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Representations of Exurbia in Jewish-American Literature

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Michael Oil

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Michael Oil

We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the
Doctor of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend
acceptance of this dissertation.

Susan Scheckel – Dissertation Advisor
Associate Professor, Department of English, Stony Brook University

Peter Manning - Chairperson of Defense
Professor, Department of English, Stony Brook University

Heidi Hutner
Associate Professor, Department of English, Stony Brook University

Ranen Omer-Sherman
Professor, Chair of Judaic Studies, University of Louisville

This dissertation is accepted by the Graduate School

Charles Taber
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Dissertation

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Jewish-American literature is conventionally thought to be urban in terms of sensibility and geographical setting. This is understandable given that the city, especially New York, has figured centrally in the genre. Yet the strong identification of Jewish-American writing with urbanism, I show in this study, has obscured a significant strain of exurban desire in the works of Jewish-American poets and novelists. Even the emerging subfield of Jewish spatial studies continues to overlook representations of rural areas and nature in Jewish-American literature despite its expressed commitment to examine sites previously ignored by literary scholars. My project begins to remedy this neglect by recovering and interpreting the complex of exurbanism in the poetry of Morris Rosenfeld, Yehoash, and I.J. Schwartz, and in novels and stories by Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow, and Philip Roth. Far from being *sui generis*, the exurbanism of these writers, I argue, is contiguous with the incipient naturism of *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) intellectuals, who sought to usher traditional European Jews into modernity, and inspired by motifs and ideals latent in Jewish liturgy, (neo-)Hasidism, the Hebrew Bible, and *Yiddishkayt*. Not surprisingly, Jewish-American literary exurbanism is also indebted to Euro-American pastoral, and specifically to such writers as Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman. A profoundly hybrid construction, Jewish-American literary exurbanism, I contend, inflects both Jewish and American identity, the former by valorizing a topos viewed as inherently assimilationist by Jewish traditionalists, and the latter through its critique of the masculinism, inwardness, and escapism that are associated with conventional forms of pastoral.

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“When we speak of a poet as being of a particular religion, we do not imply in him completeness or orthodoxy, or even explicitness of doctrine, but only that his secular utterance has the decisive mark of the religion upon it.”

—Lionel Trilling, “Wordsworth and the Rabbis”

A wry *New Yorker* piece by Woody Allen a few years ago titled “Udder Madness” underscores the auteur’s famous affinity for the urban milieu and related animus towards the natural one. It begins with an actual excerpt from a Centers for Diseases Control press release reporting that approximately twenty people are killed by cows in the United States annually, and that in sixteen cases in one recent year, “the animal was deemed to have purposefully struck the victim...All but one victim died from head or chest injuries; the last died after a cow knocked him down and a syringe in his pocket injected him with an antibiotic meant for the cow. In at least one case, the animal attacked from behind” (31).

In inimitable fashion, Woody Allen mines the CDC article for its latent comedy, allowing a representative, if unusually erudite and cerebral, “killer cow” (the piece’s subtitle) to explain for himself what inspired his murderous rage. He relates how the trouble began when the owner of his New Jersey farm, the famous Broadway producer Sy Pudnick—an “avid weekend” farmer who with his wife grows “corn, carrots, tomatoes, and a medley of other amateur crops, while their children play host to a dozen chickens, a pair of horses, a baby lamb, and yours truly”—invited a group of artists and intellectuals over one weekend for a get-together, as was his practice. Normally, says the cow, he enjoyed these gatherings on the Pudnick farm, which “rivals any pastoral tableau by Constable, if not in acreage then certainly in bucolic tranquility,” for it was “a joy...to be in proximity to New York’s fabulous glitterati...,” and was particularly excited on the weekend in question because one of the invited guests was a famous “writer-

director in cinema” who “sometimes took the lead in his own pictures” (32). Anticipating someone along the lines of Warren Beatty or John Cassavetes, the cow was deeply disappointed when the guest arrived and turned out to be a “wormy little cipher, myopic behind black-framed glasses and groomed loutishly in his idea of rural chic: all tweedy and woodsy, with cap and muffler, ready for the leprechauns” (32)—someone, in other words, who looked a lot like Woody Allen. To make matters worse, says the cow, the writer-director happened to be an insufferable whiner and braggart who started behaving badly from the moment he arrived at the farm. When he made a drunken pass at an actress one evening, the cow could take no more and came up with a plan to “strangle the nattering little carbuncle with a sash” from behind. And so, one afternoon, while the other guests were away on a nature walk that “a certain cringing homunculus, who carried on like Duse over the prospect of being in the woods among Lyme ticks and poison oaks,” refused to go on, the cow sneaked into the writer-director’s room and waited for him to return from the kitchen, where he was “cobbl[ing] together a costly sturgeon-and-beluga sandwich, ladling the bagel with a tsunami of cream cheese” (32). In the end, the cow says, he managed only to traumatize his intended victim, who (much in the fashion of the victim of the CDC excerpt) had to be transported to a local hospital after spraying himself with mace intended for the cow. To this day, according to the cow, rumor has it that the writer-director can’t stop talking about an “attempted homicide by a Hereford” (32).

The comedy of “Udder Madness” derives largely from the sense that Jews don’t belong in the country, and it is a sense that neither the “rural chic” of the writer-director nor Sy Pudnick’s amateurish farming project can mitigate. If anything, the exaggerated performativeness of their respective versions and visions of pastoral only underscores it, which is precisely Allen’s point of course. The only real avatar of pastoral in the piece is the genteel narrator-cow; he alone

seeks to preserve the “bucolic tranquility” and integrity of the farm. Ridding it of the pernicious Jewish presence embodied in particular by the writer-director thus becomes his main objective.

In this study I examine a much less well known and celebrated response to exurban environments in Jewish-American writing, one that features Jews seeking out and making such settings home. In doing so I pursue a set of related questions, among them, How do Jewish identity and exurbanism interact in the works of Jewish-American writers? Why is pastoral ideology often objectionable to them? Is the exurbanism of Jewish-American writers unprecedented in Jewish literary history? And how do these writers mobilize Jewish religion and spirituality towards ecocentric ends? These are the kinds of questions that have largely gone unexamined by literary scholars, surprisingly so in the case of those affiliated with Jewish studies. Against evidence to the contrary, they would appear to concur at least tacitly with an assertion Andrew Furman has made—that “Jewish American fiction writers in [the twentieth] century have, by and large, created a literature that either ignores, misrepresents, or, at its most extreme, vilifies the natural world” (“No Trees Please” 115).

Why a view that Jewish-American literary writers feel alienated from the natural world should persist in the face of novels and poetry that testify to the opposite is worth examining. One reason for it surely has to do with American Jews’ obvious strong ties to the urban milieu. Though Jewish-American history dates to the founding of the republic, it is with the great influx of Jews from Eastern and Central Europe beginning in the 1880s into American urban centers, and above all into the New York metropolis, that Jewish experience in the United States is most closely associated. Jewish American writing undeniably concerns itself with capturing this formative urban immigrant moment or measuring the experience of subsequent generations of American Jews against it.

But if urban thematizations often characterize imaginative Jewish-American writing, literary critics have often understood them to be nothing less than their authors' categorical affirmation of city living, with urbanism imputed to be the geographical touchstone of Jewish-American authenticity. Such a reading, it should be said, undoubtedly comports with and reinforces the Jewish self-identity of many literary scholars who seem to find in urban Jewish-American literary poetics a reflection of their own biography and sensibility. I am thinking here of the sort of lyrical tribute to the city that Murray Baumgarten offers in *City Scriptures, Modern Jewish Writing* (1982), whose opening sentence hints (as the monograph's title does) at a reverence for the urban that inflects his study as a whole: "The diverse materials of the classic texts of modern Jewish writing cluster around an informing myth: the marginal person emerges from the *shtetl* and seeks a place in the freer, more complex, and cosmopolitan life of the city" (Baumgarten 1). Implicit in the telos inscribed here is a movement away from the possibility of Jewish exurbanism, as signaled by Baumgarten's decisive relegation of ruralism or quasi-ruralism (as emblemized by the *shtetl*) to the Jewish past. The departure he believes to be embodied in Jewish American literature is ontological as much as it is sociological.

Baumgarten's reference to the "cosmopolitan life of the city" suggests another, related reason for the privileging of the urban sphere found in critical scholarship. For the city is commonly (and for good reason) regarded by critics to be the repository of multiple ethno-racial affiliations and varied diasporic allegiances—as a site, that is to say, of relative social inclusivity and tolerance. Rural places, in contrast, are associated with such retrograde ideological commitments as blood-and-soil nationalism and the pastoral desire for release from the entanglements and social "disorderliness" that history entails. Robert Dainoff's observation that "[a] certain impulse to invent a better world outside of 'history' and its most immediate signs of

societal decay seems quite proper to the pastoral as a genre” (9) seems apt here. Like him, literary scholars characteristically see literature which celebrates land and region as the repository of conservative, even fascistic ideologies which refuse to abide the “contaminating” presence of minorities. Urbanism, on the other hand, is seen as the site of a mass, disarticulated identity capable of subverting the homogenizing tendencies of the nation-state, and thus as the kind better suited to Jews.

Perhaps more unexpected is the neglect of Jewish literary exurbanism by Jewish studies scholars who otherwise seek to offer a corrective to the longstanding emphasis on time, text, and memory in Jewish studies by turning their critical eye on the question of the spatial dimension in Jewish culture, and in particular on sites that have previously received little study. Among these scholars are the editors of *Jewish Topographies* (2008), a collection of essays which, according to its introduction, aims “to discover Jewish spaces and places that have received little attention so far, and to look at well-known Jewish spaces and places from new angles” (Branch 2). And yet, a glance at the table of contents of this book shows it to be devoted almost exclusively to the examination of diasporic cities and Israel, places, that is to say, that have already benefitted from extensive study. The editors justify a focus on what they call “lived Jewish spaces”—geographical places having an actual Jewish presence and quality—rather than on those which may be (merely) expressive of certain Jewish desire by saying that “Jewish spaces on the textual or metaphorical level...have already received wide scholarly attention” (2), an assertion that takes great and unwarranted license where exurban sites (exclusive of the *shtetl*) are concerned. Perhaps more problematically, the same editors find little value in examining production of space that occurs imaginatively for the “epistemic problem” it is said to present. Here they invoke the urban theorist Henri Lefebvre, who in his seminal monograph *The Production of Space* (1992)

writes that "...even if the reading of space (...) comes first from the standpoint of knowledge, it certainly comes last in the genesis of space itself. (...) [S]pace was *produced* before being *read*; nor was it produced in order to be read and grasped, but rather in order to be lived by people with bodies and lives in their own particular (...) context."¹ But history (colonial history in particular) is of course replete with episodes that contradict such reasoning, with a host of places settled physically only after first being appropriated imaginatively. And in invoking Lefebvre the editors unaccountably ignore how sources such as the Hebrew Bible and, later, a work such as Theodore Herzl's novel *Altneuland* (*Old New Land*, 1902) helped produce what for many is the quintessential Jewish place, the modern state of Israel.

This is not to say that examination of the imaginative production of Jewish space and place has been altogether lacking in Jewish spatial studies. But even here, as I've suggested, scholars have typically focused on fictional and poetical renderings of extant (or once extant) Jewish places and spaces, i.e., Israel and cities and *shtetls* of the diaspora.² An assumption underlying the present study is that imaginative production of Jewish exurban space is important not only for what it might tell us about Jewish desire for rural space, but for the way it may anticipate the formation of actual, lived Jewish space.

¹ Italics and ellipses in the original quote.

² The approach is typified by recent special issues in journals devoted to the spatial turn in Jewish studies. A recent issue of *Jewish Social Studies*, for instance, features essays on such past and present "lived" Jewish places as the urban *eruv* and the German city of Worms. Another, according to its introduction, "center[s] on Hebrew literature and on the effort to turn the Land of Israel from an imagined space into a nation-state" (Fonrobert 7). None of the issue's essays explore Jewish exurbanism, *per se*. Not surprisingly, given its title, neither does a recent special issue of *Prooftexts*, "Literary Mappings of the Jewish City: Other Languages, Other Terrains." And although Barbara Mann's recent monograph, *Space and Place in Jewish Studies* (2012), gestures towards redressing the dearth of scholarship on Jewish exurbanism with a section titled "Environment" that ostensibly examines Jewish environmentalism, it amounts to a rather cursory overview in a book that is given over, once again, mainly to discussions of Israel and diasporic urbanism.

