension out of which the desires for relief and betterment spring; precisely because

> the desires are formed under its sign, they become assimilated to it, and convert it into the prime source of all value, so that the man, in his pursuit of whatever he considers pleasurable and good, seeks to return to his yearning as much as he does to escape it (276-7).

According to Rosenfeld, Levinsky's "entire behavior" is characterised by his drive to escape privation but at the same time he clutches on to it as the attitude of being with which he is most familiar, so that everything in his life is "divided, alienated from themselves," and he finds "simplicity ... impossible" (278) for himself.

The conflict that Levinsky experiences may be seen from a Bakhtinian point of view. Having entered into dialogue with America, Levinsky finds that he is ultimately neither solely Jewish or solely American. He now expresses a little of both identities. He is now both Jew as well as American. His personal experience of Jewishness however includes a deep sense of discontentment, so that even after having realised his ambition of success as an American businessman, he retains his dissatisfaction. The Self, we see, changes but is not destroyed.

What is interesting in Isaac Rosenfeld's analysis is his identification of the complexity of Levinsky's situation as being "proundly Jewish" (278):

> ... our whole [Jewish] history is marked by this [paradox]. The significant thing about [this paradox] ... is that it is not confined to single personalities like Levinsky, but is exactly repeated on an impersonal and much larger scale in Jewish history, religion, culture - wherever our [Jewish] tradition and its spirit find expression (278).

Rosenfeld links the paradox of Levinsky's ambition to become American and his continuing yearning after the Jewishness he had chosen to give up in becoming American, to the experience of ***galut***. Rosenfeld clarifies:

> ... the yearning for Israel runs through the Diaspora in no simple sense, as of a fixed desire for a fixed object. It is a reflexive desire, turning on itself and becoming its own object. ... The yearning is itself Jerusalem ... and it is to this yearning that the good Jew remains faithful (278).

If this were not so, Rosenfeld posits, such minute details as the shaving of the beard, one of the outward marks of the Jew's allegiance to his faith, history and people, would not have been given so much significance by the Law: "Otherwise, why the proscription of temporizing in ***Galut***, of making any compromise with desire, no matter how small, even down to the obdurate and seemingly ridiculous prohibition of shaving the beard?" (278). Levinsky's inner restlessness, then, Rosenfeld suggests, stems directly from the Jews' desire to end their identity as an exiled people, a wandering community. But this exile can only be ended with the arrival of the Messiah. And while the Jew keeps up his seemingly interminable wait for the Messiah, his hunger "must be preserved at all cost" (278-9). Rosenfeld elaborates:

> This theme is taken up and elaborated all through Yiddish literature, receiving its ultimate ironic sanctification in the work of Sholom Aleichem, where squalor, suffering, and persecution become the 'blessings of poverty,' signs and stigmata of the condition of being Chosen .... David Levinsky, therefore, does not stand alone, nor does he come, with his four cents, unattended to the American

> shore. He drags the whole past after him, being himself the Diaspora Man (278-9).

While it is true that Cahan highlights Levinsky's Jewishness he also, at the same time, treats Levinsky more as a modern anti-hero than as a Jewish character who tells his specifically Jewish tale. Levinsky, like Yekl and many other of Cahan's characters, can also be recognised as an individual confronting the conflicts within his Self at the same time that he tries to reconcile his Self with his Other, that is, the modern world around him. Levinsky certainly seems typically American in his energy and dynamism to re-create himself by exploring the potential within his Self and developing it according to his sovereign will and desire as an independent individual rather than adhering to prescribed rules of action and behaviour. Even the jadedness of his later years is suggestive of the post-World War I American ethos of alienation, loneliness and yearning for a lost world of innocence and freshness. Indeed, Isaac Rosenfeld agrees, there is a "complementary relation" (274) between the Jew and the American which Cahan instinctively felt and attempted to capture in his fiction. This is surely best seen in David Levinsky, which is essentially a tale of the unreality of the American Dream. Rosenfeld believes David Levinsky demonstrates one of the "dominant myths" of "American capitalism," that the millionaire "finds nothing but emptiness at the top of the heap" (274).[7] David Levinsky, Rosenfeld states, "had little to overcome [inwardly] to grow into the typical American of fortune" (280). Rosenfeld explains:

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[7] In his essay, Rosenfeld mocks at the common tendency to decry material success as a corrupting influence while applauding hard work and ambition at the same time.

> Only the environment was alien to him, but its inner loneliness was anticipated in his own, for one loneliness is much like another; and the very fact that the American environment was alien, and would remain so, to his Jewishness, enabled him to make good in it on his own peculiar terms - to satisfy everything but hunger (280).

Rosenfeld goes on to draw a parallel between Levinsky as an individual and the Jews as a people, suggesting that there is a close relation between Jewishness and Americanness:

> ... if Levinsky's career is understood in its essentially Jewish aspect, it may explain why the Jews, as an immigrant group, were among the first to achieve a virtually flawless Americanization (280).

