

The Fallacy of Jewish Self-Hatred in Post-World War II Jewish-American Literature

by

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To 5768 and counting...

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Abstract

This thesis examines the novels of two of the most influential Jewish-American writers in Post-World War II America: Philip Roth and Saul Bellow. In using Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1967) and *The Counterlife* (1986) and Bellow's *Seize the Day* (1956) and *Herzog* (1961) as examples, I explore the way that critics have assigned the term of "Jewish self-hatred" to various actions of the novels' male protagonists, and then I subsequently undermine their arguments in search of an alternative assessment of the characters and their feelings toward their Jewish identities.

In the first chapter, I focus solely on the works of Philip Roth, analyzing specific aspects of the protagonists Alexander Portnoy and Nathan Zuckerman. Juxtaposing my own argument with those of literary critics over the past half-century, I point out three interesting routes to examine both male characters. Specifically, I focus on their obsession with non-Jewish women, or *shiksas*, their feelings toward Judaism as both a religion and culture, and lastly their encounters with Christianity. I show that, while many of their actions could appear as professions of Jewish self-hatred if looked at alone, their overall feelings are actually ones of devotion to their Jewish heritage.

In the second chapter, like the first, I focus on a single author and his works, namely Saul Bellow. In illustrating the complexities of Bellow's (Tommy) Wilhelm Adler and Moses Herzog, I highlight their struggles with their Jewish identities, while comparing and contrasting them to the characters of Roth that I introduced in the previous chapter. Unlike Roth's seemingly assimilated Jewish male protagonists, Bellow's characters have a deeper upbringing in religious Judaism, thus creating a greater divide between their generation and that of their parents. Unlike Roth's characters who obsess over *shiksas*, Bellow's are more intrigued by Jewish women, leaving the *shiksa* category on the periphery of this chapter's argumentation. Nonetheless, much of the chapter centers on conceptions of Jewish identity (both cultural and religious) and experiences with the majority religion, Christianity. In addition, the discussion of family names comes up throughout the works as an integral aspect of Jewish and American identity—an aspect seemingly void in the works of Roth.

I conclude by indicating that both Roth and Bellow simply exist outside the realm of Jewishness that their critics assume and define them under, rather operating in a Jewish "counter-culture" that exemplifies a term I define as "Jewish self-affirmation," *not* Jewish self-hatred.

CONTENTS

Short Titles.....	i
Figures.....	ii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Philip Roth.....	11
Chapter Two: Saul Bellow.....	35
Conclusion.....	52
Works Consulted.....	55

Short Titles

CL: Roth, Philip. The Counterlife. New York: Vintage International, 1986.

H: Bellow, Saul. Herzog. New York: Penguin Books, 1961.

PC: Roth, Philip. Portnoy's Complaint. New York: Vintage International, 1967.

RMO: Roth, Philip. Reading Myself and Others. New York: Vintage International,
1985.

SD: Bellow, Saul. Seize the Day. New York: Penguin Books, 1956.

Figures

- i. "Intermarriage by year marriage began," 13

Introduction

While the diversity of the Jewish people renders it almost impossible to assign one, general voice to Jewish-American literature, the works of both Philip Roth and Saul Bellow, arguably the two most influential Jewish novelists of the second half of the Twentieth Century, successfully communicate the experiences of a great number of Jews of the generation that emerged after World War II. As two Jews who grew up during the Great Depression and Second World War, Roth and Bellow belong to the collective Jewish experience of the post-War generation, best summarized by historian Edward S. Shapiro who observed, “American Jews believed that they had at last become fully American.”¹ With this mindset, Jews, for the first time, possessed the ability to overcome obstacles that hindered their ancestors’ chances at social mobility and, at the same time, left this younger generation of Jewish-Americans with an important question: What role will Judaism now play in my life?

A complete answer to this question appears difficult because of the many conflicting identities within the Jewish-American community, and, therefore, should be addressed in general terms. At the end of the Second World War, over five million Jews lived in America, all adhering to varying degrees of Judaism—ranging from mainly secular identities to Ultra-Orthodox beliefs.² The commonly

¹ Edward S. Shapiro, “World War II and American Jewish Identity,” Modern Judaism 10.1 (February 1990): 65.

² Paul R. Mendes-Flor and Jehuda Reinharz, eds., The Jew in the Modern World (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 703.

chosen route, however, falls somewhere in between these two extremes, as many Jews drifted toward moderate religious adherence. Sociologist Nathan Glazer argues:

By the end of the Second World War...and certainly within a few years after its end, the issue was settled: Jewishness as a program for life in America—that is, the idea that Jews in America could continue as a group defined not primarily by religion but by secular culture and quasi-national feeling—was recognized as impossible.³

Glazer's view, while accurate for a large number of Jews, fails to capture a true definition of identity for all Jews. Instead, he refutes any possibility of a strict secular notion of Judaism, labeling it as "impossible." Nevertheless, in order for such a great number of Jews to find refuge in a compartmentalized identity in which Judaism played one of many roles, the presence of significant religious leadership, the very type that Glazer pontificates, was necessary. In the aftermath of the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel, two crucial events intertwined with the events of World War II, Jewish leaders saw religion as a unifying tool, but one that also allowed for a reinterpretation of the Jewish cultural symptom known as "Jewish self-hatred." This began to function as a label that, in the decades following World War II, would be used, however irresponsibly, to criticize any Jew who either consciously or unknowingly exhibited certain characteristics that projected a negative depiction of any and all things Jewish. Accordingly, emerging Jewish-American novelists such as Roth and Bellow

³ Nathan Glazer, American Judaism. 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 108.

inevitably encountered attacks of this nature in response to their works, for, no matter what their subject, they risked offending a variety of the different groups within the Jewish-American community. Nevertheless, they navigate their literature's focus as they see fit, and as overwhelmingly secular Jews at heart, could not escape the possibility of figuring into the symptoms of Jewish self-hatred.

Before addressing the history behind the acceptance of such a term as Jewish self-hatred and what the extent, if any, is of its legitimacy as a label in the post-war Jewish community, an acknowledgement of its existence in a work of Jewish-American literature provides a frame of reference for the greater argument. Philip Roth's first book *Goodbye, Columbus*, a collection of short stories that contains the novella for which the collection is named, and which won Roth the National Book Award in 1959, illustrates key elements already introduced regarding Jewish-American life shortly after World War II. During an interaction between the male protagonist, Neil Klugman, and his girlfriend's father, Mr. Patimkin, the very symptoms of Jewish self-hatred surface. Mr Patimkin begins,

"Here you need a little of the *gonif* in you. You know what that means? *Gonif*?"

"Thief," I said.

"You know more than my own kids. They're *goyim*, my kids, that's how much they understand."⁴

⁴ Philip Roth, *Goodbye, Columbus* (New York: Vintage International, 1959), 94.

Although short, this conversation between men of two generations—Neil of the post-war generation and Mr. Patimkin of an earlier one—attests to the changing attitudes that Jews had as they reconsidered their identities after the Second World War. While Mr. Patimkin's accusations of his children as *goyim*, or non-Jews, appear out of line with the common perception that after the War Jews aligned themselves more in the religious sphere, his comments allow for an alternative placement of his children—in the realm of Jewish self-hatred. Mr. Patimkin's playful use of Yiddish to posit that the only word his children know of the dying language of European Jews ironically is the word that identifies with a negative connotation of non-Jews represents his resentment for what his children, in his eyes, have become. Ironically, however, some of his children's most *goyishe* characteristics actually stem from plastic surgeries to fix stereotypically Jewish features that, as their father, Mr. Patimkin willingly financed. Nevertheless, as a religious Jew with non-practicing children, Mr. Patimkin finds himself at odds between generations, and, as the male protagonists in many of Roth and Bellow's novels also experience, this very conflict between generations acts as the vehicle that promotes and assigns the symptom of Jewish self-hatred amongst the Jews of the post-War generation.

In an obvious role of a minority population, Jews such as Mr. Patimkin and his children face unavoidable questions: How can I identify in a predominantly Christian country if I am a Jew? What aspects of my Jewish customs and traditions, therefore, am I willing to forfeit or adapt to America? The characters' responses throughout Roth and Bellow's novels vary as each one finds different

understandings of their own identities. To contextualize their varying perspectives, David Mamet, a Pulitzer-Prize winning playwright, criticizes the idea of assimilation, in which Jews, such as these characters, simply shed their traditions in exchange for acceptance into American society. These sentiments surface in Mamet's frustration with his view of the state of Jewish identity in America: "Assimilation that entails rejection of one's ancestors' sorrow, rather than a 'ticket of admission' to the majority culture is an announcement of depravity."⁵ Although a view in which Mamet sees the situation having no alternatives, he identifies an important aspect of Jewish identity. As an observant Jew, he perceives assimilation as something that is false in the sense that it provides entry into the "majority culture," thus leaving the only real part of assimilation as its denial of a Jewish past. Functioning under these pretences, Roth and Bellow's characters meet opposition as positive voices of the Jewish-American population, for Mamet's "announcement of depravity" represents the very concept of Jewish self-hatred.