This emphasis on “lived Jewish space” in Jewish spatial studies perhaps obscures more deep-seated reasons for the neglect of exurban settings in Jewish studies. Among them are a resistance to the natural world originating with the diasporic rabbis of antiquity, who worried that nature could lure the pious away from study of Torah and Talmud on account of its beauty. Perhaps the most famous pronouncement in this regard is a passage from the third chapter of *Pirkei Avot* (“Sayings of the Fathers”), the Mishnaic tractate of the Talmud. The passage reads: “Rabbi Jacob said: ‘He who is walking along and studying, but then breaks off to remark, ‘How lovely is that tree!’ or ‘How beautiful is that fallow field!’—Scripture regards such a one as having hurt his own being.’” Rabbi Jacob’s admonition is noteworthy for its implicit rejection of the idea that nature might have something spiritually sustaining to offer a Jew, and stands in obvious contradistinction to romantic cosmologies that link contemplation of nature to spiritual renewal.

The *Pirkei Avot* passage notably serves as the epigraph of “The Pagan Rabbi” (1966) by Cynthia Ozick, who takes up the threat of naturism to Jewish identity more urgently than any other contemporary writer. In important respects a countertext to the Jewish literary naturism I examine below, “The Pagan Rabbi” tells the story of Isaac Kornfeld, a rabbi and Mishna scholar whose affinity for nature leads to apostasy and personal disaster. What starts innocently enough with hiking and picnics soon gives way to Judaic transgressions, with the rabbi poring over the nature poems of the British Romantics and penning tales that feature animals and nymphs as appealing protagonists. Gradually the rabbi’s enthusiasm for nature (d)evolves into a full-blown paganism that is evidenced by an entry in his journal that pays homage to Pan, the Greek nature god: “I am writing at dusk sitting on a stone in Trilham’s Inlet Park, within sight of Trilham’s Inlet, a bay to the north of the city, and within two yards of a slender tree, *Quercus velutina*, the

age of which, should one desire to measure it, can be ascertained by (God forbid) cutting the bole and counting the rings...Great Pan lives” (17). More shocking still is the liaison that Kornfeld has (or believes he has in any case) with a tree dryad, revealed in a “love letter” that his wife later discovers. At the story’s conclusion, the rabbi hangs himself from a tree, devastated by his inability to consummate his relationship with the dryad—to become one with nature. Published in 1966, midway between two landmark moments in American environmentalism, the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962 and the celebration of the first Earth Day in 1970, the story may be seen as Ozick’s warning against the blandishments of a nascent Aquarian age, a cultural moment when love of nature comes to look more and more for her like nature worship.

Ozick also polemicizes against romantic naturism in her essay, “Literature as Idol: Harold Bloom” (1979), with Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” among the literary productions arraigned for their perceived potential to incite moral indifference and worse:

One might want to intervene...with the reasonable reflection that “Tintern Abbey” is not yet Moloch. Quite. But push, push “Tintern Abbey” a little farther, and then a little farther, push the strong imagination of Nature a little farther, and one arrives finally at Moloch. “Tintern Abbey” assumes that the poet, in contemplating his own mind and seeking his own mood, inspired by a benign landscape, will be “well pleased to recognize / In nature and the language of the sense / ...[the] soul / Of all my moral being.” But the ecstatic capacity, unreined, breeds license to uncover not only joy, love, and virtue, but a demon. The soul’s license to express everything upon the bosom of a Nature perceived as holy can beget the unholy expression of savagery. It is not a new observation that the precursors of the Hitler Youth movement were the Wandervogel, young madcap bands and bards who wandered the German landscape looking for a brooding moodiness to inspire original feeling...The recovery of Covenant can be attained only in the living-out of the Covenant; never among the shamanistic toys of literature...” (193).³

³ Importantly, in a 1987 interview Ozick said that she had significantly modified the kind of “imagination-as-idolatry” posture she articulates in “Literature as Idol: Harold Bloom,” presumably becoming less averse to nature poetry (and to nature itself): “To imagine the unimaginable is the highest use of the imagination. I no longer think of imagination as a thing to be dreaded. Once you come to regard imagination as ineluctably linked with monotheism, you can no longer think of imagination as competing with monotheism. Only a very strong imagination can rise to the idea of a noncorporeal God. The lower imagination, the weaker, falls into the proliferation of images. My hope is someday to be able to figure out a connection between the work of monotheism-

Nature for Ozick potentially precipitates the kind of inwardness that makes a person believe him or herself to be morally sovereign, with potentially catastrophic consequences.

For Daniel Boyarin, traditional Jewish resistance to the outdoors has more to do with the vicissitudes of Jews' diasporic history than with Jewish theology. In exile, dispossessed of land that had once figured so importantly as an organizing principle, Jews cultivated alternative ways of maintaining cultural integrity and resisting assimilation. Among these, argues Boyarin, was the construction of an antinomian Jewish male gender identity that emphasized not the masculinist arena of the outdoors, where the athletic competitions, dueling, and warring—later dismissively called *goyim naches*, or “pleasures of the gentiles” in Yiddish—of Jews' host cultures were performed, but the interior spaces of home and yeshiva, where gentleness, scholarliness, and community were privileged. Such qualities would in time undergird the Jewish ideal in Central and Eastern Europe of the *mentsh*, the compassionate, pro-social male. In explicating this ideal in his monograph *Unheroic Conduct* (1997), Boyarin considers the case of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, whose love of the outdoors and physical activity placed him in opposition to regnant rabbinic constructions of Jewish maleness. His example, Boyarin writes, advanced “a new form of pietistic, nature-oriented, anti-scholarly, outdoors-oriented Jewish leadership,” and represented at least a “partial accommodation of Jewish culture to romantic culture” (56).

Yet, notwithstanding the “partial accommodation” or acculturation to romanticism that Boyarin implies is promoted by Hasidism, the ideal of the *mentsh* and the accompanying code of *mentshlekhkeit* that governs his conduct persisted, profoundly informing *Yiddishkeit's*

imagining and the work of story-imagining. Until now I have thought of these as enemies.” See “The Art of Fiction.”

valorization of the social realm and human connectedness. Irving Howe in his aptly titled essay “Strangers” writes that this communitarian, domesticity-minded impulse manifests in Asheknazic Jewish-American writers’ alienated response to American romanticism, the discursive substrate for the nation’s hegemonic form of naturism: “Jewish [] writers found the classical Americans, especially Emerson and Thoreau, a little wan and frail, deficient in those historical entanglements we felt to be essential to literature because inescapable in life.” “Hardest of all to take at face value,” he continues,

was the Emersonian celebration of nature. Nature was something about which poets wrote and therefore merited esteem, but we could not really suppose it was as estimable as reality—the reality which we knew to be social...If the talk about nature seemed a little unreal, it became still more so when Nature was an opening to God...Nothing in our upbringing could prepare us to take seriously the view that God made his home in the woods. By now we rather doubted that He was to be found anywhere, but we felt pretty certain that wherever He might keep himself, it was not in a tree, or even leaves of grass (15-6).

Later I interrogate more closely the assertion Howe makes here, especially as it applies to specific works of Jewish-American fiction. But for now I will simply say that while Howe is right to underscore Jewish-American writers’ resistance to American romanticism, he makes a category error when he conflates romantic pastoral, a specific cultural response to nature, with nature itself. And he compounds this mistake when he assumes that nature and romantic pastoral are also identical for Jewish-American writers. It is perhaps not surprising then that Howe mostly ignores nature-affirming thematizations in Jewish-American writing. Such thematizations suggest, contra Howe, that Jewish-American writers, canonical ones among them, do believe nature truly “merits” their esteem.⁴

⁴ Indeed, as I point out in chapter one, Whitman, to whom Howe of course gestures when he invokes “leaves of grass,” was among the favorite American writers of the American Yiddish poets. For more on American Yiddish poets’ embrace of Whitman, see Prager, and Levinson, “Walt Whitman.”

Like Boyarin and Ozick, then, Howe suggests that Jewishness and pastoral stand in fundamental opposition, and I include his perspective among theirs to foreground some of the key nodes of Jewish resistance to exurbanism. I should note at the outset that the writers discussed in the chapters that follow, and in particular Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, and Bernard Malamud, show themselves to be sensitive and responsive to the thrust of their claims: that pastoral in its hegemonic versions is agonistic to normative Jewishness. Yet, as I show, this does not mean that they are prepared as Jews to forswear exurban places. Rather, I argue, they uncover and eschew meanings that have been imputed to rural sites, and in many cases proceed to (re)inscribe them with alternative meanings that make them more compatible with Jewish identity, and with more humanistic living generally. Their critiques and recastings thus disclose the way in which exurban (and human-made) spaces are culturally constructed and naturalized, prompting us “to think of landscape [] not as an object to be seen or a text to be read, but as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed,” in the words of W.J.T. Mitchell (1).

In refracting the natural world through the prism of their Jewishness, then, these writers resist the binary between the two that normative Jewishness can be seen to prescribe. In the process, they produce the sort of destabilized hybrid space theorized by such postcolonial critics as Khachig Tololyan, who has written that “the vision of a homogeneous nation is now being replaced by a vision of the world as a ‘space’ continually reshaped by forces...whose varying intersections in real estate constitute every ‘place’ as a heterogeneous and disequibrated site of negotiated identity and affect” (5). While Tololyan is most interested in the way that minority identities disrupt hegemonic ones and thereby subvert homogenizing nationalism, his paradigm

nonetheless posits a dialectic in which these subaltern identities are themselves destabilized and altered as a result of cross-cultural encounter.

Of course, when it comes to minority identity, what is destabilization to one thinker can be assimilation, or at least looming assimilation, to another. The latter view permeates Daniel Boyarin's thinking about the Baal Shem Tov's affinity for the outdoors. Another scholar, Robert Alter, feels similarly if his view of contemporary Jewish-American belles-lettres is any indication. "Perhaps the central fact about American Jewish fiction," he has written,

is that it is an expression of Jewishness in transition..., and by virtue of that problematic fact it cannot really meet our test of authentic Jewishness. Indeed, I would argue that some of the best pieces of fiction by American Jewish writers have served mainly to articulate the ambivalences of a confused cultural identity, or the reflex of guilt in the transition from one identity to another... The exploration of ambivalent identity, however, does not uncover firm enough or deep enough ground for the creation of what we would like to think of as a culture ("The Jew Who Didn't Get Away" 227).

Though literary naturism is not specifically mentioned here, Alter would likely consider it an expression more of Americanness than "authentic Jewishness," and thus as signaling a Jewishness "in transition" in the United States, one, perhaps, on its way to vanishing altogether.

My own view is closer to those who see Jewish-American literature as reflecting a Jewish identity that is no less viable for its interaction with surrounding culture(s). Such a conception has arguably been the ascendant one in Jewish Studies in recent years, with Jonathan Freedman, Julian Levinson, and Peter Antelyes among others variously positing a Jewishness that retains its integrity even as it becomes inflected through its dialectical engagement with American culture. The formulation of Amos Funkenstein is particularly helpful in elucidating this engagement with respect to pastoral, a cultural structure which, as Leo Marx points out in his seminal *The Machine and the Garden* (1964), is not unique to the United States but which here is "invested with peculiar intensity" (6). "The question: what is original and therefore autochthonous in Jewish culture," writes Funkenstein, "as against what is borrowed, assimilated, and therefore of

alien provenance—that question is more often than not wrong and ahistorical. We rather ought to look for originality in the end product...The end product, no matter which sources fed into it, is original in some respects if it is unlike anything in its environment” (10). The originality of Jewish-American literary naturism lies in its being both like and unlike the Jewish sources and pastoral which together inspire it, making it truly “unlike anything in its environment.”

In an important sense, the Jewish-American literary naturism I examine below, especially the prose fiction, recapitulates the kind of textual Jewish space-making practiced by the rabbis of antiquity. I refer here to the hermeneutics inaugurated in midrashes which foreground the idea of *makom*, the Hebrew word that can simultaneously denote both place and God and thus the intermingling of the two senses. Among the key biblical passages for the rabbis in this regard was the Genesis account of Jacob’s revelation of God in the wilderness of Paddan-aram (a bible story that figures in the Yiddish poem *Kentucky*, discussed in chapter one). There, lying “on a randomly picked stone,”⁵ Jacob has his famous dream of angels ascending and descending a ladder reaching into the sky, and of God reaffirming his covenant with Abraham, Jacob’s grandfather. When Jacob awakens, he exclaims, “Surely the Lord is present in this place, and I did not know it!...How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of God...” (Gen. 28.16-18). Similarly, Moses first encounters God in what seems to be a rather unexceptional patch of desert wilderness. It is only when God calls to him from a burning bush and commands him to “[r]emove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground” (Gen. 3.5-6), that Moses becomes aware of God’s immanence in this space. From scenes such as these, the rabbis of the diaspora, perhaps registering an acute and troubled awareness of the long, perhaps permanent, duration of the exile facing the Jewish people,

⁵ Eschel, 124.

reinforce in their midrashes the idea that any place (including, of course, a place outside the Land) could be made sacred through mindfulness of the covenant. In the terms of a much later, (neo-)Hasidic rabbi, Abraham Joshua Heschel, God on earth is “in search of man,” since the covenant must be heeded by the community if it is to be fulfilled; the community’s active participation is indispensable to God’s work. What I would call a covenantal consciousness pervades many of the texts I discuss below, even if this consciousness does not always disclose itself in explicitly Judaic (especially Halachic) terms. Apt here is Amir Eschel’s observation that midrashes attuned to the consecration of space anticipate the “ontological dimension prevalent in many [Jewish] literary works to come—the intrinsic longing for a place to inhabit, for *makom* as the precondition of a meaningful human existence” (124).