The Rise of David Levinsky tells the story of the spectacular rise of the orphaned David, who in his own words, "was born and reared in the lowest depths of poverty" in Antomir, Russia, arrived in America "with four cents in [his] pocket," but "thirty or forty years" later, is "recognized as one of the two or three leading men in the cloak-and-suit trade in the United States" (3). The development also sees Levinsky's transformation from old-fashioned yeshiva-trained student to modern, sophisticated man of the world. The novel begins with Levinsky's reminiscences of his childhood, adolescence and early adult life in Antomir. The young David trains to be a rabbi, according to his mother's ardent desire, but left alone as a poor, famished orphan after her shocking death, he learns to question his faith when a fellow student, Naphtali, casts doubt on the existence of God. Levinsky's natural restlessness and desire for change and adventure lead him to seek fulfilment in the

great frenzy of the time: to journey to America to start a new life. He confides to his readers:

> I applied myself to my task with ardor, but it did not last long. My former interest in the Talmud was gone. The spirit was broken irretrievably. ...
>
> My surroundings had somehow lost their former meaning. Life was devoid of savor, and I was thirsting for an appetizer, as it were, for some violent change, for piquant sensations.
>
> Then it was that the word America first caught my fancy.
>
> The name was buzzing all around me. The great emigration of Jews to the United States, which had received its first impulse two or three years before, was already in full swing (59-60).

Levinsky changes his mind when he falls in love with the modern, liberated, Matilda, but she advises him to keep to his decision. She provides money for his passage, and urges him to "become an educated man in America" (80). This becomes Levinsky's cherished ambition until an unexpected incident, an "unimportant accident," a "mere trifle," (187) at his workplace causes him to change course in a fit of hurt pride.

At the sweatshop one day, Levinsky spills a bottle of milk; his employer berates him for his clumsiness, and Levinsky, stung by Jeff Manheimer's "derision," his heart "full of rancor" for his employer, vows revenge (188-9). He plans to lure Manheimer's best worker, Ansel Chaikin, and start his own business as a serious competitor to the Manheimers. He remembers: "The idea took a peculiar hold upon my imagination. ... I beheld [the Manheimers'] downfall. I gloated over it" (189). The plan, however, grows in

scope, "no longer a mere matter of punishing [Jeff Manheimer]" (189). Tempted beyond recall, Levinsky is carried forward not only by visions of wealth, but more so by the "venture of the thing. It was a great, daring game of life" (189). And so is his career launched. The rest of the novel documents his climb to the top, the unscrupulous methods he employs to get there, his vision of life, his growth as an individual and an American, his failures at romance, his increasing loneliness, his disillusionment with his achievements, and his yearning for his lost innocence, something, he comes to realise, he had lost when he had chosen to give up his Jewishness.

Levinsky's dialogue of becoming American encourages the growth of his worldly side while dimming the spiritual side. However, the quick loss of his Jewishness suggests that like Yekl, Levinsky the restless, ambitious young man was also not as deeply motivated by his Jewishness as he had appeared to have been in the Old World. David Singer writes in "David Levinsky's Fall: A Note on the Leibman Thesis" (1967) that it was

> neither economic privation nor religious persecution that first aroused in David the thought of leaving his home, but rather his own estrangement from his former way of life. America appealed to him precisely because it was not Antomir, because in his mind it represented an entirely different pattern of existence (703).

Like Yekl, Levinsky too is attracted to the non-Jewish rather than to the Jewish; for instance, it is not Matilda's personality or appearance that attracts him, but her un-Jewish ways and lifestyle. She represents to him the Other that is as yet unfamiliar and forbidden him. He seems fully aware, for instance, that "She was singularly interesting, but pretty she certainly was not," and that it was her "Gentile name," which "had a world of charm for [his] ear,"

(67) that captured his imagination. Despite his deep knowledge of the Torah and Talmud, Levinsky seems to have only a weak Jewish centre. He loses his faith soon after Naphtali plants doubts in his mind about God. His religious fervour is apparent only in bursts and spurts, according to his state of mind, rather than as sustained faith and belief, as he later admits: "My bursts of piety usually lasted a week or two. Then there was apt to set in a period of apathy, which was sure to be replaced by days of penance and a new access of spiritual fervor" (39). In fact, it is not Levinsky's but his mother's vision that he be a rabbi and a "fine Jew" (23), as he tells us himself:

> The compliments that were paid my brains were ample compensation for my mother's struggles. Sending me to work was out of the question. She was resolved to put me in a Talmudic seminary. I was the "crown of her head" and she was going to make a "fine Jew" of me. ... .
>
> Whenever one of the neighbours suggested that I be apprenticed to some artisan she would flare up. On one occasion a suggestion of this sort led to a violent quarrel.
>
> One afternoon when we happened to pass by a bookstore she stopped me in front of the window and, pointing at some huge volumes of the Talmud, she said:
>
> "This is the trade I am going to have you learn, and let our enemies grow green with envy." (23).

Levinsky seems naturally suited for the wheeling and dealing of the modern business world. He gets ahead in the commercial world through clever use of his intelligence and shrewdness. Cahan shows that Levinsky has always possessed these qualities, and does not come by them only in America although Levinsky's dialogue with America does trigger off his meanness and depravity. Levinsky learns early about power and control and that

the person who wields power is the one in control. The young David chances upon his friend Naphtali playing a fiddle one day and asks him what makes the fiddle work. Naphtali informs him that it is the player who brings the fiddle to life, rather than the bow. The young boy is intrigued; "the question bothered me all that evening," (15) he tells us. He goes to his mother and then a neighbour for clarification:

> "Of course it is not the bow," [the retired soldier] said.
>
> "But if you did not work the bow the strings would not play, would they?" I urged.
>
> "You could play a tune by pinching them," he answered. "But if you just kept passing the bow up and down there would be no tune at all." ...
>
> When we were through [David's mother] questioned [the soldier]: "Do you think he understands it all?"
>
> "He certainly does. He has a good head" ... (15).

