

K O L

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# KOL '65

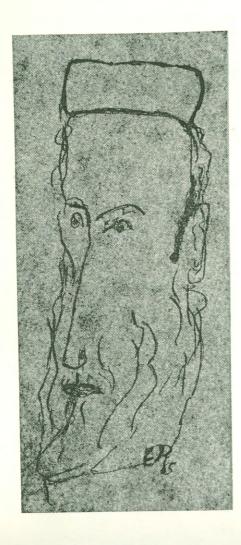
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## Long Black Grotesque

### Alan Shapiro



I was sitting in Rabbi Rethberg's Bible class. Today was the third day in a row that he'd managed to twist the text around into an overcome-your-assimilation-tendencies-by-outward-manifestations-of-

your-Jewishness spiel."

". . . and a beard does for the religious Jew what a Roman collar does for the priest. Outward signs of your faith subject you to the constant scrutiny of those around you, thereby making you more observant. . . ." As Rabbi Rethberg spoke a beard began to appear on his previously clean-shaven face; it grew; it grew; it grew until it reached down to his belt! He was coming towards me, repeating over and over again, "Long black coats are good for Jews! Long black coats are good for Jews! Long black coats are . . .!"

"Go back to the ghetto!" I screamed as I raced out of the room. Running, running, running away from that fanatic. Clutching my varmulka so it wouldn't fall off. . . . Running up Fifth Avenue — I'm proud of my yarmulka — don't stare at me; don't stare at me; don't stare at me! I belong here as much as any of you - I'm proud that I'm Jewish — I'm not old-fashioned. I'm not a fanatic! Don't stare! Don't stare! Damn you! Damn you! Damn . . . .

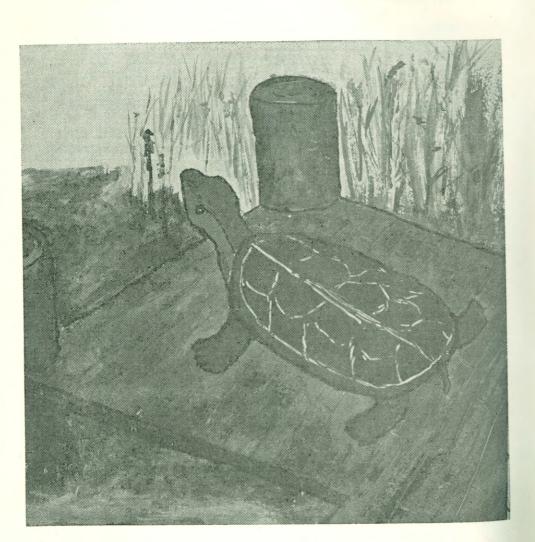
My reflection in a shop window: Long black coat, beard, big black hat, and my nose was growing, growing, growing! Like a parrot's . . . Bigger than a parrot's . . . As big as a fanatic's! Ripping the hat off - ripping the coat off - but only a yarmulka in my hand! The reflection was of ME again. I put the yarmulka back on . . . and I heard Rabbi Rethberg speak . . . and I saw them stare; they stared, not at Rabbi Rethberg in the yeshiva, but at me on Fifth Avenue. No more!

My son was strolling up Fifth Avenue without a yarmulka. My son! My son? He stopped in front of a church . . . he started up the stairs . . . I couldn't stop him — I begged . . . I begged . . . I . . .

Rabbi Rethberg was smiling as his son chanted the Hebrew equivalent of "I do" to the girl standing next to him. He smiled through his beard. His son flashed a smile in the midst of his beard. Rabbi Rethberg's wife smiled through her beard. The bride smiled through her beard. . . .

My son, my son! Come back! . . . Help me, Rabbi Rethberg! "... long black coats are good for Jews. Long black coats are good for Jews. Long black coats are. . . ."

NO!



### The Jale: a Written Narrative

Lewis E. Koplowitz

]

The clear water trickles over smooth, mossy rocks; winks of sunlight prying through the overhanging foliage dance off the brook's uneven surface, and Ezra's legs dangle off the edge of the

"ol' gray dock."

It does look very much like some sort of short dock. It is one of those things that kids find in the woods. Actually they don't really find them because they are already there; and everybody knows of them. Yet each kid discovers it for himself in his own way. An educated guess is that the dock was used to support some tramp's shack, the shack now some other hobo's kindling; but that's how educated guesses are, always missing the point.

Anyway, the dock is there, and Ezra accepts it. A tremendous amount of lore lives around the ol' gray dock, and Ezra knows it all. Every kid knows it, he has to. It is a solemn duty to hand down these tales. Nobody ever says so; it is understood. And Ol' Eli, Ezra's mentor, knows more of the dock than anybody, more than

even any kid.

H

Eli owns the general store in town, Aperon's Emporium. He has everything you could want, even peanut butter. When Ezra goes down to the store (when he has a day off from fishing), he talks with Ol' Eli, and Eli tells him some fantastic stories about the ol' gray dock, and the woods, and the stream. Eli talks with anyone and everyone, but mostly with the kids. He isn't like the other grown ups around. He is the source of at least half of their tall tales. There is one story that Ezra likes most, about an old turtle that Eli found one day at the ol' dock.

Eli was alone, sitting on the ol' gray dock (in those days it still had some blue paint on it), dangling a pole over the end. It was a strong fresh branch that he held, a piece of white string on the end, a blunted hook on the end of that, a squirming worm on

that - all with Eli on the other end.

If you had asked Eli what all that paraphernalia was for—well, everyone knew there was nothing but minnows in the brook—he would have wrinkled up his freckled nose and spit out, "I'm

fishin', ya can't fish without a rod. How ya gonna catch a fish with out a pole an' a string, a hook an' a worm?

Sure, he would have explained, without a pole and string you'd have to stand in the brook and then you'd frighten the fish. Without a hook you couldn't hold 'em once you got 'em. Without the bait you couldn't get them to look at your hook. Everything had to be there.

Eli had his gear all set, so he sat there looking at the ripples and the whirls. That was what fishing was really about — looking for ripples and whirls, trying to guess when the next one would come up. So Eli would always sit, looking at the ripples.

He would fix his eyes on a ripple, noting how it would toss the sunlight off its back; or he would follow a rivulet, watching it consume itself in its minute fury. He knew every reed and rush. That day, as he was following a rivulet into the reeds, he caught sight of something out of place. It was the white underside of a turtle. Somehow it had been turned over and was caught in the reeds. His mind worked with unnatural speed. He had to get to it before the water turned it rightside up.

He slipped off the dock. Picking out the right stepping-stones, he began his maneuver to the other side of the stream. Using his rod as a support, he moved closer and closer to the turtle. Eli stretched, caught hold of his legs, and snatched him to shore. He had very nearly hurt the creature, but he had him, and he had him good. The turtle merely retreated into his shell. Eli took him home.

#### III

"I took 'im home," as Eli tells the tale, "and you should've seen 'im. I just left 'im there on the cabin floor in front of the fireplace. Why that cabin was a castle to anything that ol' turtle had ever seen before! Yessir, I just leave him there on the floor. About an hour or so later, he pokes his head outa his shell and the first thing he sees is the fire. Well, he just blinked once or twice and went back into his shell. Pretty soon — I guess he figured he wasn't goin' anywhere — he pokes his head out, looks around, and starts to walk over to the fire. He was gettin' kinda close, so I put my hand out to stop 'im. Why that critter just nipped me and shot back into his shell.

"Well sir, it was a long time before he really got used to the

place. I guess feedin' 'im outa my hand was the trick that did it. Pretty soon he was climbin' all over the place, looking at things, getting into everything. Three or four times I had t'haul 'im outa tough spots or he would've been a goner for sure — like the time he almost fell off the stones on the edge of the well. It's a good thing I was there. Funny thing about turtles. They don't normally take to trainin'. Guess they just like water more'n anything. I guess that's why he was always near that well.

"Anyway, we got on fine, Mose and I. Called him Mose 'cause I found him in them reeds and set him free, just like ol' Moses in the Bible.

"Well, all the other kids in the neighborhood had turtles too—used t'race 'em over the flats. Set'em out early in the morning and coax 'em on till high noon. Somebody'd get his old man's watch. We'd each put our racers under a box, and somebody'd start us by givin' a sign to lift the boxes. At twelve noon whosever turtle had gone the furthest, why he took the prize. Don't recall what the prize was, but that weren't important. It was havin' the best turtle, havin' raised him better'n anybody else.

"So me and Mose worked out. I got 'im a tub with a stone and some water in it. Two or three times a day, regular like, sunup and just before sundown, I'd take 'im out and practice with 'im. Once in a while we'd get out on a bright night, but that wasn't too usual. I guess Mose needed a lota time in the water—after all he was a turtle, sorta half-fish, half-animal, ya know.

"Well, pretty soon we had worked out so much together, people'd say Mose and I started to look alike. I couldn't see it, but them other people, why I guess they were just mockin' me, playing around. Course, even I'd admit he was half-human, the way he took to racin' and trainin', but, naw, he didn't look like me.

"That summer went fast, and pretty soon they were gonna have the big turtle races. Mose and I were really knockin' ourselves out. I was even including' an extra prayer every night that we'd do all right.

"The leaves started turnin' reds and oranges and it was time for the big race. The night before I was up prayin' and waitin'. There was supposed to be a tremendous number of racers comin' out; somebody said seventy turtles. When we got there at sunup, there were eighteen boxes lined up, lined up in a clean row.

## Squirrel and Sylvie

Manny Mond

V

"It was real early morning when we started. Mavis threw up his jacknife. When it struck the dirt, we lifted up the boxes and started coaxin'.

"I leaped out in front of Mose. Most of the other guys tried to push from behind, but half of the other racers just crawled back into their shells. I knew Mose; I knew turtles. When they're crawlin' over somethin' strange — like dry land — you gotta give'em somethin' to go at — like your hand or your foot. I was on my knees all the way.