I begin my study with a reading in chapter one of the nature poetics of Morris Rosenfeld, Yehoash (the penname of Solomon Blumgarten), and I.J. Schwartz, three American-Yiddish poets whose lyrical descriptions of nature anticipate those of Bellow and Malamud, whom I discuss in following chapters. The American-Yiddish poets, much like the European Jewish Enlightenment thinkers (*maskilim*) before them, aim to encourage in their Jewish readership a philosophical if not spiritual appreciation of the natural world. But if traditionalism and piety were among the main obstacles hindering the *maskilim* in their attempt to promote naturism, the Yiddish poets in America had to contend with the fact that the immigrant Jews who largely comprised their readership struggled to adapt to the cities where most had taken up residence and which surely predominated geographically in their subjectivity, leaving little room for the contemplation of rural places and spaces. While the city no doubt represented for many of these Jews “freedom, dignity, activity, and possibility” (Baumgarten 2), it was also where the day-to-day urban reality was often defined by fetid tenements, acrid air, cacophonous sweatshops, and

widespread material impoverishment. This desperate reality is central to the so-called sweatshop poems of Rosenfeld, precisely what instigates his clamor for green spaces in so many of them. Nonetheless, though Rosenfeld is sympathetic to the travails of fellow immigrant Jews, many of whom were sweatshop workers (he was one himself), he is also capable of harsh critiques of their seemingly paradoxical embrace of urban modernity and indifference to rural places. In contrast, the nature poetics of Yehoash, the penname of Solomon Bloomgarden, are largely devoid of the stridency that often characterizes Rosenfeld's and pay no mind to his co-religionists' apparent obliviousness to places outside the city, focusing almost entirely on the natural world itself. Such focus is what predicates Irving Howe's description of Yehoash as "perhaps the first to write pure nature poems in Yiddish" (*World of Our Fathers* 426). As Howe's words suggest, these poems register the poet's profound love of nature, and at times even verge on the pantheistic, with speakers who (much like Ozick's Kornfeld) sometimes lament the human subjectivity which keeps them from merging once and for all with the natural world. The third poet discussed in this chapter, I.J. Schwartz, was an immigrant from Lithuania who moved to Kentucky after living on the Lower East Side of Manhattan for some ten years. His book-length narrative poem, *Kentucky* (1925), the subject of the last part of the chapter, documents Schwartz's strong affinity for the landscape of the state which became his home, but it also grapples with the dissolution of Jewish identity in rural America in ways left unexplored by the poetry of either Rosenfeld or Yehoash. As will become clear in this chapter, the didactic, ethical thrust of such later Jewish-American prose fiction writers as Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud—their urging human connectedness and reciprocation in rural settings largely given over to explorations of and investments in self in romantic pastoral—is mostly absent in the productions of the Yiddish poets. This does not necessarily imply that the nature poetics of the

Yiddish writers are somehow purer or more ecocentric than those of the Anglophone Jewish-American writers. Rather, it may disclose that the Jewish identity of these fairly recently arrived Yiddish poets, forged in relatively hermetic Jewish milieus (they continue to work in a Jewish language, after all), is comparatively secure and untroubled. The latter authors, by contrast, seem highly conscious of their hyphenated identities and impelled to affirm and reinscribe their Jewishness in the face of the specter of assimilation which may lie latent in their naturism.

In the novel *Herzog* (1964), which I discuss in chapter 2, Bellow concerns himself with the question of whether the countryside is conducive to Jewish living, but the question is posed indirectly, and mainly by skeptical, city-dwelling characters whom Bellow satirizes or otherwise dismisses, leaving us with a good sense of Bellow's answer. His eponymous protagonist, in the midst of a nervous breakdown and trying to make sense of his life while he recovers at his home in the Berkshires, seems to believe not only that country living and Jewishness are not mutually exclusive, but that rural environments may in fact add value to Jewish identity and vice versa. This is an epiphany that Herzog comes to very slowly and at great cost, however, for it takes time for him to see that his love of nature has been joined to a fascination with romantic interiority (importantly, he is a student and scholar of romanticism) that has often contributed to the downfall of some of his most important relationships. A kind of synthesis is reached in the novel's conclusion, in which Bellow offers a vision of pastoral mostly emptied of its solipsistic proclivities.

Seymour Levin, the Jewish, Brooklyn-bred protagonist of Bernard Malamud's novel *A New Life* (1961), which I consider in chapter 3, likewise takes up residence in exurban America, in the state of "Cascadia" in the Pacific Northwest (Malamud's fictionalized place name for Oregon), where he goes about trying to restore balance to his life. Like Herzog, Levin sojourns in exurbia

not to perform an Arcadian withdraw from society but the opposite, to cultivate more intertwined and honest relationships. Though there is nothing programmatic about Levin's spiritual seeking in Cascadia, that it is grounded in his Jewish identity is made clear by both its substance and Levin's explicitly tying it to the heritage of his birth.

The Jewishness that Levin draws on in this project of self-renovation also informs his blistering critique of masculinism. Specifically, Malamud foregrounds the way in which *mentshlekhhkayt*, the complex of values from which the traditional "effeminate" maleness of Ashkenazic Jewish men largely derives, might be mobilized to resist and even undo the aggressive individualism foundational to the cultural inscription of Western landscape and, more broadly, American male identity. In addition to Malamud's novel, I also examine in this chapter a variety of Jewish-American cultural productions which subvert the American Western mythos, among them Western-themed Tin Pan Alley songs of the early 1900s that feature *schlemiels*, the bumbling fools of Ashkenazi folklore. As I show, the *schlemiel* in these songs is interested in the Western outdoors more for the way it seems to promise by association to transform him into a strong and energetic Westerner (indeed, one of these songs is titled "Tough Guy Levi") than for its naturist attributes. Ironically, however, the *schlemiel* is obliquely valorized in the Tin Pan Alley songs, his lack of heroism offered as a worthy Jewish alternative to the *uber*-masculinism of the Western man. It is precisely this dearth of masculinism—exaggerated in the *schlemiel*, to be sure, but, according to ideals of *Yiddishkeit*, also typifying the Jewish man—that Malamud turns to in order to create his decidedly unheroic, nature-loving protagonist, Levin.

Philip Roth, whose approach to exurban settings I examine in chapter 4, may be considered unique among the writers I cover in this study for what seems to be his fairly unrelenting aversion to rural places, or more accurately, to hegemonic American versions of pastoral. As I

show, beginning with his earliest works and continuing through to the recent (self-announced) end of his writing career, Roth consistently equates ruralism with the kind of retrograde romantic impulses that also concern Bellow and Malamud. Indeed, the equation for him is so strong that even if Nathan Zuckerman, his most famous writer-protagonist, chooses to reside in the mountains, Roth rarely puts in a good word for nature, lest, it seems, he be seen as giving his imprimatur to these invidious potentials. But Roth, I show, is not so much opposed to rural landscapes or the idea of rural living as he is to the ideologies he associates with these. By calling attention to them, Roth demystifies these landscapes and thereby returns them to a natural state, as it were. In this way, Roth's negative nature poetics can somewhat unexpectedly be seen to harbor a dormant ecocentrism.

Roth's reticence and the complexity of the *schlemiel* notwithstanding, the Jewish literary naturism I examine below testifies above all to the strong appeal of rural places for some of our most important Jewish-American writers. It is an attraction all the more noteworthy for the way American Jews' cultural positioning and historical experience has mostly militated against it. A congratulatory letter written by Bellow to Malamud on the occasion of the publication of Malamud's *Dubin's Lives* (1979), a novel replete with lyrical descriptions of the upstate New York countryside, makes the vexedness of the attraction plain. "Your nature-intimacy took me by surprise, glad surprise," Bellow writes in a passage. "You weren't moved to it by the demands of a book. It's something you've done to yourself, you've achieved it. For Jews from Chicago or New York this has to be done later in life. It's not a birthright. Not to be cheated of flowers and landscapes, living and dying under subway gratings or elevated trains—that's what it is" (Taylor 365). Bellow's feeling that American Jews have been deprived the joys of nature—the passive voice of "not to be cheated" registering his conviction that no single agent can be blamed

for the exigency—is striking for the way it complicates the stereotype of the urban American Jew, casting doubt on the notion that Jewish-American naturism is simply the expression of assimilationist desire. Thanks in part to the exurban poetics I examine below, American Jews today have less reason to doubt their desire for the “nature-intimacy” that figured so importantly for Bellow.

Chapter 1

For many Jewish Studies scholars, American Yiddish poetry is a form particularly notable for the way it responds to the urban milieu, and especially to New York City. In the introduction to their seminal anthology *American Yiddish Poetry* (1987), for example, Benjamin and Barbara Harshav explain with no small amount of approbation that the American Yiddish poets, unlike their contemporaries writing in English, “often confronted American realities directly: the wonders of construction and city architecture, the subway, the harbors, labor unions, the underworld, the plight of the blacks, the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti, alienation of the individual in the jungle of the metropolis, social injustice, and immigrant longing” (Harshav 4). A recurring motif here is that the most insistent and compelling American realities addressed by these poets are those which afford insight into the urban scene. The historian Eli Lederhendler similarly reifies American Yiddish poetry as an urban project, and even more emphatically than the Harshavs perhaps, when he writes that “in [i]dentifying themselves fully with the gritty, abrasive, brittle uniqueness of [New York City],” the American Yiddish poets “imagined that ‘Jewishness (not Judaism) and urban-ness were inherently overlapping qualities, thus doing for the Big Apple what their Yiddish and Hebrew predecessors had done for the shtetl’” (“New York City” 53). Rarely problematized, the privileging of the urban in the work of these scholars (and in Jewish Studies generally) is informed by the telos of a regnant historiography that makes the urban milieu not only the geographic destination for East European Jewish immigrants in the United States but the ontological one as well.

Given this posture, it is not surprising that the considerable attention given to places and spaces outside the city in American Yiddish poetry has received scant critical notice. My purpose in this chapter is to begin to redress this neglect by assessing the exurbanism of mainly

three key American Yiddish poets: Morris Rosenfeld, Yehoash, and I.J. Schwartz. In doing so, I hope to show how these writers attempted to encourage an interest in rural places and nature in their Ashkenazi immigrant readers, most of whom were residents of the city and, as mainly traditional Jews, largely unfamiliar with and uninterested in the natural world.

In important respects, the naturism of Rosenfeld, Yehoash and Schwartz can be seen as extending the work of Jewish European *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) writers.¹ Most notable among these was S.Y. Abramovitch (1835-1917), who urged an interest in the natural world as part of a larger goal of ushering the traditional Jewish masses into modernity, and who saw Jewish religiosity as generally impeding this aim. Though the scion of a Lithuanian rabbinical family and already an accomplished Talmudist and Hebraist in his youth, Abramovitch developed an affinity for the natural world after moving to a remote swath of woods near the Lithuanian town of Melnick as a teenager. It was there, according to his autobiographical novel *Son of Chaim* (1911), that he first felt a “powerful attraction to nature,” and traded his religious studies for “scribbling and wandering through the forest all day” (Frieden 20). Abramovitch’s love of nature would eventually find its way into his fiction, which he wrote under the penname Mendele Mocher Sforim. In *Fishke the lame* (1869), Mendele satirizes his community’s practice of entering into a state of mourning in anticipation of *Tish’ah b’Av*, the fast day which commemorates the destruction of the First and Second Temples

¹ My contention, that the naturism of these American-Yiddish poets echo that of certain Yiddish poets in Europe, would likely be disputed by Benjamin Harshav. In the introduction to *American Yiddish Poetry*, he writes that “[t]he trends of Yiddish poetry created in America were never extensions of Yiddish literature in the old country but evolved from the concrete dynamics of the independent American Yiddish literary center” (32). While I do not mean to imply that certain Yiddish writers directly influenced Rosenfeld, Yehoash, and Schwartz in the American context, I am suggesting that their nature poetics are “contiguous” with those of the Yiddish poets in the sense articulated by Dan Miron in his recent monograph, *From Continuity to Contiguity* (2010). The question of Jews’ relation to rural areas and the natural world in modernity was of common concern to Jews on both sides of the Atlantic, and thus do their poetics taken together “approximat[e] that semblance of significant order” which Miron adduces as a constitutive component of contiguity.