Mamet's critiques, however, only voice one of many commentaries on Jewish self-hatred, for he is mainly concerned with the deteriorating identities of Jews who cringe at the fact that they are, indeed, Jewish. I question, therefore, whether or not it is legitimate to generalize about assimilated Jews in the way Mamet seems to do without issue. From a theoretical standpoint, scholar Sander L. Gilman, explores the environment in which Jewish self-hatred emerges in his extensive volume *Jewish Self-Hatred: "Outsiders view themselves as marginal and*

⁵ David Mamet, *The Wicked Son* (New York: Schocken Books, 2006), 39. Hereafter cited in the text.

are thus dependent on such real or imagined categories to define the borders of acceptability, which must be crossed into the world of privilege ascribed to the reference group.”⁶ Gilman’s claim, however universal, places Jews as the “Outsider” who actually receives and accepts the label of who they are from the majority culture—not from their groups’ own notions. Operating under such a definition assumes that Jewish leaders therefore subject themselves to the majority culture’s beliefs and actually possess an identity that defines them not in the terms of who they are, but who they are perceived to be. The acceptance of such an identity thus reveals exactly where Jewish self-hatred arises—Jews who refuse to embrace the concept of the “Outsider” as a complete identity. Nevertheless, could there possibly exist an acceptable Jewish identity that both acknowledges the problems that American society generates for the “Outsider” while still belonging to dominant secular culture? Although this may be problematic for many proponents of the concept of Jewish self-hatred, figures such as Roth and Bellow successfully operate in between the two sides that Gilman defines and Mamet criticizes.

Although the criticisms of assimilated Jews by the religiously observant declare varying levels of self-hatred with the denial of their pasts, a simple acceptance of their terminologies leaves the situation incomplete. Roth and Bellow, as seemingly assimilated Jews, actually find new ways to express their Jewish identity in their literature. Still, Mamet offers an interesting point of

⁶ Sander L. Gilman, Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 4-5.

departure into this, for he recognizes the very reasons for which Jews decided to assimilate. Mamet proposes, “Young Jews, most notably, discovered that traditional religion, that is, fealty to or observance of one’s faith, limited individuals’ ‘freedom’” (Mamet, 170). These “Young Jews” like Roth and Bellow, the children of first generation immigrants, broke from the traditions that were in conflict with those of America; but some, in doing so, found other avenues to explore their Jewish pasts. These routes, however questionable based on Mamet’s ideology for self-identifying Jews, emerged from assimilated Jewish intellectuals in Europe a century prior, who, as Yosef Yerushalmi argues, “first felt an imperative to examine Judaism historically...because they were no longer sure of what Judaism was, or whether, whatever it was, it could still be viable for them.”⁷ Mamet’s “Young Jews,” therefore, seem to exist in the same position as Yerushalmi’s intellectuals. In relating this parallel to the writings of Roth and Bellow, the question arises: Can their works serve as representations of Jewish history, and, if so, can they function to preserve the traditions of their Jewish ancestors that critics see threatened by secular America?

Jewish historiography actually signifies not a break with Jewish traditions, but rather an invention or re-invention of Judaism’s past traditions. Accordingly, Eric Hobsbawm, a social historian, theorizes on the actual process and environment of the invention of tradition. Hobsbawm claims, “we should expect [the ‘invention’ of tradition] to occur more frequently...when such old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently

⁷ Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 86. Hereafter cited in the text.

adaptable and flexible, or are otherwise eliminated.”⁸ This description mirrors the position in which many Jewish-Americans exist, for in feeling their traditional Judaism can no longer fit into secular America they face a choice: forget their Jewish traditions or invent new ones.

In response to this difficult question, Jews find themselves choosing one or the other, but, even in the invention of traditions, Jews take different routes. Consequently, it must be asked: what are these “new traditions”? Yerushalmi’s Jewish historiography is one example, for it coincided with the “sudden emergence of Jews out of the ghetto” in Europe first and then America (Yerushalmi, 85). Accordingly both Roth and Bellow’s novels and their male protagonists’ experiences serve as a similar response. As a result of assimilation the new tradition that Roth and Bellow embody signifies a departure from Judaism’s customs, but *not* from the tradition from which it stems. The mere act of creatively examining and writing about one’s experiences as a Jew, whether during childhood or how it has affected one’s adult life, proves a commitment to Judaism’s preservation, regardless of whether or not the novels or their characters are actual forms of Judaism in a conventional religious sense. Surely, then, the very notion of Jewish self-hatred must be reexamined, for Jews assigned that label by some Jewish leaders may simply understand their Jewish identities in the context of a modern society at odds with the religious mindset of these leaders and critics.

Accordingly, these assumed self-hating Jews that cannot help from almost completely removing themselves from all religious identity still show a vested

⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in The Invention of Tradition, ed. Eric Hobsbawm (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

interest in the way their Jewish identity has and continues to shape their lives. In keeping with this argument, therefore, Roth and Bellow's works must be looked at in these same terms, existing and representing a sort of "Jewish counter-culture"—one that operates within the majority Jewish culture that religious leaders believe to be the primary and most important voice of Judaism. Yerushalmi qualifies these conditions, "history becomes what it had never been before—the faith of the fallen Jews" (Yerushalmi, 86). The way that faith is transformed by Yerushalmi provides an interesting element to the issue of Jewish self-hatred, for knowing that there are many, like Yerushalmi who see Jewish history's emergence in American modernity as a positive reality and a reinvention of faith, allows for the very questioning of the legitimacy of the term "Jewish self-hatred." Nevertheless, through this affirmation, he gives credibility to the concept of the "fallen Jews," thus acknowledging that the real life versions of Roth and Bellow's characters do, in fact, exhibit characteristics far from the majority culture's acceptable definition of a Jewish-American. The use of the "Jewish counter-culture" thus provides a redefinition instead of a mere refutation of Jewish self-hatred, revealing a term I will call "Jewish self-affirmation."

While both Roth and Bellow's literary collections span a number of decades and deal with a multitude of subjects, the reoccurrence of male protagonists tackling questions of their own identities resounds throughout these novels. Accordingly, the topic of Jewish self-hatred, or rather questionable examples of this phenomenon, appears in a variety of forms such as self-reflection, open-dialogue, and observations from marginal characters, to name only a few. Roth's

1967 novel *Portnoy's Complaint* and 1986 novel *The Counterlife* provide poignant representations of Jewish-American males experiencing these feelings. However, where comedy plays a significant role in communicating the messages in *Portnoy's Complaint*, the strikingly different tones and narrative structures of *The Counterlife*⁹ creates an interesting mode of comparison between the two novels as they address a common topic. Similarly, Bellow's 1956 novella *Seize the Day* and 1964 novel *Herzog* center on male characters who appear constantly at odds with their identities and the role that their Jewish backgrounds should play. Whereas comedy and narrative structure provide immediate points of comparison between Roth's novels, the differing lengths of the two works of Bellow's reveals the most immediate contrasts between them based mainly on the breadth of possible character development. These novels' accepted role as representations of Jewish-American males of the post-World War II generation thus serves to function as the background of the analysis of the extent to which either author projects levels of Jewish self-hatred. Working within this context, therefore, an integral question arises: what are the best methods to approach and subsequently analyze the complicated notions surrounding the accused and/or assumed symptoms of Jewish self-hatred within the novels?

⁹ Nevertheless, comedy is a central vehicle in Roth's works and thus is still present throughout the novel—merely to a lesser extent to that of *Portnoy's Complaint*.

Chapter One: Philip Roth

The very heart of understanding why Jewish self-hatred has entered critical dialogue as a legitimate description for certain Jews lies in the fact that, as the “other” to the Christian majority, Jews constantly face the task of defining themselves differently and in such a way that sets them apart, if only in a single way, from the rest of American society. While Roth and Bellow arguably exist as secular writers representing a large number of Jewish-Americans, their identities are, nevertheless, defined in part by their religion. This unavoidable fact allows for the initial inquiry into how to approach the question of Jewish self-hatred in their writings, as neither believes they are, in fact, promoting or exemplifying the highly criticized identity. Even before the terminology of Jewish self-hatred came into vogue during the Twentieth Century, the Yiddish word, *apikoros*, evoked, at least partially, the concept, meaning, “a heretic, one who is learned in Judaism but rejects it” (Mamet, 183). A testament to the pressures of assimilation and a possible desire to identify with a Christian society, the *apikoros* signifies a strict rejection of Judaism on religious grounds, but, at the time of its inception, a secular identity simply did not exist as an option.

Moving back to the post-World War II society of America, however, the *apikoros* still can apply to the discussion of self-hatred in a more modern sense, for its grounding in religion reveals the root of analysis of Jewish self-hatred. Regardless of the prevalence of compartmentalized identities that include Judaism as only one of many aspects of one’s self, a secular Jew could never have come to

exist without their ancestral counterpart—the religiously observant Jew. An appropriate method for analysis, therefore, begins with a juxtaposition of Judaism—as a religion—with *its* counterpart: Christianity. As an acceptable term for discussion and consideration, Jewish self-hatred and its undeniable marriage to religion allows for the myriad references to Jewish identity throughout the novels to be broken into two camps. On one side of the spectrum lie the comments that address the many facets of Judaism, whereas those that reflect on aspects of the majority religion, Christianity, and its many effects on the male characters in the novels lay opposite. This two-sided rubric of Jewish self-hatred thus allows for one avenue of analysis of the concept within Roth and Bellow’s novels, but nevertheless remains incomplete without two unique categories that emerge from both Christian and Jewish aspects of the spectrum.

While stemming from the male protagonists’ experiences, but not identification, with the majority Christian culture, the second method of discussion regarding Jewish self-hatred quickly diverges from a connection to religion. Although encompassing the commonly criticized practice of intermarriage, as estimates are that 13% of the Jewish population married a non-Jew in the years prior to 1970¹⁰, it is the Jewish male’s sexual longing for Christian women that actually provides the most intriguing exploration into the legitimacy of Jewish self-hatred in both Roth and Bellow’s works. These statistics and more can be seen in the figure “Intermarriage by year marriage began”:

¹⁰ “The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01 (September 2003),” <http://www.ujc.org/page.html?ArticleID=46252>.

Intermarriage by year marriage began.