"I got down so he could see me face to face. I knew, when he looked into my eyes, I had im, and we had them. The sun was hot. I knew it was going to do somethin to Mose, but he didn't seem to care. I backed up, he kept comin. By ten o'clock we had left em all behind. But Mose was beginning to tire. It was another hundred yards to the creek which bordered the flats. No one had ever made it to the creek before.

"Mose came. And it was ten-thirty. Mose came, and it was eleven. Mose came and so did eleven-thirty. At eleven fifty-five Mose stopped. He just stopped. He didn't seem to know he had almost made it. He couldn't go on for love or fear — he just stopped. It was eleven fifty-seven (the timekeeper shouted from down the field). I picked Mose up. You could see he was tired and dry. I put him in the creek. All of a sudden he seemed to come alive, a swimmin' and a splashin' — why I never did see anything like it. Just like he was comin' alive again.

"Well, I just left him there. When the timer yelled twelve o'clock, Mose was nowhere to be seen. Just disappeared. I guess it didn't matter. Everybody knew Mose was the winner.

VI

"Well, we never found that turtle again, not to this day — but I ain't lookin'. I know he won that race and so did everyone there. Everyone knows about Mose. Why I suspect you'll tell your children just like I'm tellin' you. Why you smilin' son of a gun, I'll bet you'd even tell 'em it was you who'd found Mose. Now you take care. You tell 'em it was ol' Eli Aperon, ya hear? Now scat. I got to get down these ledgers. Scat."

And this is the way it always goes. Just like that, word for word, and Ezra could tell it to you syllable for syllable — when he's sittin' on the ol' gray dock like now. Yessir, syllable for syllable, just the way ol' Eli sings it out. Now that's somethin'.

They lived near the dunes. Dunes like Indian graves rising moundlike and scraggly sea grass tufted, along the lonely sands and

languidly lapping waves.

"Squirrel" (that was his name) and Sylvie ran barefoot and expectant along the shore. It was dawn (and their first morning in the new house). A dawn which promised mermaids and starfish and sandcastle days to follow. Days which would stretch forever and uninterrupted into new dawns and new adventures.

They plumped down on the new, cool, morning sand, tearing out the dune tufts and throwing them at each other, taking in with child wonder the stars, reluctant to leave and dying like forgotten dreams slipping in the morning memory; the sea, new moon washed and sun greeter; blown sea fogs, wispy now, which echoed cawing of gulls, issuing infinitely far away and disembodied out of the mother mist.

They scuttled about frantically, gobbling and yammering at creation in a wild, yet mute, attempt to capture all the wonder and bottle it.

scudding spider-crabs lurching frantically sidewise across the sand, and building many turreted fairy castles.

And the day waxed warm and sunny, the gulls wheeling, visible

now, in an endless summer sky.

Squirrel and Sylvie ate up the day with a wonderful diligence, chewing popcorn pebbles, ice cream air and balloon clouds. They yelled, stomped, and finally chased a weary sun into the sea.

The day waned into bloody, dying dolphin, rainbow sunsets

and silver moon moods.

Squirrel and Sylvie, end-of-carnival mooded and cotton-candy day sated, had nobody there to tell them of home goings, supper eatings and bed — and Sylvie, ever willing to know more summer sea experience, wandered tentatively into the moon washed waves, shivering in the shimmering luminescence.

Now, all of a sudden water famished, she swooped into the

waves and paddled about,

"Hey" she yelled to the moon, "hey" to a cloud scudding to a

### The Death of a Snob

### **Burton Rabinowitz**

nowhere horizon with the gulls, "hey" to an inquisitive crab which tentatively nibbled at her big toe and then scurried away, "hey" to nothing in particular and everything in general, and "you stink" to Squirrel.

Squirrel couldn't let a girl usurp his boyness and besissy him

and he bounded yelling after the delighted Sylvie.

Suddenly with a roar and the frantic jabbering of a gull which had almost been caught under it, a great wave attacked the shore, sweeping the waters and gobbling up moon, sky, and Sylvie.

Squirrel, terrified, yelped and yammered his way to shore.

All was quiet again, the sea lapping contentedly. Squirrel meandered aimlessly about kicking pebbles. Night, ghostlike, was upon him and he wanted the comfort of a cover and a bed.

"Hey Sylv," called Squirrel, out to the endless and unrippled water, "Hey ratface!" No answer. "Hey stupid," he whined, not meaning it, frightened now. The moon sea, monstrous mawed,

moaned night winds at him.

"Hey, hey" he shrieked abandoning himself into a gulf of terror. A wave laps here and there, a sleepy gull or two caws at the moon, winging home to foam and seaweed beds. Quieter than the wind before a storm. Night and sea sounds. Quieter than the moon.

"Hey", yelled Squirrel, plunging lemming-like and Sylvie-seek-

ing into the hungry waves.

The wind and the sea purled along the wispy dunes.

 $\ldots$  . The mother came for them indulgently at past bed-time seeking them.

"Squirrr-el, Sylll-vie" came the lone and lonely cry, dying away into knowing sands and moon washed dune-meadows.

"Squirrel, Sylvie" staccato and frightened now.

Ah! there on the sands those two sleeping she mutters to herself relievedly, running to fetch them.

Nothing is heard for a time save the lapping of the waves. And then she screamed — a wolf howl, long and primeval to the moon and the eternal enveloping night. On a cold, rainy night, a tall, slim soldier wearing a tattered army raincoat paced the platform of an old train station nearly fifty miles outside of London. Nervously, he removed his torn wooly gloves to check his left coat pocket. The wind blew violently. A bolt of lightning crackled in the distance; the ominous skies thundered. It was five minutes to midnight.

The train arrived on schedule, and the soldier boarded quickly. It was almost pitch black inside, and he moved cautiously to a seemingly empty compartment, seating himself near the window. As he gazed complacently around his warm and secure surroundings, he noticed a thick coverless book on the seat beside him. With the aid of a dim light cast by a nearby lamppost, he saw the title, A Shot in the Dark. He smiled wryly. The shrill sound of the train's horn signalled departure....

Suddenly, there was a rattle in the darkness and the thin, young soldier turned his head around. Conditioned response. In a mellow tone a small, bony man dressed in a smart English suit called to

him from across the way.

"Mark Windsor? That you, old chap?"

The voice was familiar to the soldier. But he remained silent, choosing not to respond to the call of that execrated snob he had known for years. To be sure, this snob with a large hooked nose and fiendish blue eyes was one of many who had lived in close proximity to Mark Windsor. But he was the worst, for he had always proclaimed openly that the rich were born to rule. The competent Windsors of the world were destined to serve him. "But why?" Windsor questioned audaciously. "Why? Why? Why?"

The answer was simple to an army man like Windsor. The army, rigidly adhering to the primitive method of brute force, had instilled in him a reflex to crush all obstacles in his path. Deliberation was unnecessary. The peaceful resolution of conflicts was too lengthy. The pistol was the quickest, surest solution. Windsor touched his left coat pocket again. . . .

## MARK TWAIN AND HIS ESSAY CONCERNING THE JEWS

Jeffrey Roth

By seven the next morning, Mark Windsor found himself amidst a large crowd moving aimlessly around Picadilly Circus. There seemed to be too many tourists in London that day, especially the kind that carry small, cheap, Japanese cameras and act like they own the world. Snobs, all of them. There was chaotic pushing and shoving, as children were brutally trampled. Windsor felt disgusted.

With a sudden jerky motion he extricated himself from the crowd. Three of the buttons on his raincoat were no longer there, and his once polished boots were badly scuffed. There was anger in his smooth reddened face. He vowed he would get even with those

bastards some day. "Some day," he muttered.

A while later he was meandering in and out of the gutters of Soho Square, just to the north of Picadilly Circus. He was still drunk with rage as he crossed the street and entered a small unfrequented pub.

"Pint of porter," he grumbled, as he leaned against the bar. The drink was served; he reached into his left pocket to get some change for payment. Hastily, he gulped down the black, potent drink.

Within minutes he was blurting out a fantastic tale of a shooting in the outskirts of London; but it was unheeded by the local drunkards who were singing some bars from an old ballad. Dejectedly, Windsor staggered out to welcome in some lonely passerby who would listen to his story.

Futile attempts were made to fascinate a few listeners. Windsor was only snubbed and given dirty looks; some snobs even pushed him aside as if he were an animal. He resented it fiercely, and once again placed his hand over his left pocket. But his hand froze momentarily.

Only twenty five meters away were two stately bobbies. They were dressed in morbid black costumes with hideous egg-shaped helmets, and were walking quickly towards him. There seemed to be a

gleam in their eyes and a sadistic smile on their faces.

Windsor was quite high now and his senses were dulled. But he knew that those two approaching bastards were determined to apprehend him. He was sure that the bony body he had left on the train had been found. His crime was discovered, and he felt unbearably naked.

Indeed, it was only a matter of time before he would be brought to justice and some cad would sentence him to death. The snobs would strangle him. How horrible! How revolting! . . .

The next day a tall, thin soldier was found in a dark alley way off Oxford Street. He was dead, and there was blood spattered over his left temple. Oddly, he had a sly snobbish smile on his face.

Mark Twain is the American iconoclast par excellence. Indeed, there are few groups or institutions that completely escape the sulphurous sting of his caustic wit. At one point he may criticize the abuses of slavery or the absurdities of democracy; elsewhere he may ridicule the hypocrisy of matrimony or the inconsistencies of Christian Science; later he may expose the untenability of the Biblical narrative or the literary offenses of James Fenimore Cooper. As a result, most of his writing is aimed at finding fault with something someone considers sacred.

This is not meant to imply that Twain censured indiscriminately. Only rarely have the writings of shallow thinkers been accepted as classics of American literature. Twain's satire is more readily considered humorous and good-natured than polemical and argumentative because his intention was not to alienate anyone. Most important, his criticism is not idle; it is backed by examples and proof,

and practical alternatives are suggested.