(among other Jewish tragedies), just as the lovely summer season begins. In “The Calf” (1911), Abramovitsch’s yeshiva *bocher* protagonist’s interest in the outdoors competes with and eventually undermines his Talmud study. At one point, addressing the eponymous calf kept by his family, and to whose care he has committed himself after its mother dies, he exclaims: “How lucky we both are! We have each other to thank for being here. If not for me, you’d still be languishing in the outhouse, and if not for you, I’d be languishing in the synagogue” (105). Perhaps the clearest sign of Abramovitch’s interest in the natural world was his *Book of Natural History* (1856), a three-volume translation and adaptation of a German textbook of natural science. Written in Hebrew, it in part represents Abramovitch’s attempt to increase Jews’ awareness of nature and science, and concomitantly to reduce, if not altogether eliminate, religious superstition.

Rosenfeld, Yehoash, and Schwartz, like Abramovitsch, prod their readership in their productions toward an appreciation of landscape, and American landscape in particular. In this way, they may be regarded as *maskilim* in their own right, as reform-minded writers who, like Abramovitch, believed their co-religionists to be woefully estranged from the natural world. And like Abramovitch, they effectively demur against a binary which holds Jewishness and nature to be mutually exclusive, and instead seek to inflect Jewishness with a topos heretofore regarded warily, thereby destabilizing normative constructions of Jewishness. The result, as we will see, is a hybridized Jewish identity that is more accommodating of the natural world.

If the *Haskalah* gave rise to discourses of naturism on both sides of the Atlantic, there is no question that local circumstances shaped their distinctive characters. In the United States, the

naturism of the Yiddish poets was most immediately conditioned by the tenements and sweatshops surrounding them and from which they were desperate to find respite in green spaces. This motif of green respite is perhaps better known from its presentation in such canonical Jewish-American novels as Abraham Cahan's *Yekl* (1896) and Michael Gold's *Jews Without Money* (1930), in which Jewish protagonists look to city parks for relief from the urban maelstrom. It is a mainstay as well of early works of American Yiddish prose writers. In Z. Libin's "A Picnic" (1902), for example, the poor immigrant cap-maker Shmuel begs his wife to assent to a family picnic in a city park. "The summer will soon be over," he cries, "and we haven't set eyes on a single blade of grass. We sit day and night sweating in the dark... Let us have an outing, Sarah. Let us enjoy ourselves for once, and give the children a breath of fresh air, let us have a change, if it's for only five minutes!" (731). Presently the family boards a cable car bound for a park, but that the excursion is ill-fated soon becomes clear, with Shmuel and the children becoming sick en route. To make matters worse, upon reaching their destination they discover that an open drink has soaked their picnic basket, leaving them without food for the day. The family abruptly returns home at the story's conclusion, and Shmuel is distraught over the debacle. "...I don't know what possessed me," he cries. "A picnic, indeed!... A poor wretched workman like me has no business to think of anything beyond the shop" (735). Though lighthearted in tone, Libin's sketch nonetheless underscores the travails of the sweatshop worker, whose impoverishment and drudgery seem unrelenting and finally inescapable, putting the respite offered by nature out of reach.

The plight of the sweatshop worker yearning for green spaces generally receives a more politicized treatment in the works of the so-called Sweatshop poets, whom Irving Howe in *World of Our Fathers* calls "unsophisticated in technique but stormy in voice" (418) for their angry

denunciations of the dehumanizing work conditions in the sweatshops where they themselves often toiled. Among the most famous of the group was Morris Rosenfeld (1862-1923), popularly known as the “poet laureate of labor.” Born in the village of Boksze in Russian Poland, Rosenfeld in 1886 moved to New York City, where he worked as a presser in Lower East Side sweatshops for ten years. In “My Place” (1904), Rosenfeld’s speaker dreams of a rendezvous in nature with his sweetheart, soon to arrive in the United States. But this desire, reiterated in each stanza, is repeatedly foreclosed on by the pervasive harshness of the sweatshop:

Look for me not where myrtles green!
Not there, my darling, shall I be.
Where lives are lost at the machine,
that’s the only place for me.

Look for me not where robins sing!
Not there, my darling, shall I be.
I am a slave where fetters ring,
that’s the only place for me.

Look for me not where fountains splash!
Not there my darling, shall I be.
Where tears are shed, where teeth are gnashed,
that’s the only place for me.²

In “Despair” (1898), Rosenfeld retains this pattern of green desire evacuated by the all-consuming reality of the sweatshop. Here is a representative stanza:

The woods they are cool, and the woods they are free;—
To dream and to wander, how sweet it would be!
The birds their eternal glad holiday keep;
With song that enchants you and lulls you to sleep.
'Tis hot here,—and close! and the din will not cease.
I long for the forest, its coolth and its peace.
—*Ay, cool you will soon be; and not only cool,
But cold as no forest can make you, O Fool!*³

² Morris Rosenfeld, “My Place,” Translated by Aaron Kramer in *A Century of Yiddish Poetry*, 52-3.

³ Morris Rosenfeld, “Despair,” translated by Rose Pastor Stokes and Helena Frank in *Songs of Labor*, 8. Italics in the original.

Marc Miller astutely observes that Rosenfeld structures “Despair” as a parody of the classical pastoral poem (such as Theocritus’s *Idylls*), in which a second speaker affirms the pastoral desires of the first in a kind of call and response (102-3). In “Despair,” however, the speaker’s interlocutor (or perhaps alter-ego) ridicules the naiveté of the primary speaker, again conveying the poet’s complete loss of hope for a respite from the sweatshop.

In other Rosenfeld poems, Jews are deprived of a connection to the natural world not because they are wage slaves in the sweatshop, but rather victims of anti-Semitism. Rosenfeld’s remedy for this is Zionism, for only in Israel, he suggests, can a Jew experience nature in its fullness, as a free person. His most expansive Zionist vision is offered in “The Jewish May” (1898), among Rosenfeld’s most anthologized poems. It opens on an optimistic note, with an announcement of spring’s lovely arrival:

May has come from out the showers,
Sun and splendour in her train.
All the grasses and the flowers
Waken up to life again.
Once again the leaves do show,
And the meadow-blossoms blow,
Once again thro' hills and dales
Ring the songs of nightingales...⁴

With the entrance of the Jew, however, this celebration gives way to overwhelming sadness:

Who then, tell me, old and sad,
Nears us with a heavy tread?
On the sward in verdure clad,
See, he looks, and shakes his head.
Lonely is the strange new-comer,
Wearily he walks and slow, —
His sweet springtime and his summer
Faded long and long ago!

⁴ Morris Rosenfeld, “The Jewish May,” translated by Helena Frank in *The Standard Book of Jewish Verse*, 577-8. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

Say, who is it yonder walks
 Past the hedge-rows decked anew,
 While a fearsome specter stalks
 By his side, the woodland thro'?
 Tis our ancient friend the Jew!
 No sweet fancies hover round him,
 Nought but terror and distress.
 While, revealed
 In wounds unhealed,
 Wither corpses — old affections,
 Ghosts of former recollections,
 Buried youth and happiness.

Briar and blossom bow to meet him
 In derision round his path;
 Gloomily the hemlock greets him,
 And the crow screams out in wrath.
 Strange the birds, and strange the flowers,
 Strange the sunshine seems and dim,
 Folk on earth and heav'nly powers, —
 Lo, the May is strange to him (578-9)

Hardly the herald of “sweet fancies,” the month of May instead ushers in thoughts of “buried youth and happiness.” This is because for “our ancient friend the Jew,” the month is associated with “terror and distress”—with a history of persecution. Diasporic nature here is identified with the repression meted out by Jews’ oppressors, and thus “briar and blossom” deride the Jew; the hemlock frowns on him; the crow scolds. The Jew’s overriding feelings in the natural world are ones of estrangement and vulnerability. Like S.Y. Abramovitsch in “Fishke the Lame,” Rosenfeld ties the start of summer to a season of Jewish mourning that culminates with *Tish’a b’Av*. Yet Rosenfeld’s point here is not to satirize Jews’ alienation from nature, as is Abramovitsch’s, but to identify with it and nostalgically recall a time when Jews were at one with nature in their ancient homeland. This was an era when

Oranges by thousands glowing
 Filled the groves on either hand, —
 All the plants were God's own sowing
 In his happy, far-off land!

Ask the cedars on the mountain!
Ask them, for they knew him well!
Myrtles green by Sharon's fountain,
In whose shade he loved to dwell!
Ask the Mount of Olives beauteous, —
Ev'ry tree by ev'ry stream! —
One and all will answer duteous
For the fair and ancient dream. (579)

Rosenfeld here conceives of ancient Israel as the ideal admix of bucolic and wild, a place which hosts a people organic to it and where God presides beneficently over all. Rosenfeld invokes the land of Israel not merely as a nostalgic exercise, however. Instead, the Jews' ancient homeland is deployed as a usable past, for Rosenfeld asks Jews to imagine themselves happily ensconced in Zion's landscape once more:

Gone that dream so fair and fleeting!
Yet, behold: thou dream'st anew!
Hark! a new May gives thee greeting
From afar. Dost hear it, Jew?
Weep no more, altho' with sorrows
Wearied e'en to death : I see
Happier years and brighter morrows
Dawning, oh my Jew, for thee !
Hear'st thou not the promise ring
Where, like doves on silver wing,
Thronging cherubs sweetly sing
New-made songs of what shall be?

Hark! your olives shall be shaken,
And your citrons and your limes
Filled with fragrance, God shall waken,
Lead you, as in olden times.
In the pastures by the river
Ye once more your flocks shall tend,
Ye shall live, and live forever,
Happy lives that know no end.
No more wand' ring, no more sadness;
Peace shall be your lot, and still
Hero-hearts shall throb with gladness
'Neath Moriah's silent hill. (580)

Deploying redolent images of olives, citrons, and flocks, Rosenfeld implores Jews to experience a “new May” in Zion. In this way, Rosenfeld's poem—published a year before the First Zionist

Congress—mobilizes biblical nature much as late-nineteenth-century Hebrew-language *Hibbat Zion* literature did as a means of promoting settlement in Palestine.

Where literary scholars have examined natural environments in Rosenfeld's oeuvre, they have done so mostly by refracting them through either of the two matrices discussed above—the sweatshop or Jewish nationalism. Significantly, for reasons of either economics or anti-Semitism, Jews are robbed of agency and thereby deprived of an ability to enjoy diasporic nature. But such a focus ignores productions wherein Rosenfeld suggests an altogether different reason for Jews' estrangement from nature, one that stems not from lack of agency but from Jews' relative indifference to exurban places. Here I refer in particular to Rosenfeld's prose-poems that comment on Jews' relation to the Catskills, where in the early 1900s large numbers of Jews congregated every summer, in some cases becoming full-time residents and even farmers.

That the Catskills inspire little in the way of Jewish naturism is previewed in the title of the poem "The Ghetto in the Catskills" (1912). In its opening lines, Rosenfeld sarcastically remarks that "no one dreamed...that the Catskill Mountains would be a continuation of Hester Street"⁵—the Lower East Side corridor that serves as Rosenfeld's metonym for the Jewish urban enclave. Once discriminated against by the gentile farmers who refused to "accept [] Jewish lodgers,"... "[t]he Jew," Rosenfeld writes, "took vengeance" on them: "he bought their farms and converted them." As a result of this "conversion,"

The gardens grew sidelocks and the trees were circumcised... And the fields will produce more fruit because Jews don't lack fertilizer... The New York Jewish summer lodgers make the greatest effort to fertilize all the surroundings... / A few years from now, you won't be able to know

⁵ Morris Rosenfeld, "The Ghetto in the Catskills," translated by Barbara and Benjamin Harshav in *Sing, Stranger*. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

which hills are higher, the dunghills or the Catskills and I fear they will have to make a new geographical map of New York state... / ...Everybody leaves New York. / It is a mass exodus. Jews are fed up with the narrow, stifling streets; they haven't always lived like that, once upon a time they worked the soil. The holy summertime wakes them up from Exile. The bird calls, the green flowerbeds wink, a feeling from the golden ancient times wakes up and draws them far, far into the free world, the lost orphan returns to Mother Nature... / Oh, how beautiful it is to fantasize! / But in truth they travel to the mountains to eat...(48).

In Rosenfeld's telling, Jews from New York City are transforming the Catskills, and not in wholesome ways. Free to celebrate a place abounding in natural beauty, where they might otherwise feel as if their exile has ended, Jews instead become poor stewards of nature. Gardens are left untended and grow "sidelocks." Trees are "circumcised"—chopped down or perhaps over-pruned. Rosenfeld's scatological references, though offered with a wink, are grounded in local history; according to an 1899 newspaper report, residents of the Catskills' Sandbergh valley sought legal counsel because the increase of Jewish hotels had turned the Sandbergh River into a 'mere sewage channel.'⁶ For Rosenfeld, Jews' annual sojourn to the mountains regrettably has more to do with their desire to feast than it does with the mountains' breathtaking beauty.