Year marriage began	Percent intermarried
Before 1970	13
1970-1979	28
1980-1984	38
1985-1990	43
1991-1995	43
1996-2001	47

Scholar Frederic Cople Jaher's essay "The Quest for the Ultimate *Shiksa*" discusses the phenomenon, embodying the very subject matter that the authors' characters actually live through. Accordingly, the work begins,

The *shiksa* obsesses many Jews: Rabbis see her as an intermarital threat to the survival of Judaism; parents fear that she will lure their sons away from family and faith; and Jewish men fantasize about her sexual and social desirability.¹¹

This "*shiksa*¹² obsession" finds considerable discussion amongst all aspects of Jewish life, as Jaher mentions the "Rabbi," representative of the religion, "parents," and most important in context of the argument surrounding Roth and Bellow's works, "Jewish men." The perception of the *shiksa* as part of the majority has much to do with the appeal to Jewish men, but declaring this admiration an actual form of Jewish self-hatred requires an in-depth look at their actual functions in the novels.

¹¹ Fredric Cople Jaher, "The Quest for the Ulitimate Shiksa," American Quarterly 35.5 (Winter 1983): 518.

¹² As defined by Jaher, "The Yiddish word for gentile female"

In addition to both the greater discussion of religion and the role the gentile female in the Jewish male's psyche, a smaller, yet still greatly significant, category exists to complete the guidelines for analyzing possible manifestations of Jewish self-hatred in Roth and Bellow's works. While not as explicitly discussed as the former modes of analysis mentioned, the both conscious and subconscious use of formal names for characters—both Jew and Gentile—by the authors brings about an issue central to questions surrounding Jewish self-hatred, for, regardless of the culture, a name can reveal characteristics about a person before they even have a chance to speak for themselves. In the context of the Jew as the "Outsider," names serve as an immediate indication of one's affiliation to this group—a fact that, as the works of both Roth and Bellow exemplify, drove Jewish men to different degrees of reaction: from contempt to outright rejection of their given *family* names.

Beginning with Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*, conceptions of religious identity and how the male protagonist, Alexander Portnoy, places himself within these boundaries, resonate throughout the novel. Portnoy recounts the story through a first person narrative of an extensive one-way conversation he has with a psychologist whose voice is silent until the last line—a *punch* line. This structure lends to a work that projects a comedic and untraditional structure with Portnoy's feelings presented the second they appear in his head, something Roth always had

an interest in exploring. Roth's interest stems from "[being] attracted to prose that has the turns, vibrations, intonations, and cadences, and the spontaneity and ease of spoken language, at the same time that it is solidly grounded on the page, weighted with the irony, precision, and ambiguity associated with a more traditional literary rhetoric."¹³ In addition to operating throughout his novels, the structure also allows for a more critical analysis of the novel. Specifically, critics coming from both the Jewish literary and religious communities found issue with Roth's nonchalance in expressing any and all thoughts regarding Judaism as his heritage.

Nevertheless, as early as with the initial *New York Times Book Review* of *Portnoy's Complaint* in 1969, Roth recognized the problematic state of his novel when read in a particular way. Appearing alongside the review, an interview with Roth revealed these very sentiments: "I'm afraid that the temptation to quote single lines out of the entire fictional context will be just about overwhelming on upcoming Saturday mornings. The rabbis have got their indignation to stoke, just as I do" (RMO, 18). Acknowledging both the agendas of Jewish religious figures that felt his novels threatened American Judaism and the ease in which they could remove "single lines" from the greater idea of the work to prove their points, Roth reveals that a proper analysis must consider both context and content as one—a method necessary for a deeper understanding of the accused self-hatred and its actual representation of a Jewish counter-culture.

¹³ Philip Roth, *Reading Myself and Others* (New York: Vintage International, 1985), 13. Hereafter cited in the text with the prefix "RMO."

As with any person, real or fictional, one's childhood and upbringing plays a significant role in how that person views the world throughout his or her adult life. However small, Alexander Portnoy's constant use of phrases to the effect of "for Christ's sake"¹⁴ throughout his memories of his life can stir controversy in the very way Roth alludes to during his *New York Times Book Review* interview. In referencing the savior of people of the Christian faith, Portnoy, in his own mind is simply employing a common slang term used by the average American. The perception of certain critics, on the other hand, lies in the fact that, in doing so, Roth gives affirmation to assimilation into America to the extreme of adopting habits specific to members of the majority religion. For a pious Jew, the word "Christ" should have no place in everyday speech. Along these same lines, literary scholar, David Brauner, understands these terms in an essay on *Portnoy's Complaint* and suggests, "Roth also found himself vilified by many members of the Jewish American literary-critical establishment as a self-hating Jew."¹⁵ In realizing the motives of his own critics, Roth accepts their terms but looking back toward his own upbringing reveals realities that cannot be overlooked in the backgrounds of his novels.

As Roth's interviews reveal his opinions of his critics, they also show the facets of his life before a writer that assist in understanding characters, such as Portnoy. In a state of self-reflection during a 1981 interview with the Parisian *Le*

¹⁴ Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint* (New York: Vintage International, 1994), 16. Hereafter cited in the text with the prefix "PC."

¹⁵ David Brauner, "'Getting in Your Retaliation First': Narrative Strategies in *Portnoy's Complaint*," in *Philip Roth: New Perspectives on an American Author*, ed. Derek Parker Royal (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2005). Hereafter cited in the text.

Nouvel Observateur Roth explained, “Like Bellow and Malamud, I was born to Jewish parents and raised self-consciously as a Jew...I was born into the situation of being a Jew, and it did not take me long to be aware of its ramifications” (RMO, 106). While Roth does not go into further detail of these “ramifications,” we can deduce that his reference is to the seemingly inescapable reality of belonging to a minority culture whose traditions differ from those of the majority culture.

Children have little freedom to rebel against their parents’ religious beliefs, as they assumingly become the children’s own without much thought. This fact plays an integral role in the lives of Jews born during the time of the World Wars, for it was these very affiliations that they strove to rid themselves of in efforts to fit into mainstream America.

Similarly, Roth’s Portnoy expresses confusion in his synthesis of his family’s customs in relation to those in the greater world around him. Portnoy reflects, “all those *meshuggeneh* rules and regulations on top of their own private craziness...I couldn’t even contemplate drinking a glass of milk with my salami sandwich without giving serious offense to God Almighty” (PC, 34). Sounding more like a stand-up comedy monologue than the prose of a novel, Portnoy’s criticism of the Jewish tradition of keeping Kosher may spurn the disapproval of religious leaders, but his emotions reveal a powerful movement in Jewish-American culture past the strict adherence of traditional Judaism of past generations. While dismissing the legitimacy of such observance, Portnoy’s use of the Yiddish equivalent of “crazy,” *meshuggeneh*, actually signifies a crucial element of the proposed Jewish counter-culture: a redefinition and reclamation of tradition. The fluid use of a Yiddish

word in an English sentence represents both an emotion that only that word can express and an acknowledgement of the traditional, European ancestors of these now assimilated, Jewish-Americans.

The character of Alexander Portnoy, nevertheless, exhibits outright denial of his Jewish faith at times that, taken out of the context of the entire novel, could support the accusations of Jewish self-hatred his critics so vehemently support. In a dispute with his parents as a child as he dresses to attend synagogue on Rosh Hashanah, Alex passionately replies, “just because it’s your religion doesn’t mean it’s mine...I don’t have a religion...I don’t believe in God” (PC, 60). These strong declarations against the religion of his family give evidence to argue that Alex is, in fact, a self-hating Jew. Their context in Portnoy’s entire life, however, question whether or not these feelings are representative of his true beliefs or even warranted to be viewed past a common, immature reaction to his parents’ request. The influences of Portnoy’s upbringing, so similar to Roth’s, serve to play only a partial role in the development of the Jewish counter-culture and its refutation of the destructive label of self-hatred. Importantly, even at the time of the publication of *Portnoy’s Complaint*, Roth stressed, “I am probably right now as devoted to my origins as I ever was” (RMO, 9). Although there is no proven representation of the fictional Portnoy as Roth, Roth’s professed devotion to his “origins,” rooted in Jewish culture, during his adult life serves to, at the very least, provide evidence through moments chronologically later in the novel, that Portnoy’s “self-hatred” are merely acts of immaturity as he moves toward the Jewish counter-culture of post-war America.

With the forces of traditional Judaism at times pushing Alexander Portnoy towards heresy, the intrigue of the easy alternative of the majority culture—Christianity—opens an even broader discussion in exploring critics' false accusations of self-hatred that truly belong part of a different dialogue. Growing up in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood in Newark, New Jersey, Portnoy's impression of the "other" stemmed more from his parents' communicated perceptions than actual interactions. His father, in this manner, describes his thoughts of Christianity to his son: "They worship a Jew, do you know that, Alex? Their whole big-deal religion is based on worshipping someone who was an established Jew at that time...you are never going to hear such a *mishegoss* of mixed-up crap and disgusting nonsense as the Christian religion in your entire life." (PC, 40). At such a young age, Portnoy may not completely understand the motivation of these comments, but their message is clear: Christianity is ridiculous. His father's motivation, on the other hand, could be a response to more pressing issues, such as a fear of losing his son to assimilation or even worse: conversion.