In thus criticizing components of the established order, Twain is following a tradition native to America and the New World. Here, the social critic is not hindered by a complex system of long-standing conventions that sets up one institution or another, perhaps a form of government, or a theology, or a particular philosophy, as beyond the realm of critical evaluation. This was especially true during the frontier days of the nineteenth century when the country and its beliefs were expanding and when Twain did much of his writing.

Twain's essay Concerning the Jews illustrates this remarkable talent for subtle, constructive criticism, coupled with keen, analytical insight. Twain had written an article describing the unrest he had witnessed in the Austria of 1897, and several quotations in this article seemed to indicate that the Jews were at least partly responsible for the disorders of the Austrian state. In answer to letters he had received asking him to clarify these statements, Twain wrote his essay discussing the "Jewish question" of his day.

What first strikes the reader as extraordinary are Twain's remarks on the quality of Jewish citizenship. According to Twain, even enemies of the Jew must admit that:

He is not a loafer, he is not a sot, he is not noisy, he is not a brawler nor a rioter, he is not quarrelsome . . . he is quiet, peaceable, industrious, unaddicted to high crimes and brutal dispositions . . .

The praise is so thick that one must turn back to the title page to be sure that America's most irreverent author truly wrote the essay. Such

encomiums Twain usually reserves for himself.

At this point, however, a paradox becomes evident. If it is true, as Twain maintains, that "the Christian can claim no superiority over the Jew in the matter of good citizenship," and this is generally recognized, what accounts for anti-semitism? The essential question is one of motivation. Twain discards religious fanaticism as the primary cause of anti-semitism, even though much persecution is perpetrated in the name of a church or dogma. Most people do not consider religion seriously enough to arrive at the conclusion that a respectable and productive group of citizens should be molested for purely theological differences. Rather, Jews are subject to unjust treatment for economic reasons; the average Christian, according to Twain, is simply not able to compete successfully with the Jewish businessman, and therefore resents the existence of the entire race.

In this light, anti-semitism is seen as "a trade-union boycott in a religious disguise." It predates the advent of Chrisitanity and derives little momentum from the Crucifixion. Indeed, Twain easily detects this resentment of the Jews' business acumen developing centuries before Christianity. One can hardly doubt the Egyptians' feeling toward Joseph who

> took a nation's money all away, to the last penny; took a nation's livestock all away, to the last hoof; took a nation's land away, to the last acre; then took the nation itself, buying it for bread, man by man, woman by woman, child by

child, till all were slaves . . .

This is the general view of what the Jew has done, perhaps in less

elaborate terms, throughout the course of history.

In one sense, the Christian has himself to blame for the Jews' talent in business. Twain notes that during the Middle Ages, the Christian community deprived the Jew of every trade and handicraft; he could own no land and was thus prevented from engaging in agriculture; even scholarship and learning were closed to him. As a result, his hands fell into disuse; but "ages of restriction to the one tool which the law was not able to take from him - his

brain - have made that tool singularly competent."

Nevertheless, Twain recognizes that the Jews themselves do little to combat anti-semitism. If it cannot be completely erased since the Jews are always essentially foreigners and "even the angels dislike a foreigner," at least it can be minimized. But the Jews must learn the value of concerted action as a means to securing their ends: "You huddle to yourselves already in all countries, but you huddle to no sufficient purpose, politically speaking." By entering the mainstream of political activity in their adopted countries and utilizing all legal means at their disposal, the Jewish communities

might prevent anti-semitism from becoming destructive.

In diagnosing anti-semitism as a condition imposed by the purely external influence of economics on the general population, Twain overlooks the psychological factors that often give rise to race hate in individuals. In the same manner, a solution achieved through political means may reduce anti-semitism that manifests itself through statutes barring Jews from full participation in the economic life of the community, but it will not eradicate prejudice which is imbedded in the thoughts and beliefs of people. Thus, Twain's conclusions may not be entirely valid, but they display what must be the result of much critical thought, and they evidence a genuine, compassionate concern for the Jews and their problems. The American iconoclast is sincerely suggesting what he considers to be a practical method for alleviating the plight of the Jews.

What marks this essay as unusual among Twain's writings is the general seriousness with which he treats the subject. But to be sure, typical Twainian satire and irony is not lacking. For example, he asks: "What has become of the golden rule?" To this he replies that "we pull it out every Sunday and give it an airing" but "it is strictly religious furniture . . . it has never been intruded into business." The moral condemnation is implicit in the words; no clearer contempt of the general Christian ethos need be expressed.

Twain does not ascribe divinity to the Jews, but he does recognize some force that enables them to exist, even prosper, under the most adverse circumstances. He concludes his essay with an expression of this mystical quality of the Jewish people:

All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?

#### ON HEARING A QUARTET OF BARTOK

#### Phillip Klahr

Into the breathstealing vortex of deafening sound I rush, and am sucked; in fury inchoate—
Fire-streak flashing of ear blinding passion—
Swept in the flow, my senses violate
To the echo and thump of the beating bows
Bouncing,
Growling, scraping, screaming strings!

\*\*\* \*\*\*

Across a dim, desolate plain caressed by a breath of the moon A haunting, plaintive note swells

And grows

To a weird wailing shriek, a thought-trampling deluge—

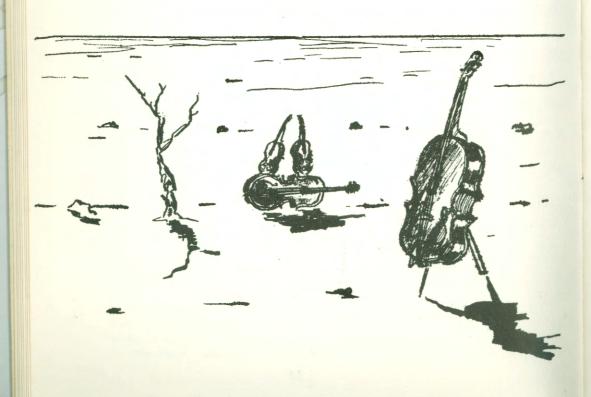
Raging fury

Brooding

Of blood-green passion . . .

With pain jarred eye and sore racked ear
I struggle vainly to breast the flood,
To wrest coherency from Chaos' lip.
A swift and thankless task
With hope receding. Yet a glimpse has lighted
(Best moment of the tortured blossom,

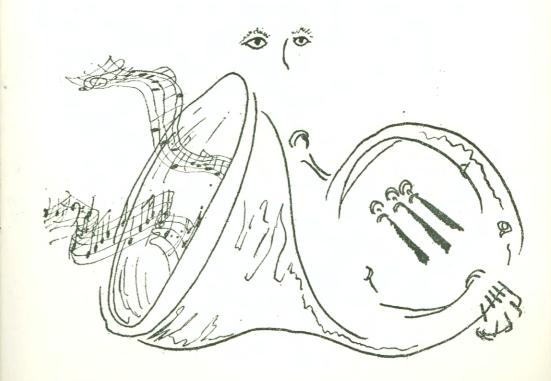
Burning, sweet syrup of the sad and bitter bark)
Oh, Whimsical Sight—Eternity's Mark!

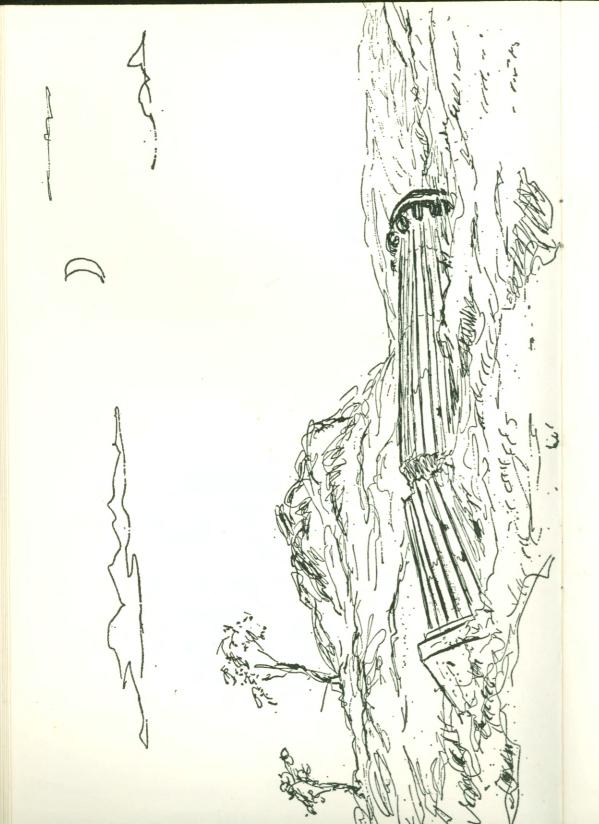


Muted Horn Player

Silver-ringing notes whirl,
Parade and resolve
Into cadres of
'Broidered waistcoats,
Gowns, tricorns,
That dip and merge
And separate into
Forests of autumnal glory
Locked in crystals of time.

Shalom Rackovsky





#### ATTICA - NIGHT

A warm East spring-wind,
Wandering through olive-scented hills,
Sang to the stars
Leaf-flutter dactyls of song.
I come through changing,
Moving shadow,
Pale-glowing light,
To meet the moon
At an ancient, ruined summit;
And we sat together,
On an ancient, much-cracked column,
Half dissolved in sand.

Shalom Rackovsky

#### The Rain Outside

The rain outside taps
small fingers on the
window pane
And the East Wind lightly—
careful not to push—
slipping in between the raindrops,
Whistles to us (and
to sleepy people
next door)
And so we sit by the fire and
Mix the raindrops with the flames
and find an autumn afternoon
among the embers and the rain.

#### Roses

Dark-born prisms, Scattered broadside in Gentle abandon in a Garden of roses, Shatter the advent of Day into a myriad of Tiny arrows.

I pick a rose for my love; And each arrow Increases by itself the Sum of my love And returns it to me The greater for being Muted by a rose.