The young boy comes to understand the concept only too well. Like Yekl, Levinsky too comes to count on transformation as a mode of survival. As a Jew and as the son of an extremely poor widow, he has to depend on his ability to counter circumstances in order to stay alive. For instance, growing up in abject poverty, David has to deal with the humiliation of being turned out of ***cheder*** [elementary Jewish school] for not paying fees. His mother often had to take him back and beg his teachers to let him continue, promising to settle the debt somehow, or when that failed, she "burst into a flood of threats and imprecations, daring [the teachers] to let a fatherless boy grow up in ignorance of the Word of God" (16). Sometimes, Levinsky remembers, "when a teacher or his wife tried to oust [him] [from ***cheder***], [he] would clutch at the table and struggle sullenly

until they yielded" (16). The trauma of his shaping years not only toughens him and teaches him to live by wit and strength of will, it convinces him that he urgently needs to acquire power and control over his life.

He soon begins to put into practice what he has learnt about power and control. David, a big lad, learns to use his size to his advantage, and as the strongest boy in ***cheder***, has the others under his thumb (22). He reminisces: "Every cheder had its king. As a rule, it was the richest boy in the school, but I was usually the power behind the throne" (22). One day, "one of [David's] potentates" (22) makes fun of his mother. David warns the boy never to repeat his indiscretion but the boy threatens to report him to the teacher, adding a stinging remark: "'Your mother doesn't pay him, anyhow.'" (23). David thrashes the unfortunate boy, after which "His Majesty tearfully begged for mercy," and more importantly for David, "Since then he was under my thumb and never omitted to share his ring-shaped rolls or apples with me" (23). After this important discovery, that, despite the sore disadvantage of his poverty, he can still control the other boys through his intelligence, cunning and superior physical strength, David rapidly perfects his technique. He tells us:

> Often when a boy ate something that was beyond my mother's means - a cookie or a slice of buttered white bread - I would eye him enviously till he complained that I made him choke. Then I would go on eyeing him till he bribed me off with a piece of the tidbit. If staring alone proved futile I might try to bring him to terms by naming all sorts of loathsome objects. At this it frequently happened that the prosperous boy threw away his cookie from sheer disgust, whereupon I would be mean enough to pick it up and eat it in truimph, calling him something equivalent to "Sissy" (23).

These incidents reveal how and why Levinsky developed an attitude of unscrupulous manipulativeness. Being in power and control becomes his method of survival.

Levinsky is made aware of different aspects of his Self by his encounter with America. He chooses to become the potential he sees within himself rather than to continue as an Orthodox Jew in America. This choice includes his decision to change from innocent to exploiter in order to achieve wealth, power and control. To effect this change, Levinsky, who even as a youngster revealed a penchant for manipulating those weaker than he, plans well and begins by studying human character and motive. As he refines his 'skill', his knowledge of human reasoning and behaviour increases rapidly; where he once was unable even to put a name to Matilda's flirting with him, he is now able to convince himself with Machiavellian clarity as to the appropriateness of his behaviour and even to congratulate himself on his brilliant technique. The guiding philosophy in his rise from peddler to millionaire, he reveals, is that:

> We are all actors, more or less. The question is only what our aim is, and whether we are capable of a "convincing personation." At the time I conceived my financial scheme I knew enough of human motive to be aware of this (194).

He practises his "convincing personation" in his very first business venture when he attempts to lure away Ansel Chaikin from the Manheimer brothers. Levinsky's 'capture' of Chaikin is based solely on his immense confidence and belief in himself as well as on his skill at dissembling the truth and inventing lies to deceive Chaikin and especially his shrewd wife into joining his enterprise. Levinsky recalls his strategy of contriving even more elaborate lies in order to keep the Chaikins' interest aflame when his first attempts at

securing orders for cloaks failed: "I talked of 'unforeseen difficulties,' of a 'well-known landlord' whose big check I was expecting every day; I composed a story about that landlord's father-in-law" (213). He resorts to flattery to distract the ever-vigilant Mrs Chaikin as he knew "nothing appealed to her vanity so much as being thought a clever business woman" (213).

Clearly, then, Levinsky the businessman is as watchful and alert as a predator, a far cry from the naive, dreamy lad he used to be in Antomir. Something of a loner as a little boy, David was given to exploring his imagination, as he tells us: "I was a great dreamer of day dreams" (5). He discovers a new facet of his character in America, which thrills him because it promises to bring him the power and wealth he seeks in America. Levinsky grows in confidence, and with great determination, sets out to win opportunities whatever the cost. He uses his imagination now to make people his prey, their weaknesses the means by which he is to come by his wealth and power. He reveals his new understanding of human nature when he goes to the Chaikins' to discuss his first venture, as we read:

> Children often act as a barometer of their mother's moods. So when I had finished and little Maxie slipped up close to me and tacitly invited me to fondle him I knew that I had made a favorable impression on his mother.
>
> I was detained for dinner. I played with Maxie, gave him problems in arithmetic, went into ecstacies over his "cuteness." I had a feeling the way to Mrs. Chaikin's heart was through Maxie, but I took good care not to overplay my part (193-4).

Levinsky is deliberate and conscious about every move he should make. He makes his target his sole and total concern, and entertains

no interruption or distraction while he is pursuing it. He explains his method in enticing Chaikin, for instance:

> The new scheme was scarcely ever absent from my mind. I would ponder it over my work and during my meals. It would visit me in my sleep in a thousand grotesque forms. Chaikin became the center of the universe. I was continually eyeing him, listening for his voice, scrutinizing his look, his gestures, his clothes (190).