Having his father's impression of Christianity engrained in his head, Alex and a group of friends accept an invitation to an Italian teenager's home in the hopes of some sexual experience. While Jewish self-hatred may not require an acceptance of Christianity as the "right" religion, the two religions' relationship to one another cannot be overlooked in the context of such accusations. Accordingly, Alex's outright disgust with Christianity at the Girardi household exemplifies both

a continuation of beliefs from father to son and a sound rejection of America's dominant religion. As Portnoy enters the home he observes,

Tacked above the Girardi sink is a picture of Jesus Christ floating up to heaven in a pink nightgown. How disgusting can human beings be! The Jews I despise for their narrow-mindedness, their self-righteousness...but when it comes to tawdriness and cheapness to beliefs that would shame even a gorilla, you simply cannot top the *goyim*. (PC, 168)

His criticisms of Judaism alongside Christianity, nevertheless, signify an adolescent's confusion with both his heritage and identity. Even so, where he criticizes stereotypical characteristics of Jews, his commentary on Christianity and its adherents, the *goyim*, digs much deeper, for it actually focuses on the true element of religion: "beliefs." Although Portnoy does not yet possess the maturity or conviction to truly grasp his identity, his rejection of the majority culture and its religion is one step closer to the formation of a *different* Jewish mindset.

As Portnoy continues through childhood into college, he confronts America and its non-Jewish inhabitants using the tools that he received from his Jewish upbringing. Faced with a Thanksgiving dinner with his Christian college girlfriend's family, his major concern is not whether he will impress them as much as whether or not his religion will be a factor in their judging his worth. Portnoy narrates,

When the aunts and uncles come for the Thanksgiving dinner, please, let there be no anti-Semite among them! Because if someone

starts in with “the pushy Jews,” or says “kike” or “jewed him down”—Well, I’ll jew them down all right, I’ll jew their fucking teeth down their throat! No, no violence...let *them* be violent, that’s *their* way. (PC, 224)

In this act of premeditated self-defense, Portnoy not only shows maturity in his ability to immediately realize that violence is not the right reaction to anti-Semitism, but in realizing this also exhibits an allegiance to his faith and culture that transcends any effort previously displayed, even internally. This behavior, as interpreted by Brauner, reveals that “the novel represents Jews as responding to Gentile anti-Semitism not primarily by internalizing it but rather by harboring a reciprocal prejudice” (Brauner). In this context, therefore, Portnoy’s response assumes a vital position in the refutation of the representation of his character as the epitome of Jewish self-hatred, for his greatest discomforts arise when removed from his Jewish environment and thrown into the world of the *goyim*.

Turning to the familiar Roth character of Nathan Zuckerman, from many of his novels, such as *The Counterlife*, the same general displacement appears in moments he must face the non-Jewish world alone. While much discussion of this novel and character will surface later, one of Nathan’s observations toward the end of the novel describes a similar feeling to that of the college-aged Portnoy. Specifically, Nathan reacts to the embodiment of Christianity, the Church: “I am never more of a Jew than I am in a church when the organ begins. I may be estranged at the Wailing Wall but without being a stranger—I stand outside but

not shut out.”¹⁶ Although part of a chapter that the reader learns is actually a piece of fiction entitled “Christendom” written by the novel’s character, Nathan, about himself and his imagined “counterlife,” the poignancy of the quotation still rings true. Roth juxtaposes the words “estranged” with “stranger” and “outside” with “not shut out” in order to master the dichotomy of possible Jewish identities. Accordingly, a true expression of Jewish self-hatred would never qualify these words; but for Roth, clarifying these conceptions of identity creates a Jewish counter-culture that feels uncomfortable with religious affiliations, personified by the significance of the “Wailing Wall” to Judaism, but still justified to be viewed as nothing else but a Jew.

While Portnoy never expresses these feelings in such a concise manner, his experience as an adult visiting Israel at least touches the surface as he observes, “These are (there’s no other word!) the natives. Returned! This is where it all began!...Hey here *we’re* the WASPs!” (PC, 224). In his excitement, Portnoy’s feelings actually represent a culmination of his feelings as an outsider of the majority culture in America, as he passionately includes himself as “*we’re*,” the Jews. His past criticisms of his Jewish past, while not forgotten, fall to the background, however, as he realizes that in a country with a Jewish majority, it is the Jew who dominates, not the *goyim*.

The mentioned confrontations that Alexander Portnoy, and to a lesser extent, Nathan Zuckerman, have with Christianity through their lives figures heavily into their formation of religious identity and association with the Jewish

¹⁶ Philip Roth, The Counterlife (New York: Vintage International, 1986), 256. Hereafter cited in the text with the prefix “CL.”

counter-culture within the “other” of greater American Jewry. Their complete experience with the secular realm of Christianity—the culture of the majority—appears, however, in a manner thoroughly at odds with the traditional beliefs of both Jewish leaders and their families. Appropriately identified as the “shiksa syndrome,” (CL, 287) this “longing in...swarthy Jewboys for those bland blond exotics called *shikses*” (PC, 152) finds a significant presence in both Alexander Portnoy and Nathan Zuckerman’s adolescent through adult lives.

The syndrome’s origins, similar to other essential elements that form the complicated identities of Portnoy and Zuckerman, find at least some emergence in the dialogue of past generations. For example, during Portnoy’s childhood his cousin, Heshie, had been set to marry a Christian girl until his father called the wedding off. While Heshie ultimately died in the war, Portnoy’s family finds solace in his death not by his service to his country, but rather in other terms. Specifically family members told Heshie’s parents repeatedly: “At least he didn’t leave you with a *shikse* wife. At least he didn’t leave you with *goyische* children” (PC, 60). With this mindset the generations older than Portnoy assign a completely negative connotation to non-Jews, especially in regard to intermarriage, likely because of both its threat to the survival of Judaism and the fact that in Eastern Europe most *goyim* would never consider marrying a Jew in the first place.

Just as the concept of intermarriage appeared foreign to older generations, the Jews of the post-war generation, such as Portnoy and Zuckerman, ultimately became intrigued by the *shiksa* as the concept assumed the characteristics of the

forbidden fruit of Genesis: uncontrollably desirable with seemingly reprehensible consequences. In the same scene that Portnoy finds himself both in awe of and repulsed by the Christian relics in the Girardi home, he also experiences his first of many sexual encounters with a non-Jewish woman. Although he struggles to convince Bubbles Girardi, the promiscuous Italian girl, to perform a sexual act on him, his ultimate triumph is rewarded with a reaction of hate. The action commences:

“Son of a bitch kike!” Bubbles screams. “You got gissum all over the couch! And the walls! And the lamp!”

“I got it in my eye! And don’t you say kike to me, you!”

“You *are* a kike, Kike! You got it all over everything, you mocky son of a bitch! Look at the doilies!”

It’s just as my parents have warned me—comes the first disagreement, no matter how small, and the only thing a *shikse* knows to call you is a dirty Jew. (PC, 180)

In a scene full of obscenities, both sexual and ethnic, Roth finds a narrative method to express the commotion and Portnoy’s retrospective thought in a way mirroring that of a joke and its punch line. While the subject matter is undeniably intense, Portnoy’s resolution signifies a partial apology to his parents for disobeying their wishes. On the other hand, however, it also functions to mock them at the same time, for a sweeping generalization like that surely borders on the line of absurdity. Nevertheless, Portnoy’s ability to defend his dignity as a Jew in the face of the ultimate insult, “Kike,” reveals his commitment to his origins, despite his

desire to experience the “other” in a sexual dialogue. These layered elements thus beg the question: Despite harboring an intense desire for *shiksas*¹⁷, are Portnoy’s *concluding* actions truly self-deprecating to the point of self-hatred or do they merely reveal a newly emerging Jewish-American identity forged after World War II?

As Portnoy continues to analyze his relationships with *shiksas* throughout the novel, his first college girlfriend, whom he refers to as “The Pumpkin,” symbolizes something far beyond his fears for the Thanksgiving feast. In remembering time spent with her, Portnoy recounts, “I travel by train to Iowa, to spend Thanksgiving with The Pumpkin and her parents...And with a blondie! Of the Christian religion!” (PC, 219). In some of his first descriptions regarding her, his excitement centers not on the fact that he has the opportunity to meet her family and possibly increase the seriousness of the relationship, but rather the fact that she is blonde, a characteristic stereotypical of non-Jews, and is Christian. As far as a representation of a college boy’s sexual prowess, the account is understandable, however his focus in regard to religion questions whether or not his intentions actually reflect negatively upon his sense of Jewish identity. In looking back at his relationship years later, however, Portnoy realizes that the reason he actually broke up with her was *because* of her religious views. While he may have some regrets as he laments, “oh why did I ever let her go! I can’t believe it—because she wouldn’t be *Jewish?*,” these feelings are merely reminiscent and

¹⁷ Although Roth uses *shiksas* (plural), *shiksas* (plural), and *shiksa* and *shikse* (singular) all refer to the same thing—a non-Jewish female(s).

nothing more (PC, 251). When it came down to the most important question—How important is my Jewish identity and past to me—Alexander Portnoy answers how a Jew with a complicated identity should: with a simultaneous pride in and frustrated compliance to his heritage.

In comparison to Portnoy's obvious confusion with his relation to his Jewish identity when facing the prospect of love (or simply lust) toward a *shikse*, Nathan Zuckerman of *The Counterlife* appears less conflicted. In the second chapter, "Judea," of the novel's multiple counter-narratives, Nathan exists as a successful writer (much like Roth himself) who has also recently moved to England. During a conversation with an Israeli intellectual, Nathan explains his current living situation: "I'm not living in New York anymore. I'm married to an English woman. I've moved to London" (CL, 64). The simplicity of these three sentences allows for a greater emphasis on the contrast they present. New York represents the center of Jewish life outside of Israel, and London epitomizes the high society that has all but rejected Jews for centuries. The sentence mentioning his recent marriage, therefore, bridges these two differing locations, for its association with England allows for the assumption that Nathan has, in fact, married a *shiksa*. Accordingly, later in the same chapter, when talking to the leader of a radical Jewish settlement his brother has joined, Nathan affirms, "All four of my wives have been shiksas" (CL, 90). Although partially stating this fact to disturb the leader, the undeniable truth of it lends credence to Nathan's infatuation with non-Jewish women, while ironically he still visits Israel, the only political home of Jews in the world.