#### GOD IN A FAREWELL TO ARMS

Alan Shapiro

Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms details a few brief years in the life of Frederic Henry, an American who drove an ambulance on the Italian front during World War I. For our purposes, the most important incident in the early part of the book is Henry's meeting Catherine, a British nurse, and their falling in love. It is important because from there on A Farewell to Arms is a novel of love set against the background of war.

It is a beautiful story, marred only by an occasional meaningless death. There is the death of an ambulance driver; there is the death of Aymo—shot in error by his own countrymen; there is the death of Rinaldi, a gifted young surgeon—syphilis; there is the death of a child born to Henry and Catherine—stillborn; and finally, there is the death of Catherine herself—hemorrhages following a Caesarean operation.

Only after his child's death does Henry begin to think of the absurdity of all this. Why was this beautiful story ruined by deaths; what could have been Heaven's purpose? Here he discovers one of the crucial philosophical problems of mankind—the god who does not care.

Although not the God of Judaic tradition, there exists for some philosophers a god who is inexorable. He created their world and then ceased to be interested in it. He performs all actions arbitrarily, completely disregarding mankind. It is as if men were bacteria in this god's mouth—when he eats cake, they prosper; when he drinks alcohol, they perish.

The Freshman Writing Contest in 1961 produced a three-way tie for First Place in the Essay Division. Two of the three First Place essays were the work of one author. One appeared in KOL '61; the other is presented above.

It is no coincidence that as Henry sits outside Catherine's room waiting to know whether she'll live or die, he recalls the following incident: Sitting near a camp fire, he had thrown a log into the flames and then noticed that the log was full of ants. The ants swarmed out of the log and ran in all directions. Eventually they fell into the fire and died.

He was conscious that this was for the ants destruction of the world and that by removing the log from the fire he would be saving their lives. But he only emptied the contents of his drinking cup into the flames so that he could fill the cup with whiskey. He noted that the sole effect his cup of water had was to steam some ants.

After this episode, the next paragraph begins with the words, "So now I sat out in the hall and waited to hear how Catherine was." Is there any doubt that he, indeed, is an ant? Yes, human, run back and forth on your log!

Why had he not withdrawn the log from the fire? Why had he, by his complete indifference, caused meaningless death to the ants? He had played god! As he sat there beside the fire, there was nothing vindictive in his not withdrawing the log; he had no feelings concerning the ants.

He was god—a god whose purpose, whose plan, whose action was not calculated with a view to its effect on ants. Burn humans, or steam if that's the case. I'll have my whiskey!

Thus we see man's relation to god. Thus we see the futility of attempting to formulate any relationship between us and someone who is hardly aware of our existence. Consequently we must choose either to ignore god as god ignores us, or to discard all logic, and pray.

Henry chooses the latter "Oh, God, please don't let her die. I'll do anything for you if you won't let her die. Please, please, dear God..."

Catherine died—another ant into the fire.

### WHEN?

### Soame Richard Kidorf

Ma Nishtanah halayla hazeh...
Tell me, father—I have to know,
Bitter herb clings inside my mouth;
The bread of affliction crumbles at my feet.
Still the clotted blood of Babi Yar
Casts a stain on a blighted land.

Father, raise the Afikomen high, Renew our ancient claim for liberty. No, don't look—the glass lies shattered; Our clean white tablecloth is soaked. The fruits of Nabath's vineyard fall And so many drops at Red Sea's shore.

With mighty hand and outstretched arm..,
The wicked son asks—who are you?
"Twas I who slew the Paschal Lamb.
Then Moses and the children sang
For me it was and not for you.
My people yet are tied and chained.

In my distress I call the Lord; Throughout the Pale a cry is heard. And in New York at freedom's gate Phylacteries float at her golden feet. Hear, Oh Israel, The Lord our God... Manna's heaped in an empty land.

Elijah enters in at an open door
And a cold damp wind creeps down our backs,
What my father bought for two zuzim
Three million cannot name a price.
Next year, please God, in Jerusalem...
Our four seder cups are all drained dry.

### NIGHTMARE

## Philip Bak

On a cold December day, the faceless crowds rushing through the Times Square area to their respective destinations hardly noticed a short, middle-aged man who was nervously pacing the sidewalk between Seventh and Eighth Avenues. As the gray skies turned dark with evening, the lonely figure continued his vigil. It was incredible that this gentle, reticent man should be in such a situation. Yet his entire life had been incredible, and recent events proved no exception.

Chilling nights like this often reminded Gold of the terrible cold of the three Polish winters he had endured in Nazi concentration camps. Since then he had always tried to forget the past, but it haunted him like an unimaginable nightmare. Fortunately, in America, he had come upon better times. In 1950, at a friend's wedding, he and the woman to whom he was now married were introduced. Having raised a family and prospered moderately, they had achieved a pleasant degree of tranquility.

Gold had been reflecting upon this tranquility just the previous night, as he was preparing to close his small delicatessen. Worn out by the day's business, he pondered the strange turn of events which had made him a contented American citizen, while the rest of his family lay in a common grave near Warsaw. "My God," he thought, "did they deserve such a terrible fate? Surely there must be a reason for such suffering!"

His meditation was broken by the slam of the door as his counterman went home. Ten minutes later Gold had also left, and was walking along 42nd Street towards Broadway, where he would catch the train for his home in Brooklyn. He disliked the daily ride, but on this night he hurried to get out of the cold and into the warmth of the subway.

As he approached the corner, he remembered that he had run out of cigarettes, and stopped at a small tobacco store to pick up a pack of Luckies, the brand he had been smoking since receiving his first Red Cross package in a D.P. camp. Walking in, he began to unbutton his overcoat. "A pack of Luckies," he said as he took out his wallet. The proprietor's face seemed strangely familiar. "Probably been in here before," Gold told himself; yet he couldn't remember having done so. Shrugging, he took his cigarettes and began to rebutton his coat.

"It's a cold one tonight," the proprietor said with a heavy accent. Startled by the familiar voice, Gold raised his head and immediately recognized him. He stared dumbly.

"Is there anything wrong?" the man asked. Gold slammed down the cigarettes and rushed out. Walking quickly—almost blindly—towards the subway, he bitterly recalled his first meeting with the tobacco-store owner, Heinrich Rocher. It had been at Treblinka. To this day Gold carried the scars of the beatings that guards like Rocher had administered to while away the idle Sundays.

He arrived home and spent a sleepless night. In the morning, too upset to work, he called his assistant to tell him that the store would be closed for the day. He spent the entire day pacing agitatedly about his room. He refused his wife's pleas to allow her to call a doctor. That evening, tired and restless, he dressed, took a revolver from an old chest, and left the house for Manhattan.

When he came to the tobacco shop, his first impulse was to rush in and confront Rocher, but the steady flow of customers discouraged him. And so began his vigil.

For the first time in the years that he had walked this block, Gold noticed the hurried, almost frenzied look of the pedestrians and drivers rushing in all directions. Compared to them, his slow, measured pace seemed almost ridiculous. With fascination, he watched the impatient crowd. "Would they care?" he found himself wondering. "Would these people care if they knew that a murderer was doing business on the block?" Gold searched the passing faces, but their blank expressions revealed nothing. "If a gang of brownshirted hoodlums pulled up to this corner, ransacked a store and beat up its owner because he belonged to a minority, would anybody stop to help? Would anybody . . . ."

Rocher appeared outside his shop and quickly locked the door. Gold hurried to catch up. Following him into the subway, Gold entered the same train as Rocher and took a seat in the other end of the car. It was difficult not to stare at the Nazi, but Gold controlled himself when he sensed that Rocher knew he was being watched. And the express hurtled rapidly through the dark tunnel toward Brooklyn.

At one of the local stops in East New York, a rowdy group of teen-agers entered. Gold noticed their leather jackets and long slick hair with distaste. For several minutes the wild bunch joked loudly among themselves; then they began to taunt the passengers in their end of the car. A young girl tried to get up, but two boys barred her way as the rest of the gang laughed riotously. Another passenger told them to leave her alone, but was immediately grabbed by some of the others. Now all their attention was focused

on this new victim, and they began to beat him mercilessly. Gold jumped up and grabbed the arm of one of the boys. He tried to push his way through to the victim, but was knocked to the floor himself. Trying to get up, yet at the same time trying to fend off the kicks aimed at him, he gave a frenzied look about, only to see the other passengers quickly disappearing through the door into the next car.

The train slowed down as it pulled into the following station. From above him a voice yelled "Let's go!" and the hoodlums ran off. As the train started again and Gold made his way to his feet, he saw that where there had once been approximately twenty-five people, there were now only five or six left. "My G-d," he thought, "they've all run off." Stupified, he looked at the other man. Luckily, neither of them had been seriously injured, but the other man was purple with rage. "The bastards," he muttered, "the rotten bastards!"

"No," Gold thought to himself, "they aren't rotten; they're just afraid. They're so afraid of endangering their comfortable lives that they would let a man die before jeopardizing themselves. And those kids—they're also afraid. They think the world is out to kick them in the face, so they kick first, like frightened animals." The thought made his stomach turn, and he sat down heavily on one of the seats. Again glancing about, he was surprised to see that Rocher was still sitting ramrod-stiff in his original seat.

After a few more stops, Rocher got up to leave; Gold quickly snapped out of his reverie and followed several steps behind. Trailing Rocher, he reached into his pocket for the gun. Reassuringly, he wrapped his fingers around the cold metal; but, controlling himself, he let go. Then, as he passed a waste can, he dropped the weapon into it.

Rocher walked along the deserted platform, obviously headed for the rear exit. As Gold caught up with him, he realized that they were all alone. With his heart pounding, he said firmly, "Rocher." Startled, Rocher turned and looked at Gold.

"What do you want? Who are you?" he said, frightened.

"Don't you remember me?" Gold started to say bitterly, but his voice was drowned out by the din of oncoming trains.

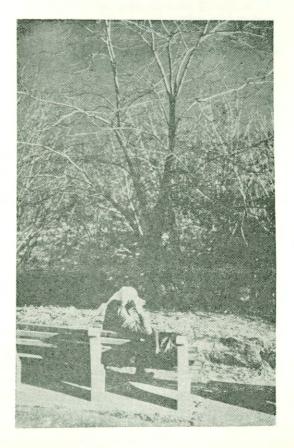
"What do you want?" Rocher demanded angrily. "Leave me alone!"