Interestingly, he exhibits here the same fervour and intensity he used to display in studying the Talmud in Antomir. Certainly, Levinsky has always been noted for his extreme displays of emotion, for instance in his regard for Reb Sender, his mentor in Antomir. What has changed in America then is not Levinsky himself, but the Other with which he is engaged in dialogue. The outcome is that a new facet of his identity is revealed. As Bakhtin points out, the Self gains a new perspective of itself from its encounter with an Other. Essentially despite his change from dreamer to ruthless businessman, he remains the same Self, motivated by the same impulses. Once again Cahan demonstrates both the inevitability of change as a result of dialogue as well as the indestructability of the unique, "fundamental building block" of the Self.

Levinsky's choice to become American works out drastically for him. First, he consciously seeks to change his appearance to "look American," as he considers his Jewish appearance a "physical defect" that "no surgeon in the world was capable of removing" (291). Levinsky states with conviction that "People who were born to speak English were superior beings," and confides that "Even among fallen women [he] would seek those who were real Americans" (176). Throughout the novel, he exhibits his Anglophilia without reserve:

> I sought to dress like a genteel American. ... I was forever watching and striving to imitate the dress and the ways of the well-bred American merchants with whom I was, or trying to be, thrown. All this, I felt, was an essential element in achieving business success; but the ambition to act and look like a gentleman grew in me quite apart from these motives (260).

Then, he strives to change his values. He strays far from the Jewish Law of his youth to embrace the corrupting ideals of capitalism. He chooses to lay aside the Torah injunctions and Talmud teachings he still knows by heart as useless maxims in the land of golden opportunity, and takes up instead a new code of living, one that is based on selfishness and materialism. He learns the new law by heart from his new mentor, Meyer Nodelman, who tutors him from his own Book of Proverbs:

> "Don't bite off more than you can chew .... Finding it easy to get people to trust you is not enough. You must also find it easy to pay them. ...
>
> "Be pleasant with the man you deal likes it, anyway." with, even if he knows you don't mean it. He
>
> "Take it from me, Levinsky: honesty is the best policy. There is only one line of business in which dishonesty pays: the burglar business, provided the burglar does not get caught. If I thought lying could help my business, I should lie day and night. But I have learned that it hurts far more than it helps. Be sure that the other fellow believes what you say. If you have his confidence you have him by the throat." (238).

Soon, Levinsky is adept at subverting the truth: he cheats, deceives, flatters and manipulates to get his way. He underpays his workers and is not above cheating the workers' union or offering bribes to get round union regulations; he has in fact, he claims, "special talents" for "dodging" the union (345-6). He reveals:

> ... I adopted another system: the men would receive the union pay in full, but on the following Monday each of them would pay me back the difference between the official and actual wage (285).

He was the only man in my employ who actually received the full union price. In addition to this, I paid him the full broker's commission for every new man he furnished me, and various sums as bribes pure and simple (295).

Levinsky learns from Nodelman that he has an honest face, whatever his heart may be hiding, and that he should use this "credit face" to his advantage in business (222). Levinsky too comes to see that it is "the best policy to tell ... the unembellished truth," (211) but shrewdly decides which part of the truth to hold back and which to divulge for his own benefit. He develops a "conscious simple-heartedness" designed to mislead customers. Levinsky recalls one incident where he had planned elaborately to land a deal; after many failed attempts to meet the successful cloak-buyer, Huntingdon, Levinsky finally contrives an informal meeting. He flatters the older man and wins his confidence with a show of calculated honesty, confessing that he had actually expanded much time and energy planning the so-called chance encounter. He recalls Huntingdon's response:

> Perhaps he was flattered by my picture of him as an inaccessible magnate; perhaps he simply appreciated the

> joke of the thing and the energy and tenacity I had brought to it, but he let me narrate the adventure in detail. I told him the bare truth, and I did so with conscious simple-heartedness, straining every nerve to make a favorable impression (338).

Levinsky gets his orders and thus succeeds in hunting down Huntingdon, but his manipulating and his 'dishonest honesty' do not endear him to his readers.

Levinsky's detailed expose of his own wrongdoings makes us wonder if his whole autobiography follows this principle of "conscious simple-heartedness," and is intended to cheat his readers into feeling sympathy for him. Jules Chametzky suggests that Levinsky's candour may be "self-serving" (1977, 136) in this respect. In Chametzky's opinion, Levinsky "reveals an emotional deficiency that prevents him from being fully human as that term is commonly understood" (136) and that there is a "deeper, and not always conscious, level at which Levinsky deceives himself [and his readers] about the degree of his self-absorption" (137). According to Chametzky, Levinsky's "self-serving lament" that he is lonely and yearns for his lost innocence not only wins him sympathy from his readers, who are repulsed by his confessions, it "takes the curse of success off the 'sad millionaire'" in a "sly maneuver" that allows him to "have his cake and eat it, too" (137). Chametzky is here referring to what Isaac Rosenfeld has termed a "myth," that financial success is a curse because it corrupts and leaves the successful feeling too lonely at the top to enjoy their millions. In order to win sympathy then, they successful speak of how lonely they are at the top. Levinsky, for instance, Rosenfeld posits

> is not enough a materialist to enjoy his goods as they come to him and [to] welcome the spiritual consolations that

> worldly pleasures bestow. "Money isn't everything," he will say, making more, and he says this to preserve an air of disconsolateness, as though virtue were impossible without a sour face. He does all this for show, but unconsciously his affectations hit upon the truth. All his life he is at loose ends, and expert only in ennui, which Tolstoy defined as the desire for desire, cousin to Levinsky's yearning. And even if none of this is true, and there is ... a direct gratification in wealth as such, it is still significant that most of us profess it to be true, clinging to a protective disenchantment (279-80).