In terms of the narrative structure of *The Counterlife*, however, the excess of having four wives, all of whom are not Jews, can serve to represent a few crucial things. In Ross Posnock's chapter "'A very slippery subject': *The Counterlife* as Pivot," the motives of the unique narrative approach are revealed. Specifically, Posnock suggests, "The rigor of the novel is its fidelity to the *making* of counterlife, to enacting bruising antagonisms out of which emerge revision and redirections inside and beyond the book."¹⁸ It is Nathan's very passion for "*making* of counterlife" that may have led him to claiming four *shiksa* wives in "Judea," as this high number for only a middle-aged man may simply serve as an exaggeration his desires for the "other." On the other hand, however, this exorbitant amount may represent Zuckerman's belief in the ultimate impossibility of a successful union between a Jewish male and a *shiksa* since he depicts three failed marriages and leaves open the prospect of a fourth.

Nevertheless, it is the very complexity of the narrative that makes it exciting and leaves open the ability for a "counterlife," as Roth states in a 1985 interview: "Normally there is a contract between the author and the reader that gets torn up only at the end of the book. In this book the contract gets torn up at the end of each chapter" (RMQ, 160). In acknowledging this unique element of his novel, Roth highlights the role that the multiple narratives plays in depicting Zuckerman's feelings toward *shiksas* because it allows more than one perspective to emerge in the novel, confusing the reader about what Zuckerman's true feelings are throughout each chapter. Regardless of whether or not Zuckerman's actions

¹⁸ Ross Posnock, Philip Roth's Rude Truth: the Art of Immaturity (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), 137.

warrant an accusation of Jewish self-hatred, however, the reactions of his lover, Maria, in the last chapter, “Christendom,” reveal the importance of *his* religion to her. Maria professes, “Do you really think that your Jewish beliefs, which I can’t see on you anywhere, frankly, make you incompatible with me? God, Nathan, you’re a human being—I don’t care if you’re a Jew” (CL, 305). In an interesting statement on what should truly be meaningful in a relationship, Maria emphasizes how little Nathan’s religious affiliation means to her, hoping he could feel the same way in regard to her family’s Christian beliefs. On the other hand, Maria still calls to his attention the fact that she finds his focus on her as a *shiksa* even more absurd based on his lack of any true Jewish religious identity. Maria thus affirms that from the side of the majority culture, religion may not always play as large a role as the minority groups may assume. At the same time, however, her awareness of Nathan’s inability to ignore religious identities reveals his commitment to Judaism, an exhibition of Jewish self-affirmation, even if only shown in a cultural way.

Similar to Nathan Zuckerman’s forged identity through Jewish self-affirmation in regard to his desire for *shiksas*, so too does Alexander Portnoy emerge as a vocal advocate for non-Jewish women. Although greatly comedic in his approach, he actually analyzes his motivation for his sexual attraction to non-Jews in an unfamiliar manner. Specifically, Portnoy confesses to his doctor:

What I’m saying, Doctor, is that I don’t seem to stick my dick up these girls, as much as I stick it up their backgrounds—as though through fucking I will discover America. *Conquer* America—maybe

that's more like it. Columbus, Captain Smith, Governor Winthrop,
General Washington—now Portnoy. (PC, 235)

In this blatantly vivid realization, Portnoy associates his “shiksa syndrome” with his desire to explore all that America has to offer, which in his case means having sexual encounters with not just the homogeneous Jewish women of his childhood, but with a more heterogeneous group that is more representative of the diversity of America. Portnoy therefore exhibits not a rejection of his Jewish heritage, but rather chooses to supplement his past experiences with Jews with *shiksas* as well.

Although the attraction to non-Jewish women seems to take away from both Portnoy and Zuckerman’s connection to a completely Jewish identity, they do not celebrate in their departure from mainstream religious Jewish life. Rather, an appreciation for aspects of Jewishness emerges in even the most unlikely of places. In *Portnoy’s Complaint*, for example, Portnoy recounts his first impressions of Israel as he flies over it: “I look down for the first time upon the continent of Asia, I look down from two thousand feet in the air upon the Land of Israel, where the Jewish people first came into being, and am impaled upon a memory of Sunday morning softball games in Newark” (PC, 244). With the use of the word “impaled,” Roth creates a powerful image of Portnoy’s consciousness. His mind’s decision to flashback to a childhood memory entirely representative of the cohesive Jewish community he grew up in signifies a connection to his Jewish identity immovable from his psyche. Moreover, the fact that this memory involves a secular example of Jewish unity proves that, while he may not associate with the religious aspects of Judaism, the very sight of Israel has the power to evoke emotions in Portnoy

that confirm his Jewish self-affirmation. David Brauner supports these claims in his analysis of the narrative of *Portnoy's Complaint* when he explains, "Roth presents us with an apparently familiar narrative—that of the self-hating Jew desperate to assimilate by effacing all signs of his ethnicity...However, he goes on to complicate (or undermine) it with a counter-narrative; that of the assimilated Jew whose ties to his culture and tradition...are more tenacious than even he realizes" (Brauner). Although Brauner still views Portnoy as the prototype "self-hating Jew," his ability to recognize Portnoy's undeniable "ties to his culture and tradition" exhibits the complexity of the narrative and reveals that Portnoy's true identity will forever be linked to his Jewish upbringing, even if it does not incorporate any actual religious practice.

Nevertheless, the realization of Portnoy's Jewish self-affirmation does not manifest itself consciously in his own mind. When placed in the environment of Israel, Portnoy encounters criticism of his role as a secular, Diaspora Jew who, by the typical Israeli definition, has not contributed in any positive way to the Jewish homeland. During an interaction with a female Israeli soldier, Portnoy has no rebuttal for his critic's comments, and instead accepts her label for him. Portnoy reflects, "I was the epitome of what was most shameful in 'the culture of the Diaspora'" (PC, 265). His understanding of this idea, however, emerges from the opinions and expectations of a powerful Israeli woman, who unlike the *shiksas* in America, refuses any sexual interaction with Portnoy. He exists at the complete opposite side of the spectrum as the soldier, having nothing in common with her than the mere fact that they both were born Jews. Accordingly, literary critic

Irving Howe recognizes these stark differences in his review of *Portnoy's Complaint* as he claims, "Portnoy is simply crying out to be left alone, to be released from...the burdens of the past, so that, out of his own nothingness, he may create himself as a 'human being.'"¹⁹ The concept of Portnoy as a "human being" epitomizes the secular element of Jewish self-affirmation, thus allowing Portnoy to focus on the aspects of the world that he deems important without having to dwell on all that a pious life involves.

Just as Portnoy strives to achieve a certain level of freedom from his religiously observant upbringing, so too does Zuckerman reject elements of his past in his construction of his more secular Jewish identity. Nathan, in a conversation with the father of his Israeli friend, explains his mindset in relation to the role that Judaism plays in his life:

To be the Jew that I was...I didn't need to live in a Jewish nation...My sacred text wasn't the Bible but novels translated from Russian, German, and French into the language in which I was beginning to write and publish my own fiction—not the semantic range of classical Hebrew but the jumpy beat of American English was what excited me. (CL, 53)

In drawing these two sets of comparisons, Nathan introduces key elements of gravely different ways of life—those of the secular Jews and religious Jews. Furthermore, by claiming his "sacred text" as the writings of European novelists, Nathan proudly rejects a religious concept of Judaism for himself. His preference

¹⁹ Irving Howe, "Philip Roth Reconsidered," *Commentary* 54.6 (December 1972): 76.

for English over Hebrew only sets him farther apart from the newly built Jewish homeland that reinvented Hebrew as a language for use in everyday life, but supports his association with the Diaspora and the variety of characteristics that set it apart from Israel. Nevertheless, Nathan still prefaces his statement with the important fact that he still considers himself a Jew, thus assuming his position as a self-affirmed Jew while still gravitating away from a secular Hebrew language due to its undeniable bond with the religious.

As Nathan's fictional travels continue in Israel during "Judea," he ultimately visits his brother who has recently moved to a radical settlement in the hills outside Jerusalem. In keeping with the radical Zionist principles of the settlement, its leader and followers reject all aspects of the Diaspora because they view it as a place where Jews all lose connection to their Jewish faith and identity. Accordingly, when he visits a classroom of the group, the teacher, Ronit, claims, "assimilation and intermarriage...in America they are bringing about a second Holocaust" (CL, 103). While a secular American Jew cannot argue much against the reality of the two elements that Ronit accuses of causing negative results to the preservation of traditional Jewish life, her comparison of their results to those of the Holocaust reveals the extreme nature of her settlement's ideology. Only a few decades after the single greatest tragedy of the Jewish people takes place, Ronit finds no issue in associating the acts of American Jews to the systematic murders of the Nazi regime in Germany. Interestingly enough, as early as the 1960s, Philip Roth may have come into contact with an individual who expressed similar sentiments in regard to how the Holocaust shaped the mindset of religious Jews.

In reference to the Holocaust, Roth notes a critic's comments: "the death of all those Jews seems to have taught my correspondent, a rabbi and a teacher...nothing other than how to remain a victim in a country where he does not have to live like one if he chooses" (RMO, 208). Instead of accepting the Holocaust for what it is and moving on in a positive light, Roth's critic remains unable to exist as anything, but a "victim." Although the critic exists in an entirely different state as the empowered Jews in Nathan Zuckerman's imagined Israeli settlement, they both find the Jews of America to be inherently weak individuals—regardless of the validity to the claim.