This theme is elaborated in the final section of "The Ghetto in the Catskills," in which the speaker, presumably Rosenfeld himself, recounts a conversation he has had with a Jewish passenger on a train en route to the Catskills. Echoing the stereotype of the crude Jewish parvenu, Rosenfeld reports that his interlocutor "looked at the mountains with a pair of hungry, eager eyes and sloppily chewed a hard-boiled egg" (51). The two proceed to talk past each other, with Rosenfeld's fellow passenger focused on food and Rosenfeld himself on American geography:

—There you must have appetite—the Jew addressed me, pointing to the mountains.

—Yes, the mountains are sublime, their splendor is indescribable.

⁶ Cited by Irving Howe in *World of Our Fathers*, 216.

—But you do get hungry as you come there?—my neighbor again begged pitifully.

—The mountains stretch almost unbroken through New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. In New York State they are called the Catskills, in New Jersey, they are called Blue Ridge, and in Pennsylvania, they are called the Alleghenies...

—And everywhere, do summer lodgers go to catch up? the Jew asked, picking his beard for pieces of yolk and pensively throwing it on my jacket.

—These are not the highest mountains, the Rocky Mountains of Colorado are much higher. America has mountains that rise to fourteen thousand feet above sea level.

—There people must really be stuffing themselves!—my skinny travel companion said happily.

—And the Adirondacks can't be ignored either. In those mountains there are still wild animals; President Roosevelt goes there to shoot bears...

The Jew fell silent. My explanations, apparently, didn't interest him very much. The conductor meanwhile shouted: "Liberty! Liberty!" / I walked into Liberty [N.Y.] amazed: what stomachs the Diaspora has developed among the Jews! (51-2)

It is worth noting that the lack of refinement that Rosenfeld takes pains to underscore here had already become a trope by the time "The Ghetto in the Catskills" was published—and one invoked not exclusively by anti-Semites. According to Irving Howe, the Yiddish newspaper the *Jewish Forward* was among the first to "register[] embarrassment before crudities it had to acknowledge as familiar."⁷ Before long the "Borscht Belt" would become a "convenient symbol of vulgarity" (*World of Our Fathers*, 218) and among Jewish comedians' favorite targets. In any case, in testily invoking the stereotype, Rosenfeld arguably distracts from what is his more trenchant and reform-minded point: that Jews are sadly oblivious to their mountain surroundings.

That Rosenfeld's annoyance with his co-religionists' utter lack of interest in the Catskills emerges out of his own strong attachment to them is made clear in his poem "Scenes in the

⁷ But Howe also attempts to elicit compassion for the likes of Rosenfeld's interlocutor, and even entertains the possibility of an incipient naturism among Jews such as he: "But some fellow feeling ought to be possible for the people who flocked to the Catskills. They were tired; they had worked hard all year; they possessed no articulate tradition of nature romanticism; and a plentitude of food was still, in their eyes, a cause for wonder. Many of the men preferred to play pinochle, and many of the women to sit around gossiping, rather than commune with the famous beauties of nature; but it cannot be excluded that some Jewish vacationers did take walks in the woods." *World of Our Fathers*, 218.

Mountains.” “With two friends” Rosenfeld travels by horse cart to the “tiny little town of Parksville”⁸ in the southwestern Catskills, not far from Rosenfeld’s summer home in Spencertown, N.Y. Rosenfeld undertakes his excursion, he says, with two purposes in mind: “[F]irst, to observe the splendid nature of those places and enjoy the bracing air so necessary for my health; and secondly, to see the various Jewish farm areas in the wonderful valley” (45). Drawing freely on the romantic sublime, Rosenfeld writes that “[t]he carriage began climbing higher and higher, the horses stood on their hind legs and we felt suspended in the air. We seemed to drive into the clouds. Fear and wonderment descended on us. My nerves trembled feverishly. For a moment, we seemed to be falling backwards into the abyss, no trace would remain of us” (46). Rosenfeld also gestures towards Transcendentalist heuristics when he writes that a “seriousness permeated all our limbs. Even the horses, as if intentionally, began to walk slowly, step after step, letting us see God’s wonders in the secluded nature. / We didn’t talk, we were silent. Words would be sacrilege. I was afraid to breath[e] aloud, not to disturb the divine calm hovering over us” (45). Like the Hudson River School painters and other American romantics who made the Catskills a major part of their artistic vision, Rosenfeld here offers a mountain landscape suffused with the creator’s beneficent presence. Yet, notably, these poetics become wedded to Rosenfeld’s own Judaism when he discusses his party’s reaction to the breaking of the silence by their gentile farmer-driver, who is overcome by the landscape’s beauty:

We woke up abruptly as from a fantastic dream or as if you were interrupted in shul while reciting the *Shmone-ESre* [Amidah] blessings... We were angry at the old man for committing such a sin. “May God forgive him,” I thought to myself and plunged again, possessed of holy

⁸ Morris Rosenfeld, “Scenes in the Mountains,” translated by Barbara and Benjamin Harshav in *Sing, Stranger*, 45. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

thoughts, and I felt my soul had risen. My spirit blended with the deep silence of the rocks and wove into a dreamy *Sh'ma* Israel..." (46)

Rosenfeld analogizes the breaking of the reverential silence to an interruption of the *Amidah*, Judaism's silent standing prayer, refracting the farmer's transgression through a Jewish prism. Rosenfeld makes a similar gesture when he invokes the *Sh'ma*, the prayer proclaiming God's unity, though Rosenfeld arguably comes close to exceeding monotheistic bounds when he writes that his "spirit blended with the deep silence of the rocks." Still, Rosenfeld seems less concerned here with theological soundness than with interpolating his Judaic identity with naturism and alerting his Jewish readership to the spiritual potential of the mountain landscape. Finally, it is noteworthy that the Christian farmer, normally an avatar of American pastoral, is shown by Rosenfeld to be apparently less competent in romantic praxis than the Jews he is driving.

Yet, as the poem comes to an end, it becomes clear that the narrator and his friends are uncommon Jews in this regard. For when the party eventually tours the "various Jewish farm areas in the wonderful valley" (47), Rosenfeld is unhappy to learn that many have been put up for sale, and for a reason wholly unrelated to the land's fertility. "Heaven forbend" this be the case, says the farmer. Reclaiming his pastoral standing, as it were, he explains that the land is highly fecund, but that Jews have bought it not to farm but "only for speculation" (47). Here the conversation concludes, with the farmer's declaration left to stand as the final word on the Jewish farmers' (in)adequacy as agrarian stewards.

Yet that Rosenfeld is no less disturbed by similar anti-pastoral attitudes and trends in American society generally is made clear in his poem "The White Devils – Thoughts about New York's Underground Trains." Its titular use of an Indian pejorative for white people betokens a romantic critique of modern industrial civilization that mobilizes the figure and perspective of

the Indian for rhetorical support. By the time of its publication in the early 1900s, the poem was of course hardly the first cultural production to deploy the Indian in this manner. Yet Rosenfeld is notably among the first Jewish-American cultural figures to do so, helping inaugurate a rich and complex tradition of Jewish-American cultural production that avails itself of the Indian to perform wide-ranging cultural work.

As with “Scenes in the Mountains,” Rosenfeld interpolates his naturism with Jewish materials to illuminate the topic at hand. In the poem’s opening lines his speaker asks: “Can you make the witch that conjured up the Prophet Samuel conjure up an Emperor of the old Indians from his eternal sleep and bring him into the new underground train of New York City? / Can you now conjure up one of those wild men who sold America for a string of beads, to take a look at what the white devils have made of it?”⁹ Rosenfeld’s witch, of course, is the Hebrew Bible’s witch (or medium) of Endor, who in Samuel I (28.3-25) channels the prophet Samuel for a King Saul desperate for help in his battle with the Philistines. Like the Prophet Samuel, the Indian has disquieting news for his petitioner: the “White Devils” have “pounced on the tranquil nature of the new world.” They “breathed a soul into steel and iron and a Brooklyn Bridge appeared, a Williamsburg Bridge, a Pike Street Bridge; high trains hovering in the air, and street trains running like ghosts; passenger ships and merchant ships and warships; and millions of factories and machines and locomotion, and cylinders that occupy the brain” (39). Far from celebrating modern technology here, Rosenfeld impugns it as the touchstone of a Tower-of-Babel hubris, with man absurdly equating his ability to “breathe souls” into machines to the performance of a holy office. He derides the champions of the modern industrial order, for whom it is obvious

⁹ Morris Rosenfeld, “The White Devils – Thoughts about New York’s Underground Trains,” translated by Barbara and Benjamin Harshav in *Sing, Stranger*, 39. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

that the “majesty of the human spirit has spread out,” that “everywhere we see the stamp of the holy seal of the striving soul” (39). Unlike the *Rosh Hashana* supplicant who humbly prays to be inscribed in the Book of Life, brash modern man is confident he has received God’s blessing. To Rosenfeld, such a conviction blasphemes the covenant, with technological prowess, not righteousness, believed to engender God’s approval.

The subway, the poem’s nominal subject, is for Rosenfeld only the latest embodiment of the modern age’s moral depravity. “The work had to be done faster, harder, people began running and chasing one another. There was a pushing and shoving till all roads became narrow and they had to create transportation under the ground / A tunnel was cut through the stone ribs of Old Manhattan so the pale noisemaker can tremble and hurl itself faster in all directions” (40). For Rosenfeld, the subway destroys both human equanimity and the natural environment.

The Indian, whose virtual extermination for Rosenfeld resulted from the same unwavering belief in progress that brought us to the modern city, represents the urban maelstrom’s antithesis.

The Indian, he writes,

did not ask more of the world than he needed right now. He was good to the soil that gave him life, let him tread it, catch its fish and trap its animals and birds. He was good to nature and to himself. A wild man...He did not cut down the forests, did not undermine the earth that bore him. / But today’s American takes whatever he can and cannot get. He swaggers against whatever gets in his way. Not in vain, says he, did nature make him farsighted and imaginative, skills he uses to obtain whatever his eye can see and his imagination can reach (40-41).

Aligning himself with the Indian, Rosenfeld here warns of the damage done to the natural world by overfishing, overhunting, and the clear-cutting of forests. His poetics are of a piece with those of other writers in American belles-lettres with a conservationist bent, calling to mind, for example, James Fenimore Cooper’s Natty Bumppo, the Delaware-Indian-bred woodsman of *The*

Pioneers, who reprimands Judge Templeton and his Ostego settlers for the wholesale deforestation and other “wasty ways” that compromise the natural environment.

How are Jews positioned in the “White Devils” binary of urban mass society on the one hand, and nature on the other? Rosenfeld aligns his coreligionists with the former, even if for the meantime they are more its victims than its beneficiaries. “In the short time of its existence,” Rosenfeld writes,

white unrest wants to achieve more things and discover more secrets than time and life can serve him. In this respect, the immigrant Jew does not lag behind his Yankee neighbor. He outgrew the ghetto very fast. His innate spirit of progress leaps forward. “You’re running so I’m running too” and the Jewish quarter has a subway, an underground train. Giant bridges span his street, and under his feet lightning drives the Jewish express train. The Jewish street never lagged behind, it overtook... (41).

Rosenfeld continues to distance himself from Jewish urbanism here as he does in “The Ghetto in the Catskills” and “Scenes in the Mountains,” imaging immigrant Jews as already making inroads into modern industrial society and inspired by the very mythos that has led to their subjection in the sweatshop. Even if their embrace of “progress” augurs well for Jews’ success in America, Rosenfeld remains deeply skeptical about it, preferring instead the cosmology of the “old Indian.” “Wouldn’t he have preferred to lie in the shade of a tree, his bow and arrow beside him, looking at the stars?” Rosenfeld asks rhetorically, “Wouldn’t he have preferred to live in peace and quiet on the bit of earth, wherever he happened to be? “Wouldn’t his big, strong, wild heart bleed to see how the green trees were cut down, the mighty Rocky Mountains smashed and boxes of clay and iron erected?” (41). Rosenfeld concludes “White Devils” by invoking the witch of Endor once more, asking, “Oh, where do you get the witch to conjure up the old Indian and return man to nature?” (43). For Rosenfeld, then, the Indian is the embodiment of a back-to-nature ethos worthy of emulation.