Indeed, although Levinsky speaks often of his loneliness and yearning for his innocent youth - the novel, we remember, even begins on this note - and readily confesses to his readers his shady business dealings, he shows little remorse for his misdemeanours. In fact he congratulates himself on his acumen. As an avid, intelligent, student of literary works by authors like Dickens, Thackeray and Trollope and disciple of socio-anthropological theories such as those forwarded by Darwin and Herbert Spencer, Levinsky considers himself to have progressed as a keen judge of human character and personality:

> I almost felt as though Darwin and Spencer had plagiarized a discovery of mine [that some people are naturally built to survive the tough competition for continued survival]. ... Later, however, I was overborne by the wondrous novelty of the thing and by a sense of my own futility, ignorance and cheapness. ... I sat up nights reading these books. Apart from the purely intellectual intoxication they gave me, they flattered my vanity as one of the "fittest." It was as though all the wonders of learning, acumen, ingenuity, and assiduity displayed in these works had been intended, among other

> purposes, to establish my title as one of the victors of Existence (282-3).

> I gave myself credit for my knowledge of human nature. "That's one of the secrets of my success," I thought. I complimented myself on the possession of all sorts of talents, but my keenest ambition was to be recognized as an unerring judge of men. ...
>
> ... I was convinced that now at last my insight was a thoroughly reliable instrument (349-50).

Basking in his sense of superiority, Levinsky looks down on others: "A working-man, and every one else who was poor, was an object of contempt to me - a misfit, a weakling, a failure, one of the ruck" (282-3). After having achieved high social position, wealth and power he had craved, he states with his usual pride and arrogance:

> People were loading me with flattery. Everybody was telling me that I had "got there," and some were hinting, or saying in so many words, that I was a man of rare gifts, of exceptional character. I accepted it all as my due. Nay, I regarded myself as somewhat underestimated. "They really don't understand me," I would think to myself. "They know that I possess brains and grit and all that sort of thing, but they are too commonplace to appreciate the subtlety of my thoughts and feelings."
>
> Every successful man is a Napoleon in one thing at least - in believing himself the ward of a lucky star. I was no exception to this rule. I came to think myself infallible. ...
>
> I looked upon poor people with more contempt than ever. I still called them "misfits," in a Darwinian sense. The removal of my business to Broadway was an official

> confirmation of my being one of the fittest, and those golden inscriptions on my two office doors seemed to proclaim it solemnly (347).

It is after this change as a result of the choices he makes in America that Levinsky begins to speak of loneliness and yearning more consistently. He admits that the "last thread [to the Old World] snapped" soon after his emigration to the US when he gives himself over to "a period of unrestrained misconduct" (125). He elaborates: "Intoxicated by the novelty of yielding to Satan, I gave him a free hand and the result was months of debauchery and self-disgust" (125). Years later, Levinsky realises that he has developed many unappealing characteristics, that "prosperity had turned [his] head," (347) and that he ought to have chosen to remain true to his dream of pursuing knowledge and education as noble ideals. It is in fact his abandoning of that noble plan that confirms his material rise and spiritual decline. College, he asserts, because of the knowledge, education and better quality of life it could give, was for a long time the "symbol of [his] spiritual promotion" (169). He adds reverentially: "University-bred people were the real nobility of the world. A college diploma was a certificate of moral as well as intellectual aristocracy" (169). The college building was to him the "synagogue of [his] new life" (169) and as dear to him as his "bride-elect" (175). At the end of the novel, he broods reflectively:

> There are moments when I regret my whole career, when my very success seems to be a mistake.
>
> I think that I was born for a life of intellectual interest. I was certainly brought up for one. The day when that accident turned my mind from college to business seems to be the most unfortunate day in my life. I think that I should be much happier as a scientist or writer, perhaps. I

> should then be in my natural element, and if I were doomed to loneliness I should have comforts to which I am now a stranger. That's the way I feel every time I pass the abandoned old building of the City College (529).

The "destruction" of his "temple" signifies the death of his youth and innocence. Levinsky encounters many other disappointments on his way up the social ladder, such as his failed attempts at romance, most significantly with Dora Margolis and Anna Tevkin. His brooding increases, and he seems to grow in unhappiness: "My shop had lost all meaning to me. I vaguely longed to flee from myself" (311). Like Aaron Zalkin and Asriel Stroon, Levinsky suffers now from disillusionment, frustration, bitterness, loneliness and yearning for his lost ideals. "I was a lonely man," he often insists now, emphasising that although he was "enjoying life in a multitude of ways," and there was "no dearth of woman or song in the program," he was still "at the bottom of [his] consciousness ... always lonely" (357). Elsewhere he moans: "My loneliness often took on the pungence of acute physical discomfort. The more I achieved, the more painful was my self-discovery" (377). He longs now to return to the old ideals. College may be out of his grasp, but he still dreams of his other old ideals:

> Odd as it may appear, my romantic ideals of twenty years ago now reasserted their claims upon me. It was my ambition to marry into some orthodox family, well-to-do, well connected, and with an atmosphere of Talmudic education-the kind of match I had dreamed of before my mother died, with such modifications as the American environment rendered natural (377).