In the conclusion of *The Counterlife*, Nathan offers a critical summation of his identity and how he perceives its evolution after spending only a few months in England. Although surely not enough to satisfy the radical Jews of "Judea," Nathan's perception of himself as a Jew remains enough to satisfy his personal requirements and serves as proof of his Jewish self-affirmation. Nathan sees himself as "[a] Jew without Jews, without Judaism, without Zionism, without Jewishness, without a temple or an army or even a pistol, a Jew clearly without a home, just the object itself, like a glass or an apple" (CL, 324). In this extremely minimal description of his identity, Nathan nevertheless accepts the unavoidable impossibility of escaping his Jewish existence, while he still may not agree with the religious and/or traditional aspects of Jewish life and all that it encompasses. As the epitome of a Jew with no association to traditional outlets to Judaism, Nathan serves as a perfect example of the type of Jew Roth realizes his writing appeals to. Roth projects this possibility: "If there are Jews who have begun to find the stories

the novelists tell more provocative and pertinent than the sermons of some of the rabbis, perhaps it is because there are regions of feeling and consciousness in them which cannot be reached by the oratory of self-congratulation and self-pity” (RMO, 211). In Roth’s apparent assessment of his audience, he perfectly describes the Jews of self-affirmation: Jews who belong to a counter-culture that do not find understanding of their Jewish identities in places such as the synagogue, but rather in the secular voices of Jewish novelists.

Chapter Two: Saul Bellow

Although born almost two decades before Philip Roth,²⁰ Saul Bellow wrote novels that nevertheless thematically mirror those of Roth, tackling issues of Jewish identity in post-World War II America. Their connection, however, exists past similarities in literary analysis, for as contemporaries they both interacted and were aware of one another's work. James Atlas, a biographer of Saul Bellow, notes this relationship, citing that Bellow actually called Roth "the real thing"²¹ in reference to his skills as a novelist early on in his career. Aside from this mutual respect between the two authors, their different upbringings and ages still allowed for significant differences to arise in their attitudes towards Jews and subsequently how they handle them in their novels. Atlas notes this contrast in these terms: "Roth represented a later stage in the drama of Jewish assimilation. Where Bellow's resolutely American-born characters of their immigrant parentage—they spoke Yiddish were city bred, struggled to decipher a new world—Roth's grew up in the suburbs. But they came out of the same world" (Atlas, 253). In observing this reality, Atlas also introduces the similarities between the author's fictions and their actual lives and childhoods. While Bellow's characters appear more traditionally Jewish, their attempts to break from this very tradition lend support to Jewish assimilation and its undeniable bond with accusations of Jewish self-hatred.

²⁰ Roth was born in 1933, whereas Bellow was born in 1915.

²¹ James Atlas, Bellow: A Biography (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 235.

As a Canadian-born Jew growing up outside Montreal, Bellow lived in an immigrant community that had little in common with the Newark of Roth's childhood. After moving to Chicago at a young age, Bellow remained in the United States the rest of his life, always considered a *Jewish-American* writer by critics. Bellow's own opinion on his membership to a specific ethnic community of writers, however, differed. For example, in an essay on ethnicity in Bellow's *Seize the Day*, scholar Michael Kramer quotes Bellow: "This whole Jewish writer business is sheer invention."²² As an interesting point to consider throughout this chapter, Bellow, more so than Roth, exerts his authorial power, denying any direct relationship to his ethnicity in his writing. Nevertheless, both of the male protagonists in *Seize the Day* and *Herzog*, in their struggles with their Jewish identities (seen through their own interpretations of their names), their religious convictions, and their relationships with women (both Jews and *shiksas*), ultimately undermine Bellow's self-analysis.

Lacking the same comedic element of Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*, Saul Bellow's epic novel *Herzog* portrays a man, who like Portnoy, has failed to find true success and happiness in his life. Significantly, both novels' titles include the given family name of each male protagonist, suggesting both characters' primary roles in the novels as well as a more subtle reference to their Jewish heritage. Even so, the names Herzog and Adler of Bellow's novels have much more ambiguous associations with Jews than Portnoy and Zuckerman. In addition, the

²² Michael P. Kramer, "The Vanishing Jew: On Teaching Bellow's *Seize the Day* as Ethnic Fiction," in *New Essays on Seize the Day*, ed. Michael P. Kramer (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Hereafter cited in the text.

novels both follow unique narrative structures that hinge on the protagonist as a narrator with the sole voice. In an introductory chapter written for a version of Bellow's *Herzog*, Philip Roth describes his elder's work having "no sustained chronological action—there's barely *any* action—that takes place outside Herzog's brain."²³ Just like Portnoy's monologue to his doctor, Herzog's jumpy account of his life's story as he reflects after an incident with his ex-wife displays Bellow's commitment to the development of the Jewish male psyche. But, as more of an immigrant story, the route Herzog takes differs greatly from that of Portnoy.

Early on in *Herzog*, Bellow introduces the many individuals who litter Herzog's mind and have played significant roles in his life. In stating his own name to himself, Herzog thinks, "Moses—Moses Elkanah Herzog."²⁴ A Jewish name with an obvious biblical reference, Herzog does not deny his existence as a Jew, but nevertheless has anglicized the name from the "Moshele" that his Aunt Zipporah still calls him (H, 106). This shift of language over generations, indicative of certain assimilation into a culture without Yiddish as its primary language, does not remove the sheer importance of Moses as the name Bellow chooses for his character. As the name of the biblical figure that plays savior to the Jewish people rescuing them from Egypt and bringing them within sight of the Holy Land, Herzog's existence as a Jew takes on a far deeper meaning than if Bellow gave him another stereotypical Jewish name. As a modern day Moses, Herzog's character can be read as one who, although not possessing a name such as his father's—

²³ Philip Roth, "Introduction: Rereading Saul Bellow," in *Herzog*, by Saul Bellow (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

²⁴ Saul Bellow, *Herzog* (New York: Penguin Books, 1961), 13. Hereafter cited in the text with the prefix "H."

“Rabbi Sandor Alexander Herzog”—still remains a savior of Jews, *assimilated* Jews (H, 26).

Another of Bellow’s great works, the novella *Seize the Day* that takes place over a single day, incorporates the importance of names to an even greater extent than in *Herzog*. Unlike Moses Herzog whose name merely changed to its acceptable English translation, the male protagonist of *Seize the Day* takes more drastic measures and makes actual legal changes to his birth name. He imagines a hypothetical conversation between an acquaintance, himself, and his father following a script such as,

“Are you Doctor Adler’s son?” “Yes, but my name is Tommy Wilhelm.” And the doctor would say, “My son and I use different monickers. I uphold tradition. He’s for the new.” The Tommy was Wilhelm’s own invention. He adopted it when he went to Hollywood, and dropped the Adler.²⁵

The protagonist, whom I will refer to as Wilhelm to avoid any confusion, clearly understands the implications of his action, for his description of his father’s reaction acknowledges the fact that he consciously understands how one could interpret his action as an act of defiance, if not a direct act of Jewish self-hatred. Wilhelm, as a Jewish-American youth trying to assimilate into American society realizes the ease of racial profiling using names, sees a future in Hollywood more clearly without a stereotypical Jewish family name. While Wilhelm does not directly narrate the novella, the narrator’s total knowledge of Wilhelm’s thoughts

²⁵ Saul Bellow, *Seize the Day* (New York: Penguin Books, 1956), 11. Hereafter cited in the text with the prefix “SD.”

reveals his feelings about his action: “He had cast off his father’s name...It was, he knew it was, his bid for liberty, Adler being in his mind the title of the species, Tommy the freedom of the person. But Wilky was his inescapable self” (SD, 21). By associating Adler with a “species,” presumably referring to Jews, Wilhelm displays his desire to break free from the traditions that he sees as so engrained into Jews’ minds that they exist as something genetically apart from the rest of humanity. These meditations, nevertheless, fall short of exhibiting any true self-rejection, for Wilhelm still accepts the fact that, no matter what he legally changes, he still will remain as “Wilky” at heart.

His feelings toward this act that he made in his youth, however, appear more complicated than initially introduced. Accordingly, soon after he stated his prior remarks, he adds that, in fact, “[t]he changed name was a mistake...[b]ut this mistake couldn’t be undone now” (SD, 22). Despite the presence of ambiguity surrounding the permanence of “now”—if he means at the given moment or ever—Wilhelm’s comments suggest that he cherishes his Jewish identity far more than he previously had. His act of rebellion, unchanged at the moment, still resonates with elements of Jewish self-hatred, but his constant desire to take back the wrongs of his past lends credence to the more realistic mindset of Jewish self-affirmation.

Later in the novella, Bellow shows the evolution of Wilhelm’s understanding of his “mistake” when he writes, “In Tommy he saw the pretender. And even Wilky might not be himself. Might the name of his true soul be the one by which his old grandfather had called him—Vevel?” (SD, 68). Wilhelm, although

not completely convinced of the importance of his Jewish heritage, takes a crucial step in his movement toward positive Jewish self-affirmation because he finds the power within himself not only to find the fault in the name he chose for Hollywood, but also to recall the Yiddish name his grandfather had called him. This connection to the furthest generation of his family that he can remember signifies a bridge over the chasm he had created in the reinvention of his name. Furthermore, the moving image of the “name of his soul” supports his commitment to his Jewish past, for, in keeping with the tradition that the soul is the only part of the body that stays on Earth after death, Wilhelm asserts that the most sacred aspect of himself is, in fact, the most deeply linked to his Jewish identity forged millennia before his birth.