It is worth pointing out that intimacy with actual natural landscapes was not necessarily the paradigm advocated by contemporaries of Rosenfeld who otherwise agreed that Jews needed to become better acquainted with such places. Chaim Zhitlovsky (1865-1943), the famous Yiddishist who viewed preoccupation with geography as subversive to his idea of a Jewish nation founded exclusively upon Yiddish language and culture, was among the most prominent of these. “As important as its own land may be for the life of a nation,” Zhitlovsky wrote,

it is no more than a condition, a qualification, an aid to life, but not a part of its being in the world. A nation does not consist of weather, earth, hills, valleys, forests and field. The forests and fields cannot be even the smallest part of the nation which consists rather of living people, with a unique body and soul, with different levels of attainment, with attributes and defects; in whom with the best microscope there cannot be found even one grain of sand, even one atom of land. (Trachtenberg, 150)

His diminution of actual natural settings notwithstanding, Zhitlovsky did not believe the topography of land to be entirely irrelevant to Jews. For if the Jewish nation aspired to be as culturally sophisticated as Europe—the world’s cultural zenith for Zhitlovsky—its aesthetic must include the kind of naturism that featured so centrally in the Occidental corpus. “We, a people of cities and towns,” he wrote, “lack nature and a love of nature. Our spiritual treasure does not yet include those moods evoked by the forest and the field, by mountain and water. We lack the “smell of the field”...”¹⁰

How might Jews attain a “smell of the field” having had such limited experience of such places? Zhitlovsky believed it could be achieved by way of exposure, through Yiddish translations, to other nations’ literary representations of nature. This purely aesthetic paradigm is

¹⁰ The quote is from an introductory essay by Zhitlovsky of a 1910 translation into Yiddish of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “Song of Hiawatha” by Yehoash. Zhitlovsky’s locution here consciously, and somewhat ironically, echoes the phrase from Genesis 27:27—“...And [Isaac] smelled the smell of [Jacob’s] raiment, and blessed him, and said: See, the smell of my son is as *the smell of a field* which the Lord hath blessed”—that recalls a time when Jewish communal life was intimately bound up with the physical environment. I am indebted to Joshua Price for this observation, and for sharing his unpublished translation with me.

propounded in Zhitlovsky's introduction to the Yiddish translation of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's epic "Indian" poem "Song of Hiawatha" by the poet and translator Yehoash, published in 1910. There Zhitlovsky commends Longfellow's poem—"so richly suffused with the air of field and forest, with the spirit of mountains and water" (Zhitlovsky 15)—as precisely the kind of literary production that could help Jews overcome their dearth of knowledge of the natural world.

Somewhat paradoxically, Yehaosh's original nature poetry, itself inspired by firsthand contact with wild places, serves as a kind of demurrer against Zhitlovsky's suggestion that translations alone could satisfy whatever desire for rural places a Jew might have. An emigrant from Lithuania, Yehoash moved to Colorado in 1901 after briefly living in New York City in order to undergo treatment for tuberculosis at a sanatorium for poor Jews in Denver, where he stayed for ten years. That he went to Colorado for "the cure" because he preferred that state's natural scenery to the urban environment is made clear in a biographical sketch of Yehoash written by his daughter that prefaces a collection of his poems. There she wrote that her father felt that were he "fated to die soon [from tuberculosis], he wanted to die surrounded by the Rockies rather than New York's tenement houses" (Goldstick 11)

The widely anthologized poem "Amid the Colorado Mountains" reflects Yehoash's deep affinity for the Rocky Mountains. Comprised of ten quatrains in three parts, it describes a thunderstorm at twilight heralded by "black clouds, like attacking knights" that "come on in regiments"¹¹ over the mountain peaks. Yehaosh draws on the romantic sublime to describe the

¹¹ Yehoash, "Amid the Colorado Mountains," translated by Aaron Kramer in his *A Century of Yiddish Poetry*, 66. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

storm as an experience at once fearsome—“Already every dale can feel / a gruesome tumult rise” (66)—and transcendent, with the speaker experiencing the raindrops as an “anoint[ment]” (67). With the storm’s passing, what Alan Trachtenberg describes as the “neo-Wordsworthian” (154) note in Yehoash’s nature poetry becomes more pronounced: “The mountains loom up blue and large, / the vale grows small and darkens, / and there’s a soundless melody / somewhere, to which one hearkens” (67).

Similar romantic impulses imbue “From the Catskill Mountains,” a long, sixty-stanza poem that Yehoash wrote during a fundraising tour for the Denver sanatorium after he’d completed his treatment for tuberculosis. Its four-stanza prologue commences with a description of the Catskills at dusk:

The sun hung low in the west
And shadow stripes soft, blue, silken
Stretched along on mount and vale.
And where the shadows didn’t reach,
A calm, mild light rested
And woodland and meadow shimmered
In all shadings of green.¹²

The bucolic scene is disturbed in the next stanza, however, by a memory—a “greeting brought / To the green, wooded mountains from the Rocky Mountains,”

From the cold, bald, lofty Rocky Mountains
With their white snow-turbans upon their peaks
That there in my far-off western home
In naked grandeur stare against the sun,
Where the eagle sits upon his rocky throne
In cruel, silent loneliness,
And in his ice-covered tower lives
The wild prairie hurricane. (11)

¹² Yehoash, “From the Catskill Mountains,” translated by Jehiel and Sarah Cooperman in their *America in Yiddish Poetry*, 10. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

Following another stanza descriptive of the foreboding Rockies, Yehoash returns to a meditation on the Catskills in the prologue's final stanza. He implores the "verdant mountains where light and shade are sweet.../ Where dwells the spirit of serene meditation/" to "banish the phantom of those monster mounds, / Of that cold, towering world of rocks" (11). In juxtaposing the gentle Catskills and severe Rockies, the prologue serves as a kind of Burkean primer on the beautiful and sublime, with Yehoash edifying his Yiddish readership both about these landscapes and literary approaches to them. Elsewhere Yehoash evokes myriad romantic traditions and tropes, including the Hudson River School painters: "Distantly the landscape spreads— / So tiny things appear afar! / Seemingly it is only blazoned / On a canvas painted bright" (14); the "faeries" of European folklore, which issue "from the forest's secret sites / from the rocks and from the streams" (19); and, perhaps too derivatively, a Wordsworthian solitary:

High walls of umbra trees
 Round about the world obscure;
 Only a patch of sky is seen,
 Densely spangled, full of stars.

And in the midst a cabin stands
 Dreaming within shadows deep,
 And there appears to me therein
 A recluse once lived there.

Each night he would sit there,
 Solitary, outside his hut,
 Staring upward to the sky,
 The stars would quietly ponder,

Till the night dew would in droplets
 On the hair of the recluse fall,
 Till the trees would rustle,
 Shaken by the morning wind. (20-1)

Among other Yehoash nature poems indebted to canonical English-language poets, “Song” (1920) reads as a conscious homage to Walt Whitman.¹³ In Whitmanesque fashion it catalogues an array of natural phenomena, beginning with its invocation of the iconic trope of grass. Here are its first lines:

Song of grass,
Song of earth,
Song of gold ore in the entrails of a rock,
Song of a tine-white river
Washing the body of the moon,
Song of an extinguished cloud
At the threshold of the sunken sun,
Song of a hungry wolf
Howling in the snow-steppe.¹⁴

If Yehoash contravened a foundational tenet of Zhitlovsky’s aesthetic program by seeking inspiration for his nature poems in actual natural settings, he also advanced Zhitlovsky’s vision of a Yiddish belles-lettres informed by the literary conventions of an array of world literary cultures, especially Occidental ones. But it also seems worth mentioning that another towering Yiddishist, the writer I.L. Peretz, found Yehoash’s literary naturism disconcerting. An otherwise ardent admirer of Yehoash’s poetry, Peretz believed that if Yiddish literature was to retain its integrity as a Jewish form, it must draw on traditional Jewish culture and norms even as it didactically revised and updated them, so that the Jewish folk would be “guided in its attempt to adapt to modern conditions and mentality” (Miron 80-1). Yehoash’s nature poetry, in Peretz’s estimation, failed to do this, inasmuch as its main thematic concern fell outside the parameters of normative Jewish identity. Peretz, moreover, was disturbed by what he took to be the outsize

¹³ Yehoash was not alone among the American Yiddish poets in emulating Whitman. Janet Hadda goes so far as to say that the great American poet helped teach them to “define their lyrical self, to catalog, to describe landscapes.” See Prager, 29.

¹⁴ Yehoash, “Song,” translated by Harshav in *Sing, Stanger*, 113-4.

influence on Yehoash of Heinrich Heine, the German-Jewish poet whose assimilation to German society (arguably most evident in his conversion to Christianity) Peretz thought a contemptible betrayal of the Jewish people. In Heine's writing Peretz detects obsequious Jewish self-abnegation, something that particularly rankled him coming as it did in the wake of pogroms that had swept Eastern Europe after the failed Russian revolution in 1905. "I curse the days when I read him, and the night," Peretz wrote of Heine in a 1907 letter to Yehoash, "his artificial, counterfeit, 'genial' mockery, joking in him is nothing but ... impotence, in the best case: self-contempt. We do not need jokers driving—we need prophets and leaders." Heine, Peretz writes, is an "infection to which many...have succumbed." The echo of Heine he hears in Yehoash's nature poems makes him feel, he says, "as if an anvil fell on me" (Williamson 7).

A similar rejection of Zhitlovsky's highly abstracted approach to land and nature is performed by I.J. Schwartz's long narrative poem *Kentucky* (1925), whose protagonist is a Lithuanian Jewish immigrant who settles in the eponymous state and finds himself deeply moved by its natural beauty. Born in Lithuania in 1885, Schwartz emigrated to the United States in 1906, and soon fell in with *Di Yunge* ("Youngsters"), a loosely affiliated group of modernist Yiddish poets who were particularly influenced by Walt Whitman and whose poetry often seeks to reproduce the "geographical grandeur" of his poems.¹⁵ Some ten years after living in New York City, Schwartz moved with his wife and daughter to Lexington, Kentucky, where his sister lived. Among other things, *Kentucky* serves as a record of Schwartz's profound attachment to the

¹⁵ Kramer, *The Burning Bush: Poems and Other Writings, 1940-1980*, 222. Notably, Schwartz was among the first of the group to translate Whitman's poetry, with his Yiddish translation of "Salut au Monde" appearing in the *Di Yunge* journal *Shriftn* in 1912.

landscape of his adopted state; indeed, he once remarked that he had actually given nature too much of “a say” in the poem.¹⁶

Whitman’s influence on Schwartz’s poetics is already observed in the erotically charged first lines of *Kentucky*’s dedication. “I love the earth on which I tread,” Schwartz writes. “Fresh is the earth and fruitful and rich. / Virgin earth, so yielding, so mild, / She kisses and cools my steps with her grass.”¹⁷ Echoes of Whitman are also detected in the tribute to the “broad fields of Kentucky” (25) in the introductory poem “Blue Grass,” whose speaker nostalgically reflects on his many years as a Kentucky resident.

Kentucky’s beauty also inspires in Schwartz nostalgia for the landscape of his native Lithuania, even though he had had to flee the country due to its virulent anti-Semitism.¹⁸ It was there, his speaker says, that he “first touched God’s world” and enjoyed “solitary forests / And blue rivers of grace.”¹⁹ Schwartz’s fond memories for a place he associates with Jew-hatred can seem hard to account for, but he was not alone among the Yiddish writers in this regard. As Ruth Wisse points out, “The old home had a powerful hold on the imagination of the [emigrant] writers,” and in many cases continued to serve as a “touchstone of their identity” even after they had lived in the United States many years (“*Di Yunge*” 46).²⁰

¹⁶ Quoted by Gertrude W. Dubrovsky in the introduction to her translation of Schwartz’s *Kentucky*, 8.

¹⁷ I. J. Schwartz, *Kentucky*, translated by Gertrude W. Dubrovsky, 23. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

¹⁸ Schwartz once explained the reason for his leaving Lithuania thus: “A Christian rock thrown at a Jewish head drove me here.” See I. J. Schwartz, *Kentucky*, 6.

¹⁹ This passage is translated by Julian Levinson in *Exiles on Main Street*, 133.

²⁰ Wisse’s assertion is also borne out in the case of the Yiddish American playwright Peretz Hirschbein, whose pastoral Yiddish comedy, *Greenfields* (1916), offers an idealized portrait of the countryside of the author’s native Lithuania. Too, such nostalgia could disclose a vicarious identification with Jewish intellectuals in the Old Country,

The centerpiece of *Kentucky* is “New Earth,” an approximately two-hundred page poem that tracks the life of Joshua, a Jewish immigrant from Lithuania who has wearied of New York City’s urban maelstrom and moved to Kentucky, where he initially earns his livelihood as a peddler. In the poem’s opening scene he has arrived, much like his biblical namesake, in a new land, and as his first day there comes to a close he finds himself fairly mesmerized by the resplendent landscape:

The night set in—blue, wondrous.
At first colors merged,
Violet with blue and red.
Finally, one color engulfed the world:
A deep thick blue. Only in the west,
On distant black hills.
One dark red strip burned. And first stars,
Near and red, winked to one another.
With the onset of the Southern night

A great freshness arose:
The earth’s luscious moisture
And warm odors
Filled the blue, cool air.
It was like water for the thirsty,
Like strong wine for the weary. (31)

Here, Schwartz’s nature lyrics bear the impressionistic signature of *Di Yunge* aesthetics; as Gertrude Dubrovsky writes in her introduction to her translation of *Kentucky*, the *Di Yunge* poets “generally tried to capture the sense impressions of a scene, and their poetry is full of sensuous imagery” (8). But Dubrovsky emphasizes that such “rhapsodic,” highly aestheticized verses should not be seen as registering a less than sincere appreciation of the Kentucky landscape.

whose embrace of local landscapes registered not only their love of rural places but also resistance to their growing social and political disenfranchisement. In early twentieth-century Poland, for example, “Jewish intellectuals saw their exclusion from the historical landscape as both an attempt to delegitimize the Jews as a people and to exclude them from the enjoyment of nature...” See David G. Roskies, “The Last of the Purim Players: Itzik Manger,” 212.