Levinsky becomes homesick (377) but realises with anguish and hopelessness that he must now bear the consequences of his choices in America for he cannot cancel or reverse them. His physical and psychological attachments to the Old World have been broken one after the other: Reb Sender's death, Matilda's new life, Anna's rejection of his marriage proposal, his change of feeling towards a former teacher, the brutal Shmerl the Pincher (503-4), his dismal meeting with Gitelson, with whom he shared passage to the US. Clearly, as he himself recognises, his dialogue with America has changed him and his needs irretriveably.

In his later years, Levinsky is eager to re-instate his Jewish consciousness as he now feels a lack of fulfilment in being American. In fact, he now feels that it is his Jewishness that most clearly affirms his Self. Recognising the uniqueness and wealth of Jewish life, Levinsky now upholds it for itself even as he acknowledges that he is American in appearance, thought, behaviour and attitude.

His discontentment, however, remains with him as it does with Aaron Zalkin, Asriel Stroon and Yekl because of his knowledge of what he has lost, and also because yearning has come to be an essential trait of his Jewish Self, as we have considered elsewhere. Levinsky appears to be a man exiled within a conundrum of identity that stems both from his Jewishness as well as his peculiar individuality. Unable to be fully Jewish and yet unable to be fully Gentile, he dwells in a state of ***galut***, doing his best to achieve equilibrium in his uneasy privilege of being both Jew and American. This is perhaps why Jules Chametzky writes that David Levinsky is a "haunting, suggestive, ... prophetic book," for

> Two generations from Levinsky, many thoughtful people in the Jewish community speak of a spiritual malaise that seems to be present in its more or less affluent American

existence. Certainly this awareness is discernible in the work of serious American-Jewish writers when they explore their own ambivalent experience in this new world (1977, 143-4).

EPILOGUE

TRANSCENDING JEWISHNESS: THE STORY OF THE HUMAN SELF

What is truly exciting, and humanising, about Mikhail Bakhtin's work is that it strikes a familiar chord. Bakhtin reiterates what we already know - indeed, his life's work is based on the theses of other philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Hermann Cohen. The human need to know one's identity reflects the intuitive belief that each Self is sovereign. This is why we are profoundly concerned about establishing and understanding our personal histories as we are about our collective history as a species.

The Self is unique, this we know. As a unique being, the Self makes independent choices that direct its dealings with the world around it. We know this. We also know that despite its basic inalterability, the Self does, however, change when it encounters other Selfs. Indeed, as a living organism, the Self is naturally driven towards interaction with other Selfs. This, too, we know, for we often affirm and look forward to communion and dialogue as paths towards understanding and growth. We know, then, that the story of the human Self is ultimately a paradox: even as the Self remains intrinsically itself, it changes, and even as it changes, it remains inalterably itself.

Bakhtin's discoveries are not new. We are ourselves living proof of what he so neatly summarises for us. We have long been involved in the business of discovering our Selfs, from the beginning of time, in fact. That is finally the main theme of the story of humankind - the knowing of the Self from within ourselves and from without, with the help of the Other. Even the ancient battle between God and Satan revolves around identity and Self-discovery. As Creator, God affirms the individual's be-ing,

which leads to the crafting and shaping of identity; Satan the destroyer, on the other hand, confuses be-ing, and therefore fragments identity. The most widely-known and frequently retold fairy tales which initiate us as children into the deepest, most profound passions and subtleties of the human mind and soul also instruct us about the human Self. Whether it is the alienated step-daughter who eventually becomes a princess, the shunned frog who knows he is really a prince, the churlish beast who is brought to recognise the humanity of his inner Self, or the sorceress who finds she cannot forever conceal her evil Self under the illusion of beauty, the lesson is often that the Self always remains itself and cannot be hidden for long.

Cahan's Jewish stories, as we have seen in previous chapters, are also about the Self. However, many of his stories are familiar in a disturbing way, for his stories of Self-discovery reverse the order we have learnt to affirm and with which we have come to identify. The Rise of David Levinsky, for instance, is The Ugly Duckling in reverse; in one of the most triumphant of tales, the duckling realises he is ugly only because he is a swan, and thus finds fulfilment in a new beginning, but Levinsky's new life in America only perverts his sense of who he really is, taking him far away from his noble dreams of education to the discontentment of a rich but lonely man in this brooding novel. Cahan's protagonists, like Levinsky, Yekl and Rouvke Arbel, commit the big sin of going against their true Selfs when they choose to discard their Jewishness for what they perceive as Americanness. Only much later do they realise how damaging their choice has turned out to be, when they find themselves spiritually dislocated and yearning for the world they have lost.

Cahan's attitude towards Americanisation is certainly ambivalent, as is his protagonists'. Cahan, in his Jewish Daily Forward, promoted Americanisation with vigorous conviction, but in his fiction, aired and explored the doubts and trauma of

assimilation. He exposed the bitterness and discontentment of the Americanised Jew who finds in his later years that the American ideals he had so adopted, such as sovereignty of will and total independence from traditionally and culturally imposed behaviour, may have brought him material success but they have also led to the splintering of his Self. The Americanised Jew longs to return to his cherished past, but is psychically too far removed from that past to be able to do so. Asriel Stroon, for instance, decides to leave the US, but chooses to go to Israel rather than back to his native Pravly in the Old World. As a Jew he is guilty of having consciously and easily given up his Jewishness to pursue the American Dream of success, wealth and power, and tries to redeem himself with the extreme act of renouncing his Americanness and retiring to his origins as a Jew. As an individual, however, Asriel is strongly motivated by the impulse of his Self, which is in essence modern and eager to be free of strict racial or communal boundaries in order to explore the many possibilities of being. Although Asriel's moral predicament is a tough, complex one, his act of restitution seems too facile, too predictable; he has already satisfied his craving for wealth and power; it is natural that in his quieter years, he is awakened to his mortality and should want to re-discover his earlier, more familiar experiences. The beauty of Cahan's vision is that it takes in Asriel's inner suffering while also seeing the complex psychological impulses of the old man's Self.