In addition to the important role that names play throughout the novels of Saul Bellow, his male protagonists' actual *religious* identities cannot be overlooked when examining the scope of their entire Jewish identities. As mentioned earlier, the immigrant presence in Bellow's novels introduces an element missing from the main characters in Philip Roth's works. Instead, Bellow's male protagonists, as first generation Americans, experience an even more extreme break from the traditional lives of their parents. In *Seize the Day*, Wilhelm's father, Dr. Adler, expresses these sentiments to his son and states, “I come from a different world. Your mother and I led an entirely different life” (*SD*, 46). While not specific in the degree of “different,” Dr. Adler's comments still highlight the differences between past conceptions of religious adherence and the pressure to assimilate felt by American-born Jews like Wilhelm. Wilhelm, however, does not look at his past

with any fond memories, for his religious observance has disappeared in any traditional Jewish sense. Moses Herzog, on the other hand, still reflects on his childhood in a way that suggests a clear respect for traditional Judaism. The image of him and his brothers, “the bootlegger’s boys reciting ancient prayers” (H, 153) moves him as Bellow explains,

To this Moses’ heart was attached with great power. Here was a wider range of human feelings than he had ever again been able to find. The child of the race, by a never-failing miracle, opened their eyes on one strange world after another age after age, and uttered the same prayer in each, eagerly loving what they found. (H, 153-154)

In Moses’ sentimental description of his memories as a child adhering to the traditional religious aspects of Judaism raises, the important question of religious continuity. Moses acknowledges that, throughout time, Jews have always been the “other,” but have, nevertheless, always been proud of their religious beliefs and thus continued their customs. Although as an adult Moses has strayed far from his roots, the very act of recalling such emotions questions the extent of Moses’ love for Judaism and how far removed his heart truly is.

In accepting the inevitable changes that have taken place across generations in both their lives, Herzog and Wilhelm possess the ability to properly address and reassess their devotion to both their Jewish past and its possibility of a future. Regardless of their present issues, the presence of Judaism still resonates strongly for his protagonists. For example, in a moment of thought “Wilhelm was

thinking...there's really very little that a man can change at will..[w]hen he's young and strong and impulsive and dissatisfied with the way things are he wants to rearrange them to assert his freedom...[h]e can't...be differently born" (SD, 21). In a comment that can certainly reference his choice to change his name from Wilhelm Adler to Tommy Wilhelm, Wilhelm also realizes the limitations of such a maneuver. Given to him at birth, his name and the Jewish identity that comes with it simply cannot be removed from his psyche regardless of his manipulative attempts. In an interesting moment in *Herzog* in one of the many letters that Herzog writes to both famous people and to himself alike, he transcribes, "*And the peculiar idea entered my (Jewish) mind*" (H, 116-117). Although not as explicit a comment as Wilhelm's in reference to his Jewish identity, Herzog's conscious decision to parenthesize "Jewish" before "mind" demonstrates a specification of the exact nature of his thoughts, but, at the same time, indicates that this element of his life is a permanent, inescapable reality.

Critics of Bellow nevertheless interpret the motives of these characters as typical of Jews assimilating into American society and their actions as indicative of Jewish self-hatred. Michael Kramer, in response to *Seize the Day*, claims, "But Tommy's Jewishness doesn't even seem to be at issue. It is only – emphatically *only* – a genealogical fact" (Kramer). In this accusation, Kramer views Wilhelm as a completely assimilated American whose Jewish identity exists only for the mere reason that he was born to Jewish parents. Ironically, where I have chosen to call the protagonist of *Seize the Day*, Wilhelm, by his given name at birth, Kramer sees fit to call him by the name he created for Hollywood, Tommy. In this stark

contrast, the elements of Jewish self-hatred and Jewish self-affirmation come into contact. But even so, is there anything *wrong* with calling himself Tommy in the first place? In opposition to Kramer's beliefs, Bellow notes the type of religious faith that Wilhelm seeks in his everyday life as something far from a complete rejection of the Jewish religion. Bellow narrates, "Wilhelm often prayed in his own manner. He did not go to the synagogue but he would occasionally perform certain devotions, according to his feelings. Now he reflected, In Dad's eyes I am the wrong kind of Jew. He doesn't like the way I act. Only he is the right kind of Jew" (SD, 82-83). Although not the traditional methods of religious Judaism, Wilhelm's conscious efforts to have a relationship with God prove that he still feels a link to the observance of his past. Even so, he realizes that, regardless of what his *personal* acts of faith are, his father will not approve of any type of Judaism past the kind he brought from Europe when he immigrated to the United States. This conflict, therefore, puts two generations up against one another, and, while the more traditional aspects of Judaism may seem the only true observance to Dr. Adler, the very root of Jewish self-affirmation is a reinvention of old traditions that work in a modern America.

In the case of Moses Herzog, an entirely more observant Jew than Wilhelm, his connection to his father's European past and his Yiddish are still evident throughout the novel. While not the model Jew religiously, Herzog's respect for the culture and heritage of his Jewish ancestors appears obvious. In the description of a cultural Jew that Herzog despises, Bellow describes the man and Herzog: "Valentine loved to use Yiddish expressions to misuse them, rather.

Herzog's Yiddish background was genteel" (H, 67). As a somewhat hypocritical criticism since Herzog himself does not know Yiddish, the comparison of Herzog to Valentine is highly significant because it indicates an important respect that Herzog has for Yiddish and all that it represents. He can admit that his Yiddish is not impressive, but at the same time does not flaunt it, and *incorrectly*, just to sound more Jewish than he really is. Herzog, therefore, affirms his American interpretation of Jewishness by revering Yiddish culture and not disgracing it at the same time by pretending to have false knowledge.

Interestingly, while many of Roth's novels contain the voices of non-Jews, Bellow's *Herzog* decides against this, and instead acts as a celebration of the diversity of Judaism in America. When the book was initially released in 1964, it received a review from Julian Moynahan on the cover of the *New York Times Book Review*. Moynahan acclaimed *Herzog* as "a masterpiece, the first the movement has produced...and it is Bellow's most Jewish book. There are no gentiles in it."²⁶ In labeling Jewish-American writers as a "movement," Moynahan not only legitimizes the works that Bellow, Roth, and their contemporaries were producing, but gave them credit as not only Jews, but *Americans*. Furthermore, his claim of complete Jewishness in the novel resonates in the above discussion regarding Yiddish, for even a character that the reader should not favor, like Valentine, actually exists as a predominant Jewish figure in society.

Aside from the important question of where Judaism fits into the mentalities of Bellow's Herzog and Wilhelm, their interactions with the dominant

²⁶ Julian Moynahan, "The Way Up From Rock Bottom," New York Times 20 September 1964: BR1.

religion of America, Christianity, plays an equally significant role in shaping their Jewish-American identities. Just as Roth's Portnoy and Zuckerman come face to face with Christianity, whether it is in the form of the religion or simply with a desirable female, so too do Bellow's protagonists encounter similar situations. In the culminating scene of *Seize the Day*, Wilhelm has just been scammed and scours Manhattan for the culprit. Ironically, as his journey comes to an end and he begins to cry, Wilhelm "[is] carried from the street into the chapel" (SD, 112). Of all places to end up, he finds himself in a house of worship, but one for Christians. Clearly a deliberate location choice by Bellow, the chapel image can be read as an act of defiance against Judaism. At the same time, however, it could simply indicate Wilhelm's evolution over a single day, where he realizes that his faith in religion is much stronger than he previously understood. Using this as a possible reading, Wilhelm's actions display an affirmation of his Judaism through faith, rather than a hatred of it by moving towards another religion.

Moses Herzog's experiences with Christianity, although plentiful throughout *Herzog*, manifest in more intellectual and academic formats than Wilhelm's more instinctive interactions. Although previously a successful scholar, Moses Herzog, at the time of narration, is currently struggling to finish his most recent work. Bellow, early on in *Herzog*, introduces the reader to Moses' academia: "He had made a brilliant start in his Ph.D. thesis—*The State of Nature in 17th and 18th Century English and French Political Philosophy*. He had to his credit also several articles and a book, *Romanticism and Christianity*" (H, 6). The title of his thesis suggests that Herzog is an accomplished intellectual, but the title of his

published book, *Romanticism and Christianity* evokes more complicated sentiments. While there is nothing directly wrong with writing about another religion, it is still curious why Bellow would choose his Jewish character to be the author of such a blatantly Christian work. Interestingly enough, Richard Poirier, a scholar of Bellow's works, points out, "Herzog's interest in Romanticism is itself an expression of a familiar concern of Bellow: the effort to preserve individuality during a period of economic and scientific acceleration with which it is supposedly impossible for the human consciousness to keep pace."²⁷ In Poirier's reading where he views Herzog as actually representative of Bellow's own feelings, Herzog's book title can be interpreted not as a religious analysis, but one about Romanticism that highlights a key element of Jewish self-affirmation: individuality. The question is, therefore, does Herzog strive for individuality or has he stumbled upon it?