"Don't you remember?" Gold shouted, "TREBLINKA, TRE-BLINKA!"

"Verdamte Jude!" the Nazi spat contemptuously in his face. Gold grabbed him by the shoulders and shoved him against a steel girder. The former guard, struggling to free himself, lifted his knee and violently smashed it into Gold's groin. Doubling in pain,

with the roar of the trains pounding in his head, Gold reared back, and with a mighty swing knocked Rocher off the platform.

The train screeched to a halt, but it was too late. In the confusion that followed, Gold staggered outside and hailed a cab. Sitting in the back seat, listening to the banal conversation of the good-natured cabbie, Gold tried to steady himself. But bitter tears were flowing uncontrollably down his rugged face long after the taxi had crossed the bridge and made its way into the desolate side streets of Brooklyn.



#### EICHMANN IN JERUSALEM: A RETROSPECT

#### Richard Kaufman

The publication in the *New Yorker*, and subsequently in book form of Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*<sup>2</sup> created quite a stir in intellectual circles. This was evidenced by the numerous polemics that appeared in such journals as the *Partisan Review*, *Commentary*, and the British *Encounter*, written by such people as Lionel Abel, Norman Podhoretz, and Mary McCarthy.

The heart of the storm has been Miss Arendt's scornful treatment of the *Judenrate*, those Jewish groups organized by the Nazis to expedite the rounding up of Jews for deportation to the concentration camps. Her critics have spared no pains in showing that her assertions concerning the importance of the *Judenrate* to the Nazis are, to say the least, unfounded and often incorrect. Regarding her condemnation of the *Judenrate*, the evidence is staggeringly in favor of these critics.

Aside from this major criticism of the book, there are a few minor objections (minor in terms of printed matter and aroused emotions). There is an accusation, by Lionel Abel,<sup>3</sup> in particular, that Miss Arendt has rendered an aesthetic judgement of Eichmann, and that this has had a cathartic effect on the character of the accused in the eyes of her readers. "And this is the reason he comes off so much better in her book than do his victims . . ." This, it seems to me, depends upon the reader; I personally found Eichmann as utterly contemptible as usual—and perhaps even more so.

Along the same lines we find objections to the so-called reduction of Adolph Eichmann to a banal character—a Kleiner mann. The whole concept of evil manifesting itself in a banal form seems to be an affront to our sensibilities. Are we that steeped in eschatological fantasy that we have come to believe that evil manifests itself only in the form of some demonic being who exudes malevolence from every pore? Have not the lessons of history taught us that this concept of the maleficent soul is nothing more than a primitive superstition? William Golding in his Lord of the Flies demonstrates vividly that the real Beelzebub, the real lord of the flies, is not some evil demiurge but, in fact, he is a Kleiner mann, a banal man—an Adolph Eichmann.

Mary McCarthy, in much of this criticism, has pointed out one very salient fact: that in a two-hundred seventy-five page book only eight pages have been devoted to discussion of the *Judenrate*. This reveals

a most egregious omission on the part of Miss Arendt's critics: two hundred and sixty-seven pages. For the most part the rest of the book has remained unscathed by criticism—and, what is most regrettable, totally unmentioned by most of her critics. It is in these pages that Miss Arendt develops the major thesis of the book; it is in this unmentioned part of the book that she voices her objections to the character of the trial.

In her epilogue Miss Arendt sums up her dissatisfaction with the trial. She castigates the tribunal for "its not coming to grips with three fundamental issues . . . the problem of impaired justice in the court of the victors; a valid definition of the 'crime against humanity' and a clear recognition of the new criminal who commits this crime." (p. 251)

The first of these issues is fundamentally a question of philosophy. A court is still a place where justice must be defined on purely pragmatic terms. Why does Miss Arendt feel that the Israeli court holds the duty of recognizing and accounting for the fact that the criminal in the dock can never again be the same person who committed the crime? Since time immemorial, courts have faced this problem. Every court, in every session, faces this problem. Why then does Miss Arendt relegate the task to this particular set of judges and this particular trial? To say that the opportunity was most ideal now because of the vast publicity accorded the trial would be fallacious. We have only to look back at the Nuremberg Trials of 1948 — why not then? Or why not at the Sacco-Vanzetti trial? No, I think it grossly unfair of Miss Arendt to ask of this tribunal to take upon itself the responsibility that has so long been shirked by the rest of society.

The Eichmann trial occupied a unique position in the history of the Nazi war trials. For the first time we found before us a man whose sole function was that of collating all of the Nazi machinery and directing it toward the annihilation of the Jews. Adolph Eichmann represented the ultimate justification for classifying all members of the Nazi bureaucracy as hostes generis humani. Here, then, at the Eichmann trial we had before us a chance to realize a clear, practical, juridicial, and philosophical definition of crimes against humanity. For the first time in history a court had been given the opportunity to show the world why planned genocide of any people, Jewish or Gentile, is not simply a crime against that particular people, but a crime against humanity. At the same time this tribunal had the opportunity to clearly delineate the criminal. This Adolph Eichmann was clearly no Iago bent upon destruction. On the contrary, he was quite normal. He was all too normal; so normal as to become banal. This trial could become a lesson to all mankind on the very nature of evil. It might say to the world: "It takes no intellectual prowess, nor any great talent to destroy six million people. You need not be a genius or a madman. Here we have before us

the most petty of bureaucrats; and this man, this very plain, very ordinary man, has been instrumental in the physical destruction of a people. Beware, for your sons and daughters are not beyond this!" For the first time judges, and not philosophers, could demonstrate concretely the ultimate evil which may be inherent in the most normal of men. This evil was no deviation from the norm. On the contrary, in a society that would condone this, and even further, encourage it, this evil became the norm.

Miss Arendt fears, and in my opinion justifiably so, that a recurrence of this evil could take place at any time and at any place. She fears that men as normal as Adolph Eichmann might rise to power and wreak havoc once again. In another book, she takes to bemoaning the sad state of mankind:

It is a society of laborers which is about to be liberated from the fetters of labor, and this society does no longer know of those other higher and more meaningful activities for the sake of which this freedom would deserve to be won . . . what we are confronted with is the prospect of a society of laborers without labor, that is, without the only activity left to them.<sup>4</sup>

George Steiner, in reviewing Miss Arendt's "On Revolution," called this attitude "her sad scorn for man." I would rather call it a case of homines credunt facile id quo volunt, her compassionate lament for what she considers the sorry state of man. This thread, it seems, runs throughout her works, and Eichmann in Jerusalem is no exception. It is this concern for the stature of man that leads Miss Arendt to castigate the court for its failure to present Eichmann to the world not as a monster, as the prosecuting attorney would have us believe, but as a banal being whose soul may not be very different from ours.

All of this leads up to the final implication of Miss Arendt's book, the greatest failure of the Israeli Court: the failure to establish a universal ethos that would transcend all manner of parochialism. Miss Arendt bemoans this failure, for to her this was the prime opportunity for a court, for the people this court represented, and for a nation, to transcend all the bonds of ineffectual juridicial, ethnocentric, and nationalistic thought. To her this case might have set the precedent for a new era of justice—a justice tempered with an understanding that goes deeper than the simple etiology of modern jurisprudence.

Perhaps Miss Arendt is that "keener observer" that Walter Pater in his Appreciations describes when discussing Shakespeare's Measure for Measure: "The action of the play, like the action of life itself for the keener observer, develops in us the conception of this poetical justice of which Angelo knows nothing because it lies, for the most part, beyond the limits of any acknowledged law . . . and as sympathy alone can discover that which really is in matters of feeling and thought, true justice is in its essence a finer knowledge through love."

#### **FOOTNOTES**

<sup>1</sup>For a poignant view of the role or "non-role" of the New Yorker in this controversy, see the essay by Irving Howe in Commentary, October, 1963.

<sup>2</sup>Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil, New York, Viking, 1963.

<sup>3</sup>Partisan Review, Summer, 1963.

<sup>4</sup>Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition: A Study of the Central Dilemmas Facing Modern Man, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1958, 384 pp.



### Lewis E. Koplowitz

I

The silent cotton snow piles thick on ice-topped ponds (Though deep below in swift sharp subtle moves Small minnows play, reckless of their thickening quilt—The water yawns and blinks a winter weary eye.) while softly somewhere over there
The warm morning fog rolls out of bed And settles on the cold, salt sea . . .

 $\Pi$ 

A wisp of cool wind widens weary eyes
So they may see silver drops fall off
An autumn oak leaf after rain. The drops
Fall; your eyes alive with pearl-blue light
Can follow lucent globes slow falling, bouncing
Purple hues from off the western sky whereon the wind
whispers,

Your eyes are raindrops.

A raindrop trickles down a blind man's nose And deep inside it tickles.

Ш

Great G-d steps over a night-soaked hill,
Bends low over the moon-bathed village
And whispers warmly: Many-patterned snowflakes.
And stands upright and smiles: Cold-melting snowflakes.
The air feels his hands and his snow falling through
And through his presence the soul of a sound
Is heard and grows and grows until
The whole village is filled with the sharp scream
Of joyous silence.

A Sweater

Max Lebow

My tastes are changing. I sit at home and mope and think about what I'm going to do and what I'm going to be. And I dream. Maybe I'm a dope, but I just dream about things. Take Marsha, for example.

She sits right in front of me in Latin class and looks pretty. She comes in right on time every day and neatly folds her sweater and puts it on the back of the desk. The desks are the old kind that are all hooked together, so her big, bright, red sweater sits there on the front of my desk and drives me crazy.

Since I hate Latin, I'm left with nothing to do during the fifty minutes of the day that Marsha sits in front of me. I go absolutely crazy thinking about her. That's really dumb too, because I never can work up enough courage to tell her how I feel about her.