The complexity of Jewish American identity is apparent in Cahan's work. Cahan's Jewish Americans are dejected and in a state of yearning because of the loss of their personal history, and the fear that they will also lose their collective history as Jews, although they may not possess a solely or even dominantly Jewish perspective. Despite their commercial success in America, then, they are frustrated and discontented in America, and slowly come to the conclusion that they will always have to carry their disillusionment within them. They also feel guilty because they

feel responsible, to a degree, for their own inner suffering. As sovereign beings, they had chosen to give up Jewishness to pursue material security in America. As Jews and Americans, Cahan's protagonists live in this state of tension and unease, in a kind of mental exile in which they are constantly aware of their duality, but are largely incapable of reconciling both strands of their consciousness.

The Jewish American's yearning, Cahan suggests in his fiction, stems partly from the complexity of Jewish identity as a whole. Cahan clearly suggests in David Levinsky, for instance, that the Jewish American's yearning is a collective experience that originates in the pain and suffering of the Jewish people as a whole. It is something the Jew cannot consciously discard as it is an inherent characteristic of his personality. Cahan links this yearning to Jewish history, and suggests that to an extent, Levinsky inherits his sense of yearning, his air of despondency, from the larger Jewish experience. His frame of mind as he grows older then, is not exactly a new or surprising experience for him. Because Levinsky's essential Self is motivated by a sense of yearning, he finally returns to this state of being when the excitement of exploring possibilities of be-ing in America wears off. It is a complex circle of be-ing which again illustrates the basic inalterability of the Self. Despite the changes it undergoes in America, the Jewish Self remains intrinsically Jewish in perpective as Jewishness is its "fundamental building block".

In removing to the US, the Jewish Self, for its own survival, could hardly choose *not* to assimilate. Cahan acknowledges in both his journalistic and fictive writings that assimilation was the most logical option open to the Jew (or to any immigrant to any land, certainly) who had already chosen to uproot himself. Firstly, their choice to migrate reflects the desire to change, whether conscious or not, and suggests that they were ready to consider becoming Americans, or would be at some point

in the future. Secondly, it is essential to think and feel as the Other would in order to survive in a foreign land. The immigrants, survivors if nothing else, knew they would have to, to an extent, become foreign to themselves as a result of their choice to move. Cahan's Jewish stories treat assimilation as an accepted fact, but highlight the uniqueness of the Self as well as the different ways in which each Self manages its assimilation. For Levinsky, Yekl and Rouvke, the decision is to Americanise as quickly as possible and to climb the social and financial ladders as rapidly as they can, caring little for scruples. Others, like Michalina, Rabbi Eliezer and Bernstein, for instance, choose to tread more carefully. Levinsky and Yekl choose rapid assimilation because of their energy and restlessness, natural traits of their Selfs. Michalina and Rabbi Eliezer, on the other hand, are naturally more compassionate and humane, and so, allow their consciences to play a significant role in the shaping of their new lives in the US. Michalina and the old rabbi are too aware of the changes taking place in their inner lives to pin their hopes on material success. Their trauma and suffering, therefore, contrast greatly against Levinsky's "conscious simple-heartedness".

Ultimately, however, Cahan's contemplation of Jewish American identity suggests that his Jewish Americans are more American than Jewish in spirit. He captures their daring and sense of adventure, their proud independence and stubborn belief in themselves in choosing to break away from the clutch of tradition to chart their own personal destinies. All of this links them to the American ethos of independence and originality. Even their later despondency parallels the American sense of regret for the loss of European culture, tradition and learning that we see in modern American Literature.

Indeed, there is much to link Jewishness to Americanness. Basically, both the Jewish and American ways of life emphasise human dignity, freedom, equality and justice. Sam Girgus notes

this fact in The New Covenant, where he echoes Milton R. Konvitz's conviction that the American idea[1] is "basic to Jewish identity and to the modern Jewish mind" (6). Girgus acknowledges that the American idea inspired by Theodore Parker, Emerson and Walt Whitman derive from Jewish scriptures and the Talmud. He draws attention to the "importance of the ideology of America" to "many Jewish thinkers and writers" who saw in "the American Way" the "development of Jewish values and beliefs that proved the consistency and compatibility between both traditions" (4). For some of these American leaders, Girgus continues, the American Way was

> almost a mirror image of the most important teachings of Jewish culture and tradition. These Jews ... maintain[ed] that American Jews can be most Jewish by being totally devoted to the ideals of the American Way since Jewish concepts of human dignity and freedom provide the foundation for the American Way in the first place (4).

Girgus goes on to point out that Jewish writers, intellectuals and public figures often refer to the ideals of the American Way. Jewish writers such as Saul Bellow, for instance, "often write with the vision and sensibility of prophets and judges who stand between the American Way and the people" (12). Girgus concludes, aptly, that the similar visions of both Jewishness and Americanness "demolishes the wall dividing Jewish from

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[1] By this, Girgus means "the set of values, beliefs, and traditions of freedom, democracy, equality, and republicanism that are known as the American Way and that give America a unique identity in history" (3).