Although not an easy question to answer, Herzog's individuality (at least in terms of not giving in to the temptation of complete assimilation) does reveal his acceptance as the "Outsider." In a reflection on Herzog's house in the Berkshires that has gone into disrepair, Bellow narrates, "Herzog's folly! Monument to his sincere and loving idiocy to the unrecognized evils of his character, symbol of his Jewish struggle for a solid footing in White Anglo-Saxon Protestant America" (H, 337). By juxtaposing the two religions that Herzog encounters in his life, Bellow proclaims Herzog's attachment to his Jewish roots, while at the same time

²⁷ Richard Poirier, "Herzog, or, Bellow in Trouble," in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Herzog*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988).

acknowledging that he still lives in a Christian dominated society. Although a failure, his homestead is still representative of the American dream in the sense of ownership and creating a new identity for oneself. Growing up in the slums of Montreal (like Bellow) Herzog has completely changed the course of his life. Somewhat ironically, however, the seclusion that this life consists of goes against the beliefs of literary critic Daniel Fuchs in his analysis of Herzog. Fuchs believes that “the Bellow protagonists longs for community, and ironic distance gives way to the nearness of confession as we are on a personal standard.”²⁸ With this statement, Fuchs, while in disagreement with a certain quest of individuality on Herzog’s part, nevertheless acknowledges its presence in the novel. In terms of religion, therefore, Herzog cannot relate with any true organized form, but still affirms that “he [is] a Jew” (H, 70) who “[n]o matter how hard [he] tried...would never grasp the Christian and Faustian world idea, forever alien” (H, 254). In doing so, Herzog admits his place in the world as a Jew, however lacking in religious faith he may be.

Along the same lines as both Herzog and Wilhelm’s religious identities, come their inevitable experiences with both Jewish and Christian women. While it is difficult to extract too much information about Wilhelm’s life as *Seize the Day* takes place over the course of a single day, his mentioning of a relationship that he has with a *shiksa*, now that he has left his Jewish wife, enters the dialogue on more than one occasion. Bellow explains, “[priests] don’t care about individuals, their rules come first. Olive said she would marry him outside the Church when he was

²⁸ Daniel Fuchs, “Saul Bellow and the Modern Tradition,” Contemporary Literature 15.1 (Winter 1974): 74.

divorced” (SD, 90). Although appearing critical of Christianity, Wilhelm’s desire to marry a *shiksa* once his divorce is finalized indicates a partial lack of dedication to Judaism, as any children they have together would not be considered Jews by Jewish law. Nevertheless, his inclination to assure he could marry Olive outside a Church proves that, while he may not care about the religious aspect of their marriage in terms of Jewish law, he certainly does not want to associate their marriage with Christianity either. Michael Kramer’s highly critical views of Wilhelm (Tommy), however, reveal another side of his psyche worth exploring. Kramer suggests, “Tommy seemed rather to exemplify the antithesis of Jewishness. He was the assimilated American Jew, a familiar, quasi-mythic figure of Jewish demographic studies – disaffected, intermarrying, disappearing” (Kramer). With a definition of Jewishness that clearly includes strict religious adherence in its terms, Kramer introduces Wilhelm as a person with all of the symptoms of Jewish self-hatred, but at the same time gives him the very credit necessary for Jewish self-affirmation: he still calls him an American *Jew*.

The case of Herzog draws some similar nuances to that of Roth’s Portnoy. Revealed throughout Herzog’s monologue, his love and conquests of women—both religiously observant and ambiguous Jews—dominate the story. Unlike Portnoy, however, Herzog tends to gravitate toward Jewish women. One of his love interests, Ramona, requires a lengthy introduction to fully comprehend her various ethnicities and origins. Bellow describes Ramona: “She came from Buenos Aires. Her background was international—Spanish, French, Russian, Polish, and Jewish” (H, 19). By grouping her “Jewish” element with nationalities, Bellow not

only places Jews as a group equivalent as a nation (Israel?) but also sees this as an important aspect of Ramona's life. Even so, the fact that he does not state her Jewishness (or lack thereof) until mentioning all of her other affiliations is emphatic. On a short weekend trip with Ramona, however, she offers him a meal that may explain this. Herzog replies to Ramona, "I haven't seen food like this for some time. Proscuitto and Persian melon. What's this? Watercress salad. Good Christ!" (H, 204). Although this act could appear as an act of complete disregard for his Jewish heritage since proscuitto is non-kosher, Herzog's true reaction tells a different story. Rather, his response of "Good Christ!" is a direct reference to this fact, as he recognizes the absurdity of the situation. Nevertheless, he does not refuse the meal, but he is aware of Ramona's lack of any *true* Jewish identity, as she does not even see anything wrong with the situation to begin with.

Another of his lovers, Madeline, with whom Herzog has had a child, plays a more complicated role in terms of her religious affiliation. In Bellow's first introductions of Herzog, he explains the conditions under which he met Madeline: "With Madeline, several years ago, Herzog had made a fresh start in life. He had won her away from the Church—when they met, she had just been converted" (H, 8). Described as a sort of triumph, Herzog successfully found a Jewish woman who actually converted to Christianity, but he somehow kept her from making a complete transition. Instead, Herzog, just as Portnoy, views Madeline as a challenge that he must overcome. Of all people to comment on Bellow's Herzog and the character's sexual prowess, Roth offers a crucial analysis as he suggests, "In all of literature, I know of no more emotionally susceptible male, of no man

who brings a greater focus or intensity to his engagement with women than this Herzog, who collects them both as an adoring suitor and as a husband” (intro Roth to *Herzog* xvii). Charged with words that evoke the similar mindset of Roth’s Portnoy, Roth dissects Herzog’s relationships with women, leaving out one important factor—religion. In doing so, however, Roth suggests a motivation for Herzog deeper than religion, one that is not concerned with anything but who the woman is. Just as Portnoy thinks that “through fucking [he] will discover America...*Conquer America*” (PC, 235), Herzog, while not as vocal, appears to still consider Judaism into the equation, but in a way that allows him to affirm his Jewishness and coexist as an assimilated American at the same time.

Bellow’s protagonists exercise complex approaches to their Jewishness, but through these unique avenues come to terms with themselves as assimilated Jewish-Americans. Regardless of their inclination to reject traditional Jewish religion, they nonetheless find their own conceptions of faith. Herzog, for example, ponders, “if existence is nausea then faith is an uncertain relief” (H, 115). Although prefacing his statement with an overall frustration with life itself, he still acknowledges that “faith,” which can exist in a Jewish God, provides one with the necessary tools to continue living as happily as possible. Wilhelm, in a similar statement in keeping with the overall negativity of his life in his opinion, offers his own feelings regarding life. In a meaningful moment, Wilhelm thinks, “[t]he past is no good to us. The future is full of anxiety. Only the present is real—the here-and-now. Seize the day” (SD, 62). Clearly taken as the eventual title, “Seize the day,” resonates with Bellow and his audience, for Wilhelm, regardless of his unfortunate

and downtrodden condition, still possesses the ability to look past his failures earlier in life and see what is truly important—the present. While a possible interpretation could assume that the past he rejects is his Jewish heritage, his ability to reject the future as well proves that his only concern is the type of person he can be today. And, having displayed both remorse and a commitment to faith, Wilhelm certainly has done nothing but affirm his Jewish identity.

Conclusion

Although my introduction of Jewish self-affirmation as a working term allows for a new approach in the interpretation and navigation of the works of Philip Roth and Saul Bellow, its role and relationship to the accepted concept of Jewish self-hatred cannot go unremembered. Jewish self-hatred has essentially transformed itself from hypothetical to a commonly accepted label that one can loosely assign (with negative connotation) to any Jew who has in some way strayed from the accepted path of a pious Jew in modern-day society. The most intriguing aspect of this entire situation, however, is how did the term's evolution and addition to Jewish rhetoric occur with little opposition? Conversely, what needs to be questioned, therefore, is the *real* truth behind Jewish self-hatred as a term that Jews, and *not* their Christian counterparts, use to articulate their feelings toward certain actions of so-called members of the Jewish community.

Sander Gilman, nevertheless, assists in my argumentation toward a reassessment of the Jewish self-hatred as he states,

Philip Roth and the writers of the 1970s and 1980s place a close on the concept of the self-hating Jew. By creating a character who accepts a concept of identity formation foreign to his own experience, Roth shows us what happens when historically determined concepts of identity formation are viewed as universal (Gilman, 390-391).

In placing the Jew as an individual that is grounded in history, Gilman shows that Roth's characters understand their born-identities, yet possess the ability to see past their assumed path's and create new ones for themselves.

While Gilman's comments do not touch on the works of Saul Bellow, his crucial addition to the controversy surrounding Jewish self-hatred and the legitimacy of its use does not go unnoticed. Specifically, it begs to question whether or not Bellow and Roth even had any presumptions regarding the term when they began writing. As two Jews who grew up in relatively observant Jewish households, Bellow and Roth grew away from their religious roots and formed much more secular identities in relation to their Jewish faith. Accordingly, at the inception of their writing, did either novelist think their work could be interpreted in a negative manner? They both successfully operate outside the assumed religiously observant Jewish psyche that their critics assign, and thus exhibit the very characteristic that has assisted Jews in surviving persecution over more than five thousand years: adaptability.

Along these lines of adaptation, Saul Bellow evokes a similar attitude in *Herzog* as his counterpart, Roth, expresses six years later in *Portnoy's Complaint* at a scene that Portnoy imagines at a Thanksgiving dinner with his college girlfriend. Bellow narrates, "Ancient Herzogs with their psalms and their shawls and their beards would never have touched a revolver. Violence was for the goy" (H, 312). Violence, in both author's eyes, remains a characteristic that only non-Jews possess. In contrast, it is the brain of the Jewish people that allows for their ability to adapt to an environment (and in our case that of post-war America) and

succeed. The actions of Roth and Bellow's male protagonists, therefore, must be looked at not as exemplary of Jewish self-hatred, but rather as poignant instances of successful adaptability into a foreign landscape—the very act of Jewish self-affirmation. For this very reason, Roth and Bellow forever exist as contemporaries who, while facing opposition from Jewish leadership, championed the voice of the Jewish counter-culture they represented, exemplified in Roth's dedication of *Reading Myself and Others*:

To Saul Bellow,

the "other" I have read from the beginning

with the deepest pleasure and admiration (RMO, iii).

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