It's not like I don't try, either; I really do. For two whole weeks I've been thinking about and practicing how to meet her for the first time. I think I'll try it sometime next week. It'll probably go something like this.

We'll be sitting there in Latin class and Mrs. Cardiff will drone out another one of her infinitely long, excruciatingly boring lectures, and after an interminable wait, the bell will ring and I'll get up like I'm in a big hurry to get to my next class. While I'm hurrying, I'll accidentally pick up her sweater with all my books and stuff. Then I'll start out of the room and walk exactly three steps until Marsha turns around and notices her sweater isn't where it should be. I'll act like I just noticed the sweater and turn around like a shot (I think she likes boys who are impulsive). I'll give her a line like, "I'll sell ya a sweater, it's a real bargain," which is pretty funny around school with some of the rats who take girls' stuff just to be mean and give it back after they make the girl feel like nothing. Naturally, she'll think I took it on purpose and her cheeks will get a little red in the middle like they do when she gets mad. She doesn't let the rats get funny with her at all. She just gets mad and makes them feel like nothing.

First Place; Short Story Division; Freshman Writing Contest.

I'll fix her getting mad though. I'll say, "Oh, I didn't take it on purpose," which will make her think I'm a little better than those rats. But, before she has a chance to think I'll get her good with, "I was in a hurry to get to my next class. I must have picked it up by mistake." Then she'll start to apologize (she's so polite). While she's apologizing, I'll say something like, "It doesn't really matter. I'm sort of glad it happened. I really have been wanting to meet you for the longest time. I think you're really swell."

Then she'll say something like, "Oh, really? I've been wanting to meet you myself but I could never bring myself to just . . . you know, do it." I know she thinks this way but she's always fooling around with those jerks in the back of the room, even though she doesn't like them.

So, I'll answer her like this. "I always thought you went in for the back of the room' contingent."

She'll say something like, "Those jerks never meant anything to me. I just fool around with them to keep in company; I don't go out with them."

Meanwhile, while we're talking, I'll ask her for a date. That'll be pretty great. We'll go to a movie and go to some little coffee shop afterwards and just sit and talk. It's been cold the last few days; and if it keeps up, there'll be steam all over the windows of the little place, and the neon signs in the window will just make blobs of color on the inside of the window. It'll be cozy in there, kind of real nice just to sit there and talk about stuff that isn't very important.

You can get to like someone in a night, in a conversation about nothing. It sort of sneaks up on you. You start talking about the weather and then about school and then about who you both know at school and then what you both like, and right there is where it dawns on you that you have a new friend.

So, Marsha and I will be friends, and for the rest of our lives we'll probably remember that smelly coffee shop. I'll take her home after that, and she'll give me a goodnight kiss, a real nice one. I'll be tickled pink (She likes boys who are cute at times).

We'll go out a few more times and then she'll ask me to pin her. I think she'll ask. If she doesn't, then I'll ask her. We'll go steady for a while, and that will be very nice. I've never gone steady before, and I guess it was all for Marsha. We could even get married. I'd like about four kids, maybe five. Marsha is so great. I can see us married in a nice little house out in the suburbs somewhere. Five kids playing around in

a big backyard. We'll put a set of swings out in the back. There'll be a school fairly close, and the kids will all walk to school and grow up healthy and be the best in their classes.

I can even see myself as a father, saying things like, "Well, Son, you can be anything you like, just work hard and use your head and pretty soon you'll move up. That's just the way it works," and, "Believe me, it hurts me more than it hurts you." Heh, I guess they'll horse around like other kids. I wonder if ....

"Oh, hi Mom." "No I don't think I'd like any cookies just now. Thanks anyway, though." "The theme? Well, it's taking a lot of thought. It took me a whole half hour to find enough for those two lines. I'm in high school now, Mother, and it's not as easy as just sitting down and writing. You have to use a lot of brainwork to write. Yes, I'm sure I'll finish it in time to get to bed early. Look, it's only eight o'clock and besides, I have most of it already planned out in my head." "OK, I love you too."

Maybe I'd better work on this stupid theme. Yeah, it'll give me a chance to exercise my brain. I like that line, "It takes brains to be a writer." Now about that theme. About five hundred words . . .

"Scaling the walls guarding a happy and meaningful life, high walls, thick walls. Scramble, tear, hook yourself to the walls, force yourself up. No doors to open on secret passages to the other side. The only passage is the rugged bruising climb to reality."

Not too bad for a starter . . . I wonder if I could be a great writer?

# carousel

George Henry Lowell

among these woods last winter, the morning the rink was frozen for the first time,

you and I
skipped over the hill
and laughed out loud
at the little grey squirrel
running up the tree
and across the high wire,
at littler boys and girls
bundled three times over so
thick they could hardly walk,
at the piles of snow
we kicked high in the air
as we ran thru the cold white wind,

at just about nothing in particular

but we laughed, swung our skates and jumped in line for the little red-faced man in the smokey old jacket to take our tickets... I look at you now
your eyes, glowing a light moist blue
in the crisp morning sun,
seem to gather
all the autumn loveliness;
I watch the reddened leaves
float from the sky
to bathe the earth in autumn
and as I reach out my hand
to lift one off your hair,
a gentle, surging warmth
runs up my arm
and fills my self
with love for every leaf
in all our world;

the smell of chestnuts
and hot sweet potato
dances in the air
recalling winters' come
again to build our raisin
smiling man of snow;
and as I engrave this day
upon a young white birch,
just around the bend
the carousel is singing
to awake the child that's sleeping
in the heart of every man.

# If You Know What I Mean ...

Alan N. Shapiro

The following short story is the ninth and closing piece in an imminent collection called *And Like a Lillian Bloom*. The title is based, however, on another story in the book. In it, A Child Prodigy is taught the poem "Abou Ben Adhem" when he is barely three years old. He recites it at all occasions deemed proper either by his Doting Aunt or his Proud Mother. These include both family gatherings and drug store luncheons.

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!) Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace, And saw, within the moonlight in his room, Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom, An angel writing in a book of gold:—

The child, however, admittedly bright, but city-bred, was unaware of the existence of lilies. Much less that lilies did anything called blooming! And while his elders were only too glad to explain the meaning of concepts like "An angel writing in a book of gold," no one thought to explain the niceties of lilies blooming. But the protagonist was at no loss: Carole and Joan Bloom were the four-year-old twins who lived in the apartment across the hall. Unusually bright, but still in his sociological infancy, our hero was no judge of his neighbors' economic status. But "rich," he knew, is a laudatory word; and he was quite willing to believe well of Lillian, the twins' mother.

Only after Mark read me a short story of his yesterday was I sure that I could tell him about my operation. I mean, I'd tell anyone about having my tonsils out when I was nine and how I cried when Mommy said she wouldn't come down the green hallway into the operating room with me - that she'd wait in the room till I got back. I knew she could come into the operating room with me if she wanted to; she'd simply tell the doctors and they'd listen. And I cried - not because I was frightened, not because I hated Mommy for not coming with me, but because I knew that Mommy knew I hated her and I didn't want to die with her knowing that. And how they put that gas thing over my mouth and told me just to breathe normally; and how I gulped that gas down as fast as I could because I didn't want to wake up in the middle of the operation with all kinds of things in my throat and start gagging - it was bad enough twice a year when Doctor B----- stuck that wooden thing on my tongue and said, "Say Ah". ... and then the room started turning round and round and spinning, and then it wasn't the room it was colors spinning red, blue, yellow, green, redblueyellowgreen, redblueyellowgreenred and I woke up seeing Mommy and said, "Mommy, I love you," and puked.

I could tell almost any intelligent person about my tonsils, if you know what I mean. Last year, in fact, coming back from Israel, there was a rather intelligent middle-aged woman at the same table with me and after four or five meals I told her about my tonsils and all. At first she irritated me by ejaculating, "Charming!" but quickly redeemed herself by telling me about her appendectomy at age fifteen. I'll reproduce her story here — not because I'm collecting hospital anecdotes but because its very important that you know more about me if you're going to understand my operation. Actually, if you're bothered by the direction this is taking you ought to stop reading now because you certainly won't really understand about my operation. In fact, I wouldn't want to tell you about it unless I was sure about you, if you see what I mean. I mean that Mark has been my roommate for seven months and I was only sure of him yesterday.

Her appendectomy, if you're still with me, was a rather difficult one. It seems that instead of swelling as infected appendixes should, hers lengthened, wrapped itself around an ovary and was causing infection there too. This fact was not discovered, naturally, until after the operation began. For some reason she had been given a spinal

rather than ether and was conscious enough to hear one surgeon inform the second that, because of the damage done the ovary, it would be necessary to remove half that organ as well as the appendix. She was quite upset and objected, "But then I'll never have cihldren!" The surgeon replied, "Yes you will, dear—one and a half."

I'd like to tell you more about both Mommy and The Woman, but then they'd become characters, and since they're probably not going to appear again in this story, they wouldn't be well developed—which

wouldn't be fair to either of them. Or to you.

Mark's story was about a Young Idealist who becomes a Doctor. The story opens on him walking through the Spring Countryside with the Rebirth of Nature all around. He lights his pipe (symbol of his creative period) and walks along Thinking. Thinking along among the trees he soon reaches a Fork in the Road. As he chooses one path, his pipe goes out. He relights the symbol of creative period and continues through the Lovely Countryside. Eventually he begins sweating (not perspiring—this is Life) and he removes his jacket. The heat was becoming intense—if you see what Mark means. Not only that it was summer, but also . . . . Meanwhile his pipe has gone out again, a second time—symbolizing: End of Creative Period.

But he relights the creative period and begins a Difficult Uphill Climb. (Am I going too fast? He's on a mountain now) He struggles along puffing (yes, double entendre) and by the brown and shriveled Falling Leaves we are made to realize that it is now autumn—not just autumn, but Fall. Young Idealist has—while I was distinguishing between autumn and Fall—aged muchly and climbed to the top of the mountain. As he enters the conveniently located cemetery there, a light snow is falling (should I say "wintering"?) and his symbol of C.P. goes out—this time, for good.