American identities" and "heals conflicting loyalties" by making Jewishness and Americanness "mutually re-enforcing ideologies" (4).

Cahan's fiction reveals many similarities inherent in Jewish and American thought. In David Levinsky, for example, Reb Sender, the young Levinsky's spiritual mentor, encourages him to be honest, upright, pure in his motives, and to work hard with integrity and discipline, all American ideals, especially of the American work ethic.

Ultimately, Cahan's fiction goes beyond pointing out important links between American and Jewish identities; it is recognisably universal in theme and tone. Indeed, it is most memorable for its universal note, for its story of the human Self. It is the Bakhtinian principles inherent in Cahan's stories - the uniqueness of the Self and its sovereign right to choose its path of change; the inevitability of change within the Self due to dialogue with the Other/s which the Self depends on for its own survival; the final immutability of the Self - that are most impressive in Cahan's work. Cahan's fiction investigates the profundities of the human psyche; it delves into the complexities of the human being. The themes he develops, namely, disintegration, alienation, discontentment, yearning, the identity of the Self, are all themes that concern any individual who experiences uprooting from one milieu to another. Coming out of the familiar and journeying into the foreign is indeed a traumatic experience for any Self. Cahan's themes are most familiar to modern readers who as modern beings commonly possess multi-levels of identity and therefore often find themselves contemplating their 'true Selfs'.

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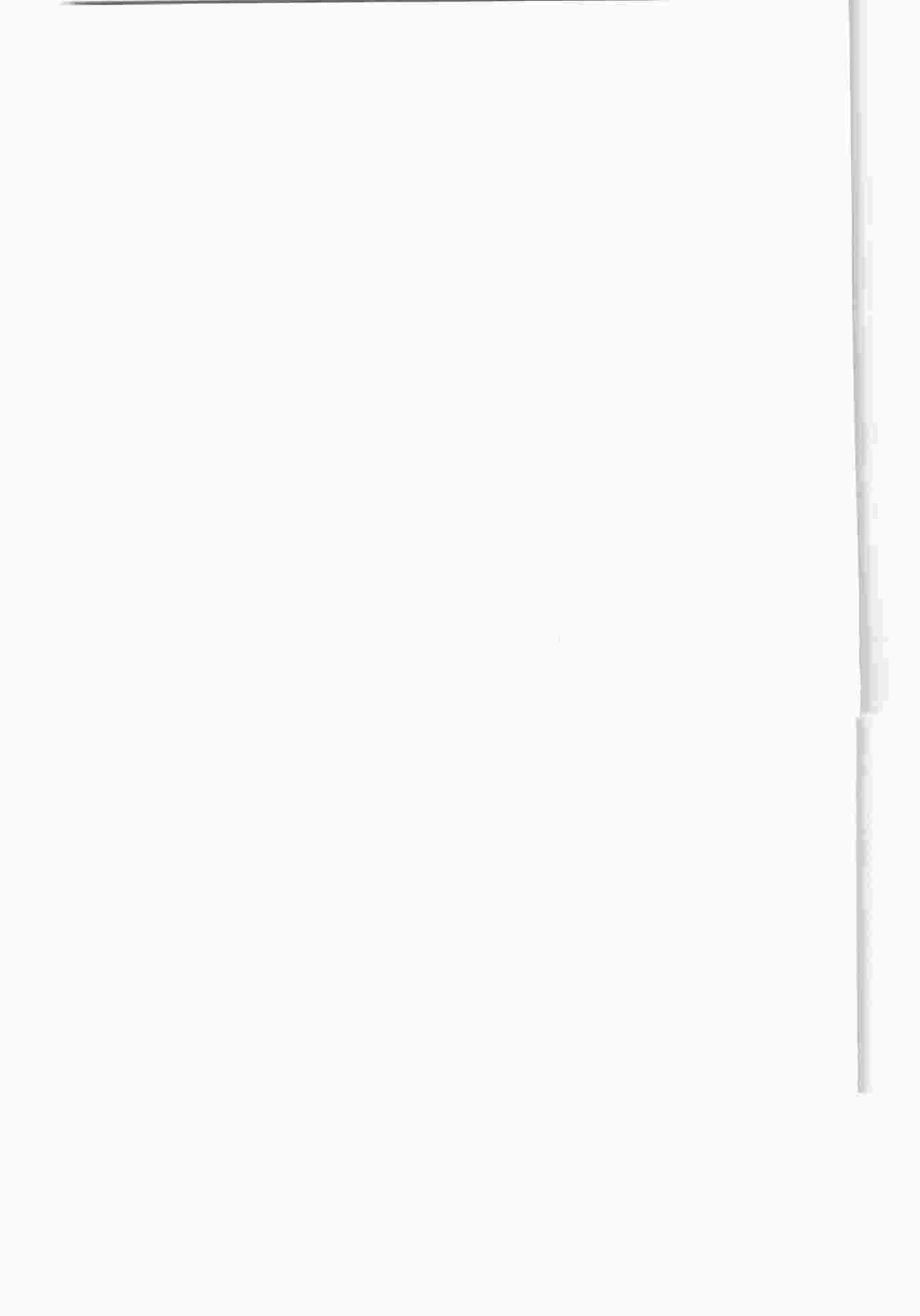

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