Indeed, she quotes Schwartz's fellow *Di Yunge* poet, Reuben Eisland, as saying that Schwartz was alone among the *Di Yunge* poets in possessing "a real feeling for nature" (8).

Soon Joshua emerges from the "blue quiet darkness of the wood and field" (30) and makes his way to an area of "old low farm houses" (31), where he will soon settle and become the symbolic progenitor of a Jewish community in rural Kentucky. He knocks on the door of the nearest farmhouse and, identifying himself as "[a] Jew, who seeks a place to rest his head" (32), gains permission to spend the night in the barn's hayloft. This first night he grows lonely thinking of the wife and child he has left behind in New York, and comforts himself by reciting "[p]salms with heart and soul" (34). Recalling a biblical patriarch with similar feelings of displacement and want, he utters "[t]he old prayer of Father Jacob / When he came to the alien land: / "Give us bread to eat, and a garment to put on," / For him, for her, for his pale children" (34). When he is finally able to fall asleep, however, Joshua's dreams of the Kentucky landscape foretell a future not of anxiety, but of profound contentment: "He saw himself in a green field / Bathed in tremendous light / It sprouts, it greens, it blossoms, it pours fourth bread / With the powers of the first seven days. / And see! He has taken hold in the soil, / In the blackish, rich, wild earth. / He feels as if he drives roots into the earth" (34). It is here, in the rural spaces of the South, that the Jewish peddler sees himself eventually emplaced and rooted, his wanderings finally over.

That for now Judaism lies at the core of Joshua's self-identity is made clear when he is asked to join the farm family for breakfast the next morning. Before eating he wraps himself in a prayer shawl, explaining to his host family that "first he must pray, he must praise God" because "[a] pious Jew [] ought to do / As is written in the Old Testament, / As God commanded Moses, His servant" (36). He then he goes on to relate his reason for coming to Kentucky:

He came, he said, from hell, from a city
Where people do not live, but fall under the yoke.
He suffered in that big, wild city.
He was a tailor fifteen hours a day,
Confined in a narrow hole
Without a drop of air, without a bit of sunshine...
So, with a pack, he set out on the road.
Here, at least, he has the open sky,
The world is wide, and people good;
A Jew does not get lost, as they can see. (37)

Sounding the aggrieved notes of Rosenfeld's sweatshop poet, Joshua here condemns the city as a place of suffering and inhumanity. Kentucky, in contrast, is a land "fresh and young," its people possessed of "good hearts with compassion for strangers" (38). His belief is borne out the next morning, when the townspeople invite him to live among them, exhibiting an openness to Jews that takes him by surprise.

Joshua, who now introduces himself by name, gratefully takes them up on their offer, and in "In the New Land of Canaan," the suggestively titled final section of Part One of "New Earth," the narrative fast forwards to show Joshua thriving in Kentucky. He has been reunited with wife, Sarah, and young son, Yankel, and puts his peddler wiles to the service of a new scrap business he founds. Joshua is portrayed as a highly respected resident of the village, and, importantly, one who hasn't had to renounce his Jewishness to become so.

Joshua and Sarah will eventually have seven children in all and move to a palatial home, one with windows looking out on "fresh green fields, / Wide lawns and distant woods" (97). His bountiful existence reminds Joshua of God's benevolence towards the Jews of biblical Canaan, where "God increased us, And we spread out in the land" (97). The Jewish community in his Kentucky town grows as well, with Joshua helping relatives and others gain a foothold.

"Litvaks" (Lithuanian Jews) and German Jews, hearing of the good fortune of Jews who have moved to Joshua's town, relocate there too, arriving in such large numbers that a rivalry between

them grows, abating only on “the awesome days / of *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur*” (102). Joshua spearheads the construction of a synagogue in recognition of this explosive growth, and, to be sure, all evidence points to a new Canaan for Jews in the Kentucky countryside.

But for all the ways in which rural Kentucky seems to succor Jews, it is also a place where Jewish identity weakens due to assimilation. Heralding this is the disappearance of both sacred and vernacular Jewish languages. On the Sabbath, “The father studies God’s word with his son, / And in a soft wistful sing-song, interprets / The text for the week.” But “...[h]e is sad / To see how the child grows estranged. He doesn’t want to say the Benedictions, he forgets / The little bit of Hebrew which he brought with him” (49). As for the vernacular, Jake’s “Yiddish tongue suddenly turned heavy, / Moving clumsily in his mouth, / As if it were full of pebbles” (50). When Yankel—now called, significantly, by his Anglicized name, Jake—starts school, “His Yiddish tongue stiffened completely” (50). Importantly, Jake’s lack of interest in Yiddish and Hebrew is tied to his movement away from the indoor spaces of domesticity and study—from home and yeshiva—to those of the outdoors: “He was too entranced by friends: White, freckled, gentile boys, Getting lost for whole days in the woods, / Wherever God put a swamp, a nest, a berry tree” (52). Before long, Jake’s love of the land becomes integral to a racialized blood-and-soil nationalism, much to the chagrin of his father, who avails himself of the Genesis story of Ham to disabuse him of it:

...His little voice rings with the love and the flame
Of the broad prairie and of young America.
Somehow the South takes root,
Now he even complains about the cold north,
And is not pleased with “Old Abe.”
Why did he free the black slaves?
His father tries to argue,
He tells him stories from the Bible,
About Noah with his sons: about Shem,
About Ham and Japeth, that Ham
Is not responsible for his black skin. (53)

The children born after Jake follow in their brother's Americanizing footsteps. "The old roots [] now strange and distant" (94), they become estranged from religious observance and Ashkenazic ideals of gender identity and manners. Joshua has "graceful, strong, athletic sons, / And thin, Puritan daughters" who speak "foreign tongues" and "read unintelligible, alien books / By the Sabbath lights" (94). The children become exemplars of genteel culture: "On quiet Sunday nights of rest / The piano beat out romances / And the front room was full: / blond-haired, blue-eyed girlfriends / And young lords carelessly dressed / In old-fashioned Southern costumes... / They sang in quiet voices / And recited old songs and ballads / With noble gestures and courtesy" (98). Among the surest signs of waning Jewish identity is Jake's marriage to Vivian, a young Christian woman whose ancestors were "[t]he first pioneers who / Cut their dreadful way through / The western side of Virginia and reached / The fertile region of the blue grass..." (115)—which is to say robust outdoorsmen emblemizing the antithesis of non-masculinist ideals of Jewish manliness. Vivian's forebears in fact include none other than Daniel Boone, "the powerful, bold hunter" who was "the first to see the land of blue grass" (115). Jake and Vivian, the speaker informs us, are eventually married not by a rabbi, but by the village's "old, good-natured pastor" (119).

Still, Schwartz does not give up entirely on the idea that Jewish identity may yet survive, if not necessarily thrive, in Kentucky. Somewhat unexpectedly, a source of hope is Vivian herself. Though she goes to "church / Every Sunday and returned inspired" (134) she is at heart an ecumenicist who finds value in all faiths, including in her husband's Judaism. Indeed, she goes so far as to light candles and bake challah bread on the Sabbath, and attends synagogue with her family and father-in-law on the high holy days.

But it is Joshua's first daughter, Dorothy, and her son, David, who represent what is perhaps Schwartz's best hope for the continuity of Jewish identity in the heartland. After "the incident with Jacob occurred" (125; Jacob's brother's marriage to Vivian), Joshua sends Dorothy to live with a relative in Chicago, hoping she will "mingle with Jews there" (126). The plan succeeds, as Dorothy marries and has a child with a Jewish man. When her husband unexpectedly dies, however, Dorothy and her son return to her father's home in Kentucky, where she becomes a newly observant Jew with a wide-ranging interest in secular and religious Jewish topics: "Into the house of old Josh / Came new books / Of Jewish history, and religion, / The poems of the gentle Emma Lazarus / And others. / In the town, the talk was / That Dorothy wanted to be a rabbi: / She studied the holy language from the *Khumesh* [Torah]" (126).

Dorothy's son, David, heralds a return to Jewishness as well. The speaker describes him as being possessed of an innate sense of justice that is honed by study of the Hebrew Bible: "It was as if the spring of Torah / Which was dammed up by his grandfather [Joshua] / Was opened again by the young sapling / And began flowing freely, clearly, / With the ancient wisdom / Of generations of elders whose life was steeped / In the house of Torah" (147). Dorothy takes pride in David's affinity for Torah, and hopes that one day her son will become a rabbi.

When David comes of age, however, he decides to become a farmer instead. Though Schwartz might have discursively connected his decision to David's love for the outdoors in his early years, when he would "disappear" into the "open fields and woods" (145) for long stretches, Schwartz hints that David's affinity for farming is a more complicated affair, the product of an array of psycho-historical factors, intellectual trends, and political movements. The speaker wonders, "From whence did this spirit come into the youth, / Of generations upon generations of tradesmen born / Who were strangers to and aliens to the earth and soil / Uprooted

from its source and powers and scent?”, speculating variously that it “[p]erhaps [] came instinctively / An unconscious impulse from within / To revive through the earth his weakened powers”²¹; that it may be some kind of rebellion against the habits of his merchant ancestors; that it might reflect the influence of “the great thinkers” (149)—among them surely Tolstoy— whose writings David read and which presumably commended the virtues of agrarianism.

Though the speaker presents these possibilities as distinct, all reflect the ideals of *Am Oylam* (“The Eternal People”), an auto-emancipatory Jewish movement founded in Russia in the early 1880s that promoted agriculture as a key to Jews’ economic and spiritual uplift in the diaspora. Schwartz gestures explicitly toward *Am Oylam* in “Joe,” a sketch of the life of another East European Jewish immigrant in Kentucky which follows “New Earth.” Here the speaker observes that pictures of Baron Hirsch and Jacob Schiff, among the most generous and famous philanthropists associated with *Am Oylam*, hang on the walls at the home of the relatives with whom the eponymous Joe initially lives. Guided by the *Haskalah* tenet of “productivization”—the belief that Jews would be welcomed in their host societies if only they engaged in vocations requiring manual labor—*Am Oylam* was strongly influenced by Russian populism and the agrarian radicalism of such thinkers as Robert Owen and Charles Fourier. With the writer Abraham Cahan and the Yiddish poet David Edelstat among its members, *Am Oylam* had established Jewish agricultural settlements in Louisiana, South Dakota, Oregon, and New Jersey, among other states by the 1930s. Most failed within a few years for a variety of reasons, among them that the land chosen for farming was often agriculturally unsuitable; the settlements were often inadequately funded; and because their members were often psychologically unprepared for the rigors of farming. *Am Oylam* tenets also informed the work of the Jewish Agricultural

²¹ These lines translated by Levinson, *Exiles on Main Street*, 137.

Society, the organization chartered in the United States in 1900 to help East European Jewish individuals and families become “free farmers on their own soil.” Its Yiddish and English bilingual monthly, *The Jewish Farmer*, published for some fifty years beginning in 1908, aimed at keeping its readership abreast of the latest technical and economic developments in agriculture.²²

David’s agrarian interests also reflect the influence of the ideas of Max Nordau, the Austrian-Jewish physician and writer (and later, leading Zionist) who believed that Jews in fin-de-siecle Europe exacerbated, even epitomized western society’s perceived cultural and physical decline, or “degeneration,” as he termed it in one of his most famous books. Through a regime of so-called muscular Judaism, Nordau hoped to transform putatively weak Jewish men into paragons of physical strength and agility—into manly men. Nordau would have approved of *Kentucky*’s David, “[a] gentle little boy” who “[d]id not grow up effeminate” (150). When his mother and aunt eventually visit him on the farm, they marvel at his new physique, at “how manly the youth became, / How power and energy seemed to sprout / From the elastic, muscular, tanned body” (150). Unquestionably, hard work has transformed David into a new kind of Jewish man, one who, like his biblical namesake, is a force to be reckoned with.²³

But “New Earth” doesn’t end here, with the masculinist vision of Jewish farming that David represents. Instead, it returns to and privileges the more passive, ecocentric vision of Joshua,

²² For more on *Am Oylam* and the Jewish Agricultural Society, see Abraham Menes, “The Am Oylam Movement,” *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 4 (1949). *Am Oylam* features in Anna Solomon’s recent historical novel *The Little Bride* (2011), whose protagonist is a Jewish teenage immigrant from Odessa betrothed as a mail-order bride to an older Orthodox man on an *Am Oylam* supported farm in South Dakota. In an interview, Solomon said that her inspiration for the book was her discovery that “there was an entire movement driving Jewish farmers to the American West; it wasn’t just a few isolated examples...this grew out of a very idealistic socialist vision, called Am O[y]lam, which had its roots back in Eastern Europe.” (Dreifus)

²³ While the Hebrew Bible and, to a greater extent, Zionism valorize the Jewish warrior, rabbinical Judaism repudiates such an ideal. For discussions of Jewish male gender identity construction and polemics arguing in favor of a normative ideal of Jewish male passivity, see especially Daniel Boyarin’s *Unheroic Conduct*.

who from the start of his Kentucky sojourn has embraced the landscape not as a means to realize manly desire, but for its beauty. When David asks him for financial help with the farm, Joshua questions him closely, apparently concerned that his grandson might be spending money unwisely. But we are promptly given to understand how Joshua's caution is something of a bluff. In fact, Joshua is eager to help—and for a reason that is in some sense selfish: “In his old lifeless eyes,” Schwartz writes, “Something shimmered, as though through tears,” because “[t]he odor of earth intoxicated him...” (149).