The crucial point (as a philosophy professor used to put it) is that Mark thought he was writing really first class symbolism—he regretted not having done any writing in his undergraduate days.

I find it very hard to explain why I like people, but this story made me really like Mark. He's planning another short story now about a college freshman who "thinks he's really Cool". The incident revolves around our cordovaned, Ivy-pantsed, herringbone-jacketed hero discovering a Very Attractive Girl while waiting for a train in Grand Central

Station. He has about an hour till his train leaves and so he coolly (and Coolly) begins following her. Obligingly, she meanders towards a Coke machine, still blissfully unaware she's being pursued. (He's Cool, see?) She prepares her dime, makes her selection, and suddenly sensing that she's being stared at, turns around, fumbling her dime, which falls to the floor. She sees Cordovans—Ivy-pants—Herringbone-jacket who (Mark's own follow:) looks away—just in time. He was Cool.

I hope Mark doesn't add a concluding paragraph contrasting their relative situations that evening: he Coolly alone, she warmly with some fellow who picked her up on the train. I really like that "just in time"

bit-there's hope for Mark as a writer yet.

I worry sometimes about my transitions. If you must have one, note that I'm going now from why I like Mark well enough to tell him about my operation to Israel, the place of my operation. Not directly though. One doesn't begin a year's study in Israel without first attempting to master modern conversational Hebrew. Having had a dual major in college, literature and Bible, I felt sure the Hebrew required for the Bible studies half would practically suffice for my year's stay. After all, what's difficult about memorizing half a dozen "which way to the Customs Office, Exchange Desk, Passport Control," type phrases? In addition, I was ostensibly going there to continue in my field, Bible. Assured as I therefore was of familiarity with my textual material and its language, I didn't take my six week refresher course in modern Hebrew too seriously. Glenn, whom I met registering for that class, didn't take it seriously for another reason. By all rights, he should have—not having seen Hebrew more than a half dozen times a year since his Bar Mitzvah. But he was going to Israel for a year (he thought this his purpose, not merely the time involved.) After his year, he'd return and enter his father's business.

We were a little shocked upon entering the classroom to find it peopled by a dozen fifteen year olds. We complained; the instructor justified himself, and them . . . and we remained. Glenn thought it humorous that we were back in high school. I avoided looking at our Arab-looking instructor and contented myself with observing my classmates and trying to rate each as either "good kid" or somewhat negative. One, in particular, drew my attention. He was a handsome serious type about my size, but what attracted me was his sweater. It

was the sort of almost black blue which I've often felt every boy who wears fluffy, bulky, pastel-type sweaters should be forced to change to.

He looked right.

Although I smoke a good deal, I somehow sensed it was against the class policy and not wanting to anger the "Shalom . . . Shalom, repeat again, Shalom" Arab, I waited until recess. Glenn and I walked into the lounge along with our classmates. I lit a cigarette, exhaled, and felt someone practically leaning over my shoulder. I turned to face blue-black sweater who asked straightforwardly, "How long have you been smoking?" I can't begin to unravel my thoughts at that moment! Sufficient to say, I could only answer truthfully, "About five years." "You really shouldn't" he continued, "it's not good for you." I was starting to regain my composure. Who was this kid? What's it to him? Anyway? I was tempted to try a Devastatingly Witty Reply (or is it Rejoinder?) but he somehow looked too serious. I mumbled a what-doyou-mean type mumble, and he explained what I knew damn well he'd meant. Glenn was no help; as I later learned, the conversation had become too serious for his interest. He'd dropped out after the initial shock—which hadn't been as great as mine, not only because I was the wayward son under attack, but also because he hadn't noticed blueblack sweater in the first place. Serious Sweater recounted the latest Department of Health study (minus the graphs) from the weekly ready-opinion magazine where I'd seen it, and I decided, against my college debating training, not to challenge his source. In fact, I enjoyed him. When I thought about it during my convalescence in Israel, I was really glad I didn't wisecrack and ask if his next lecture was about the birds and the bees. I wonder also, if other people have these experiences. I wonder . . . At the time, however, I just enjoyed my fifteenyear-old-father. I have to be sure, now, that you understand I'm not being facetious. Speechlessly, I enjoyed knowing that there were concerned kids like this around, and knowing one of them myself. I don't remember how I thanked him for his interest and managed the introductions. Some things are just too anti-climactic to remain on the conscious level.

I'd had a somewhat similar experience a few months before: I dated a really lovely girl (why is it so difficult to simply say lovely girl without seeing the capital L and capital G jumping off the page at you? Why must sincerity sound like a T.V. commercial?) from a

small town in Virginia who had only been in New York a few weeks. As we were walking back from the show, she noticed the smoke purling up from one of many Forty-Sixth-Street manhole covers and confided, "Whenever I see smoke like that I think it comes from little dragons imprisoned down there waiting to get out." It was somehow too beautiful a moment to allow any reply; I would have hated myself for a month had I assumed a corny protective pose. The rest of that evening is very hazy. Anti-climactal—if you know what I mean? . . . .

So was the remainder of our six week Modern Hebrew course. We completed two texts. The first was fifteen hundred common words: ("something found around every home"). The second, six hundred useful phrases, included the likes of "See here! I'm an American citizen! Either you return my purse or I'll call the Consulate!" Needless to say, the second really appealed to Glenn. I didn't see much use for

either in understanding Isaiah.

\* \* \*

As we were waving good-by to those familiar faces among the thousands on the pier, I felt that Sweater was one of the very few I'd like to take along with me. In a sense, I have.

What more must I tell you before I may begin with my operation? Only how we met Ted on the boat, and settled in Jerusalem: Three or four days from New York found me sitting alone on a far corner of the deck watching the ice in my drink melt. Glenn was still continuously dancing to the continous music of seven bands—or was he in the Sandwich Shoppe gaining enough energy to dance continuously between supper and the midnight snack? Ted, whom we'd met as a result of my convincing Glenn to eat in the Kosher dining room, materialized alongside of me and sat. "It may be artificial, but its continuous enjoyment," was his greeting. I realized then that he was one of those bright spots in my life—along with Mark, Sweater and Dragon-shy. Ted was very religious; he was going to Israel to continue his Rabbinic preparation in a yeshiva in Jerusalem. Interestingly enough, he also intended to audit several Bible courses at the University. I'd found a roommate.

The hotel that we settled in was probably Class C only because there is no D classification. Glenn decided to room down the hall from us since his hours would be very different from ours. We soon discovered that survival necessitated daily reminders to the hotel-keeper (Baal Mahlon according to our items-found-around-the-home text) to turn on electricity, heat, water, etc. Glenn had a gift for making Hebrew understandable: under his able hand Baal Mahlon became Billy Malone — his feminine counterpart, Bah - ah - lot Mahlon, for whom I could do no better than Mrs. Billy Malone, became (Sweet) Molly Malone.

I soon found that between diversions Glenn discovered and shared with me and the simple necessities of survival, I just managed time to attend to my studies. Ted, on the other hand, in addition to our Bible studies, was devoting six hours a day to his yeshiva — and about twenty minutes a day to a religious guidance program aimed at me. After about two months he succeeded and I began devoting a few hours a day to Talmudical studies too. He doubled my efforts, though. More than by what he said, by his example, I realized that I wasn't devoting myself spiritually (That's not the adverb I want, but I know no better.)

I had studied Bible in college, as I'd studied English, French, and Russian literature. I was now going for a doctorate in Bible. Why in Jerusalem? Ostensibly because the Hebrew U's Bible Department is the best, but actually because . . . .

How can a Jew tell you why he's visiting Israel? Can you ask him to condense a dictionary of answers into a short story? Add to this the fact that the question why, in reality, calls forth two responses: A. because of . . . . B. in order to . . . . Multiply this by the individual factor — and don't blame me for going no further than to admit that my research was, in part, only the ostensible reason.

Ted's view is easier to express: Man's greatest concern must be with his God. A Jew's chief occupation must be study of God's revealed word: Bible and Talmud. One must feel this obligation at all times and in all places, but most especially in Jerusalem, the Holy City. Fulfill one's obligation!

This philosphy is not foreign to me; in fact, I will admit to its validity. I think it a self-evident truth that no one turns to Bible Scholarship from a feeling of neutrality towards the questions of God, religion, Bible authenticity. One's leaning is one's guide to direction; one's leaning determines whether one will seek verification of God's Authorship or not. My approach, my leaning was positive — yet I studied, as I studied everything else. I enjoyed study; I had been

Dean's List, but my hour was the time I spent wondering. Ted studied his Bible and Talmud — there is no word but: religiously! My day included time with Glenn; his could not.

And so I spent week after week studying, enjoying, continuing — one is really unaware of the passage of time in the Middle East.

Pain, however, is something one feels anywhere, in any pursuit, whatever the pleasure forming the background. I awoke one morning with a pain in my left armpit. We tend to ignore Nature's warnings and so I consciously forgot the pain. When after a day or two, the pain would not be ignored, I began thinking of it as a muscle strain - although four years of college wrestling strains should have taught me that one does not "strain" an armpit. Just short of a week later, my entire armpit red and swollen, I headed for the local clinic. The good doctor examined my armpit and indicated he wanted me to take my temperature — I say indicated because a language barrier was becoming obvious. The word thermometer appears nowhere in the Five Books of Moses. What do you think about 6500 miles from home with a sore armpit while a doctor is placing a ridiculously large thermometer in your mouth? Among the more usual thoughts of dying a martyr to the cause of raising the primitive medical conditions abroad, I saw our medical office back in college with Mrs. H—— insisting that we know our present body temperature before entering the doctor's office no matter what you want Dr. S---- to do with the bandage on vour knee, Mister,

The Ro-Fai meanwhile removed the thermometer and began asking me if I had been wounded — not just wounded, but shot, gunshot — within the last ten days or two weeks. I assured him I hadn't been and was told that the infection in my armpit was just the same sort of infection which usually followed bullet wounds. I wished I knew the Hebrew equivalent of "Imagine that!" I tried a running translation of "Ain't that a kick in the head?!" which apparently failed totally. Bed-rest; antibiotics; keep an every-four-hours temperature chart; see me in five days. Five days of bed rest for an almost bullet wound! Glenn thought it was great! He assured me I'd get a Hebrew purple heart and become an honorary veteran of Arab wars. I told him he was elected to buy a thermometer and dutifully began my bed rest. Ted was still in the yeshiva.

Glenn returned triumphantly. He'd located a pharmacy not far

from our hotel and in no more than twenty-five minutes of improving Israel-American relations with his marvelous command of the native tongue transmitted his desire for a thermometer. The only setback was that it was based on the Centigrade scale. Fahrenheit thermometers were not to be found in Jerusalem! Try to understand the utter uselessness of a thermometer which tells you your temperature is 39° when you're trying to measure the progress you're making against a postalmost-bullet-wound infection. I spent the next several hours writing about all this to friends back home; Glenn found the centigrade-fahrenheit conversion formula in the inside cover of a dictionary and spent the afternoon working out a scale for all possible centigrade temperature equivalents between 98.6° and 105.3°.

And so we passed the next seventy-odd hours: Ted telling me that being on my back was no excuse not to study; Glenn telling me about his friendship-exuding ventures among the natives. The third morning brought increased pain and a temperature pushing 103°. Ted had left early for the University and Glenn was still asleep. Not for long. I showed him the thermometer and he ran, slippers, pants and jacket over his pajamas for the clinic. (Our hotel had no telephone and the clinic was less than three blocks away.) Apparently he passed Billy Malone on the way out and communicated the fact that I was dying because Billy and Molly appeared seconds later. By the time Glenn returned with a doctor, Billy had done the impossible and found a taxi. Cabs in Jerusalem are about as unavailable as submarines between Manhattan and New Jersey. I would have liked to have seen Billy commandeering the cab! Glenn was left to gather my toothbrush, passport and other overnight essentials as the doctor and I sped to the hospital.

During the ride, the doctor alternated between assuring me that only a minor operation was called for and giving me a guided tour of the city. We reached the hospital — several words in Hebrew between my man and the local M.D.'s and I was admitted and scheduled for surgery. An English-speaking intern-type again assured me that this was to be a relatively minor operation — I was past twenty-one, wasn't I? Just sign this form, please . . . . He collected several other facts — my friend was bringing my passport, wasn't he? And I was changed to an oversized green pajama top and placed on an operating table right in the hall. As I began settling comfortably on the cold surface, I was

made to surrender my own pajama bottoms and was covered modestly with a sheet. He switched to Hebrew for his next question: "You do understand Hebrew?" I don't know why, but I hit him with my most nonchalent, fluent-sounding Hebrew equivalent of "Sure!" A few Shaloms passed between us and he was gone.

I lay there realizing that, pajama-bottomless as I was, I had no real option but to wait there in the hall. What thoughts are in one's mind at a time like this? You really do see your entire life in flashes and episodes! I wanted an airplane back to New York like I never wanted anything before. I thought of the old comic routine: "Why does Grandpa spend so much time reading the Bible, Ma?" "He's cramming for his finals, Son." And I began to feel, uncomfortably, that Ted was a Hell of a lot more prepared than I was. What is the source for the dictum, "Live each day as if it were your last"? I knew I hadn't been. Mercifully, I thought at first, an intern-looking chap appeared with a hypodermic and an opaque bottle. I knew why he was there; they'd taken a blood specimen while I was being checked-in — this could only be anesthesia. He Shalomed me and began babbling away. I stopped him and explained that my Hebrew comprehension was on the same level as the explanation he was getting, and would he please take it slow. My explanation struck this moron as funny. When he recovered, he asked intelligently enough what I weighed? My reply of one-thirtyseven brought more laughter. I realized why immediately, and controlling myself, (after all, he was armed) explained that my answer was in pounds, not kilos. To which, this medical genius replied, "What's that in kilos, then?" I told him, hoping my sarcasm dripped in translation, that if he'd send out for pencil and paper, I'd be happy to divide one-thirty-seven by two-point-two. Eventually, I solved the division mentally, watched him fill the hypodermic from the opaque bottle, rolled over obligingly, grunted Shalom when he finished.

Frankly, I was sure by this time that if he was any indication of this hospital's standards, I wanted out! I knew that I couldn't possibly survive an operation in this place. Well, Bible Scholar, I thought, think of a comforting verse. And I'll be damned if while lying there waiting for the injection to take effect, I could think of any verse but Leviticus 18:28. "... that the land (of Israel) not vomit you out when you defile it, as it did to the people before you." Again and again I could only see this verse — the land was vomiting me out for not

taking my studies seriously, religiously, if I must use the word. God, I was scared.

As it began dawning on me that I wasn't becoming drowsy, that my senses, especially pain, were not becoming dulled, that easily half an hour had elapsed, another person appeared in the hallway. He was, however, dressed in oversize green pajamas too. I wondered if he was pre-surgery or possibly, hopefully, a survivor. I was about to launch an enquiry when he stopped at my bed (table, really), checked the name on the chart near my feet, and produced — I swear this is how it happened — a bottle of rubbing alcohol, cotton, and a razor blade held in a pliers. I was reduced to sheer utter panic. Terror. Why didn't I faint? How did I manage not to go into shock? What was this? Self-help? A new kind of group therapy? I stammered; I couldn't speak. I wanted to run, but I couldn't move. Was this really going to operate on me in the hall? With those things? Without the injection having taken effect? Where the Hell were Ted and Glenn?

Thankfully, thankfully, he explained that he was there just to shave the armpit . . . . As he prepared the site for future excavations, my heart resumed its beating and life returned to my limbs. I hadn't been vomited out yet.

He was almost finished when the until-then-empty hallway began filling with visitors. Their expressions of disbelief as they passed gave me some clue as to the face I must have greeted him with. I began chuckling at their horror and whether in doing so I moved, or he slipped, or lost his touch in front of an audience, or whatever, but he nicked my upper arm with the blade. A minor nick, a very minor shaving type nick which produced the usual tiny spurt of blood. He dropped his tools, mumbled something too fast for me to catch, and ran off down the hall. I was rather embarrassed with all those people standing around. He redeemed himself by reappearing almost immediately with a bottle of mercurochrome-like liquid which he poured freely over my arm, armpit, sheet, etc.

He stood above me surveying his handiwork with an expression which was undecided between profuse apology for his error and immense satisfaction with its correction. And then (deus ex machina!) his superiors arrived to conduct me to the operating room.

Shout for joy! Clap yourself on the back! Plant a flag! Your endurance has been remarkable. And you have reached "the operation."

But once having congratulated yourself, pause. In fact, stop. I'm not going to discuss what transpired during the operation. Not only was I thoroughly unconscious then, but also what really concerns me is what happened after the operation. I'm not going to relate the usual post-operative anecdotes either; or even spice this story with an account of your semi-conscious post-operative narrator shouting "Bedpan, damn it!" to a whole bevy of Hebrew-speaking nurses gathered about his bed trying to understand.

What I have to relate is how I awoke — about seven hours after entering the operating room - with my entire right armpit, shoulder, upper arm and rib cage aching unbearably under mounds of bandage and adhesive tape through which extended a plastic drain tube whose end was hidden somewhere in an almost four-inch-

long incision in my armpit.

During the entire first week of convalescence — a week punctured by antibiotic injections several times a day — the plastic drain tube remained in my armpit. Open, draining wounds require changes every six or eight hours. Even with the bandages removed, I was unable to move my entire shoulder region. The surgeon who always supervised the three or four interns who changed tubing, gauze and tape - always with much probing and pain - insisted that I turn my head to the left during the entire procedure. Once, when I returned my head to its forward position seconds too soon, I glimpsed the nurses disposing of the bandages they had just removed from me. They were stained various shades of yellow and dark brown and were very wet. One glimpse, and I began retching. Needless to say, the retching produced extreme pain and increased drainage. When the surgeon had everything under control again, he said simply, "When we operated, your body temperature was over 105°; it was rising . . . only a matter of hours. Your temperature is still over 102°. Please try to cooperate with us." Then he and his team left.

Alone, I realized — perhaps for the first time — how close I had come to dying. How close I had come to being vomited out by the Holy Land! God, does that change your perspective — I could have been dead at twenty-two! When you've come so close to

nothingness, existence must forever be of great concern, of great import to you. I thought how few were my accomplishments, how minor my achievements, how petty my interests. And I grew immeasurably happy at the thought that I had been granted an

opportunity to right the situation.

I don't believe it necessary for me to physically bring Glenn and Ted into the hospital room with me now. They were there all along. Or rather, they were both with me until the operation began, both with me during the first few days of convalescence; but only Ted was still with me after the surgeon reminded me how close death had been. Glenn became a very uncomfortable thought when I began measuring values; I realized that if he were to live another eighty years, it was hardly likely he'd be more prepared for his final exams.

My recovery lasted over nine weeks. By then, I was spending as much time as Ted on religious studies.

\* \* \*

That was over three years ago. After a few months, I returned from Israel and began studying for Rabbinic Ordination. This coming June, God willing, I'll be ordained. When I go to my college class-reunion, former classmates who haven't seen me for the last few years will ask in amazement, "You, a rabbi?," and I will tell them about my operation, and ask those among them—like Mark and you—whom I'm sure understand, to join me in prayer that the Glenns among us will not be vomited out by the earth they walk on.

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In his concern with the efficacy of the phrase, and in his aggrandizement of style, the fledgling writer often misassesses the elements of sensitivity and perception which are prerequisite not only to expression, but also to human interaction.

Whether sensitivity and perception can be taught in a classroom context is a moot question; but that they can, and must, be learned by the author is not.

In taking cognizance of those whose efforts helped produce the magazine, should we not also acknowledge those whose efforts helped produce the authors — Dr. Irving Greenberg, and especially Rabbi Morris Besdin.