Joshua's love of rural space is above all what connects Schwartz's nature poetics to those of Rosenfeld and Yehoash. It is also what connects all three of the Yiddish-American poets discussed in this chapter to Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud, whom I discuss in the chapters that follow. Taken together, these writers' naturism suggests that a Jew might, *contra* normative ideals of Jewishness, celebrate the natural world, and effectively invites Jewish readers to immerse themselves in specific beloved natural spaces in the United States. We might say that Schwartz has more in common with Bellow and Malamud than do either Rosenfeld or Yehoash in this regard, however. For like Schwartz, Bellow and Malamud implicitly question whether a topos which has been conventionally thought to signal assimilatory desire can be incorporated into Jewish identity. Schwartz in *Kentucky* seems unsure that it can. Malamud and Bellow, however, offer dialectics that point the way to an expansive Jewishness more accommodating of the natural world.

Chapter 2

[T]here is something correct—although seriously misvalued—in the persistent European representation of the Jewish man as a sort of woman. —Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*

Mr. Roosevelt, when are you going to get beyond the boyishness of killing things...are you not getting far enough along to leave that off? —John Muir to Theodore Roosevelt, 1903

Though Seymour Levin, the New York-bred Jewish protagonist of Bernard Malamud's second novel, *A New Life* (1961), tries his best to adjust to life in the state of Cascadia (a fictionalized Oregon), where he has moved to take work as an English instructor at a public land-grant college, he almost immediately finds himself at the center of embarrassing situations: a tuna casserole winds up in his lap, a rambunctious child urinates on him, his first-ever college lecture is delivered with fly unzipped. Given these contretemps, and the fact that they befall Levin in the American West, a region so radically different from the representative Jew's normal

stomping grounds, it is not hard to understand why literary critics have commonly understood Levin to be a *schlemiel*, the feckless bumbler of Jewish folklore. In an introduction to the novel, for instance, Jonathan Lethem calls the protagonist a “*schlemiel*...ill-suited to his adopted landscape.” Sanford Pinsker states “[t]hat Levin should be a *schlemiel* is as much an a priori assumption as is Bober’s [of Malamud’s *The Assistant*] ‘suffering.’” Robert Alter writes that Levin’s “openness to the world...brings him, inevitably, to a *schlemiel*’s fate...rolling westward in his overheating jalopy toward a horizon of pitfalls.”¹

Leslie Fiedler is perhaps most invested in the idea of what he calls Levin’s “total schlemielhood” (216). He describes the character as a “*schlemiel* who cannot really believe that the Pacific is really out there over the next range of mountains, and who has never seen a mountain ash or heard of a potluck picnic” (214), emphasizing and reinscribing the idea of Jewish estrangement from the outdoors. But he is also convinced that Malamud ultimately destroys the novel’s Jewish sensibility and, with it, the novel’s aesthetic value when he transforms Levin into a “heroic defender of the Liberal Tradition” and the work itself into “what may well be the least rewarding of all American fictional sub-genres, the Academic Novel”(215):

“...[I]nsofar as *A New Life* records the misadventures of a luckless bumbler, it belongs to a genre with which Jewish writers were concerned before any of them had heard of Tom Mix or Gary Cooper or John Wayne, a genre with roots in Yiddish folk culture, whose most eminent old world practitioner was Sholem Aleichem...insofar as *A New Life* is about the *Schlemiel*...it belongs to the mainstream of Jewish-American fiction.” (216)

Fiedler’s claim, that *A New Life*’s becomes less identifiably Jewish to the extent that it departs from a *schlemiel* treatment, is a strong one. At its heart lies a conviction that exurban

¹ See, respectively, Lethem’s introduction to a recent edition of *A New Life*, x; Pinsker, *The Schlemiel as Metaphor*, 88; and Alter, *After the Tradition*, 199.

space demands a comedic response from the Jewish artistic imagination, if it can be said to demand anything at all. Such a conviction, as we have seen, informs Woody Allen's "Udder Madness" as well, and it also underwrites *Blazing Saddles* (1974), the Mel Brooks comedy whose Western setting serves, as with *A New Life*, to epitomize American rural space; not coincidentally does Fiedler praise the movie in his review of Malamud's novel, published only a year after the movie's release.

Such a conviction notwithstanding, *A New Life* brims with a Jewish sensibility. As I show in this chapter, however, it is realized less through the *schlemiel* than the *mentsh*, the gentle, compassionate man who serves as the normative ideal for Ashkenazi Jewish maleness. It is through this ideal—one no less integral to *Yiddishkayt* than Fiedler's beloved *schlemiel*—that Malamud ventures to inscribe the landscape with less masculinist meanings and thereby create Jewish space in the American west.²

Although the *mentsh* as a Jewish cultural structure developed largely in opposition to European ideals of manliness, its deep anti-masculinism has been mostly obscured as it has

² That literary scholars have generally not identified Levin as a *mentsh* may have much to do with Malamud's deployment of the trope in the rugged American West, an unexpected place for the stereotypical American Jew to reside. S. Lillian Kremer observes a similar phenomenon with regard to Malamud's deployment of the *tzaddik* (righteous man) and *lamed vov tzaddik* (one of thirty six secret saints of Jewish legend) in his oeuvre. These figures, she writes, "generally elude critical scrutiny" because Malamud often deploys them in "nontraditional transformations and settings," and thus they "remain detached from their literary precursors in critical commentaries on Malamud's work." See "Reflections on Transmogrified Yiddish," 123-4. Yet, though the *mentsh* has become fairly naturalized as an urban denizen, Irving Howe's commentary on *mentshlekhkayt* and the Lower East Side in *World of Our Fathers* shows that the relationship between the code and the city is one of correlation, not causality. Squalid conditions there merely recommended *mentshlekhkayt* as a buffer against the city's severity, inasmuch as the code embodied "a readiness to live for ideals beyond the clamor of self, a sense of plebian fraternity... and a persuasion that human existence is a deeply serious matter for which all of us are finally accountable." "For many children and grandchildren of the East Side," he continues "it was through this world that one first came to glimpse a life worthy of the idea of man" (645). Thus, the desire for the values of *mentshlekhkayt* became heightened due to difficult urban living conditions, but the city itself was not the code's vector (as the code's pre-modern, European provenance alone should tell us). Malamud reminds us of this in *A New Life*, and in so doing provides scholars interested in the subfield of Jewish spatial studies the opportunity to move beyond familiar sites of analysis.

passed conceptually into popular culture, where it is understood to mean simply a decent, perspicacious person. I don't mean to suggest that this valence is unimportant in the *mentsh*'s indigenous matrix. By itself, however, it elides an antinomianism that is fundamental to the construct's diasporic origins. This is alluded to by Mark Kaminsky where he characterizes *mentshlekhkayt*—the complex of values to which the *mentsh* (or aspiring *mentsh*, in any case) subscribes—as “exalt[ing] an ethics of the household, of the extended family, of the sphere of the domestic.”³ *Mentshlekhkayt*, in other words, prizes that which Euro-American culture has, for males, usually considered feminine. Joseph Landis's gloss of the code further discloses the depth of its anti-masculinism. *Mentshlekhkayt*, he observes, is

wholly different from [] that other ideal so often manifest in Western history, the ideal of muscled, aggressive manliness, which admires force and is basically suspicious of man, mistrustful of intellect as impractical and of art as effete and of social melioration as visionary....The admonition “Be a man” is very far removed from the exhortation “Be a *mentsh*.” (Landis 5)

As Landis suggests, whereas the exemplary Euro-American man is physical, bent on domination, and socially alienated, the Jewish man is ideally passive, gentle, and oriented towards communalism and domesticity, qualities which western society typically ascribes to women.

Following Bernadette Brooten and others, Daniel Boyarin traces the origins of such Ashkenazic Jewish male “effeminacy” to diasporic rabbis' resistance in antiquity to imperial Roman culture, wherein activity and passivity were coded respectively as masculine and feminine. “The early Rabbis,” Boyarin writes, “constitute an instance of opposition to the representation of masculinity as activity and dominance, just as their later analogs in modern Europe would resist romantic ideas of masculinity” (6), and he describes *mentshlekhkayt* as a

³ As explicated by Kaminsky in a letter to Daniel Boyarin. See *Unheroic Conduct*, 37.

“secular continuation of the rabbinic opposition to European romantic ‘masculinism’ (37). For Boyarin, among such “later analogs” is Eliezier, the father of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism. According to a volume of legends about the life of the Baal Shem Tov, Eliezer was kidnapped by pirates and sold as a slave to a kingdom in which those who were identified as Jews were promptly put to death. Eliezer was able to hide his true identity, however, and soon was pressed into service as a slave of the viceroy. In this role Eliezer was required only to wash his master’s feet at the end of the day, a less than onerous obligation that allowed him to pursue his most inspiring and enjoyable activity: Torah learning.

Eliezer, as it turned out, was also gifted with military prowess—something unexpected given his penchant and preference for studying. The viceroy became aware of his exploits on the battlefield and promptly made Eliezer a trusted adviser and commander. He also awarded Eliezer his princess daughter as a wife. Eliezer, however, didn’t want to be married to the princess, but rather sought to return home to the wife he had been forced to leave behind. And so he prevailed upon the princess to help him escape, which she did out of love for him. In the end, Eliezer returns home, Boyarin writes, “to his humble Jewish existence poor, weak, and married to a poor old Jewish woman” (59), thereby “achiev[ing]”

his true vocation as father of a great mystic. This true Jewish existence had been maintained in the domestic, private, “female” space of his own room, where he engaged in the nonmanly, quintessentially Jewish pursuit of the study of Torah. At the same time, the story signals that his passion for this inner, “passive” space is owed not to his inability to perform in the world of manliness but to his commitment to the alternative values of Jewish male gendering (59).⁴

⁴ That Boyarin himself powerfully identifies with the kind of effeminate masculinity emblemized by Eliezer is made clear in the prologue to *Unheroic Conduct*: “As I reflect on my coming of age in New Jersey, I realize that I had always been in some sense more of a ‘girl’ than a ‘boy.’ A sissy who did not like sports, whose mother used to urge me, stop reading and go out and play, in fifth grade I went out for—ballet...This in itself is rather a familiar story, a story of inexplicable gender dysphoria, but one that had for me, even then, a rather happy ending. I didn’t think of myself so much as girlish but rather as Jewish...I start with what I think is a widespread sensibility that being Jewish in our culture renders a boy effeminate...”(xiii).

I spend some time on Boyarin's gloss of Eliezer's life in order to elucidate more fully the way that the *mentsh* in a Jewish matrix resists conventional European definitions of manliness.

Despite being possessed of what were considered heroic attributes by the wider culture, Eliezer yearns to return to a life of domestic pursuit and, relatedly, the study of Torah and Talmud.

Though of course he chooses his own fate when he moves to the American West, Levin, like Eliezer, also rejects the ambient masculinism of the wider society, and does so similarly under the sign of his Jewishness. But an important difference which obtains between Levin and Eliezer is that Malamud's protagonist repudiates masculinism even as he embraces the outdoors. The crux of Boyarin's reading of Eliezer's enslavement and eventual liberation, however, is that one cannot embrace both outdoor activity and *mentshlekhkayt*. The two, for Boyarin, are necessarily mutually exclusive.

In a way Malamud tests Boyarin's proposition when he sets his aspirational *mentsh*, Levin, down in the American West, the nation's geographical touchstone for masculine outdoor pursuit at least since the end of the nineteenth century, when the country was in the throes of a "crisis of manliness," and "the relationship between what is western and what is male...tightened into an almost impermeable bond" (Johnson 497).⁵ Among the key figures in this regard is the historian Frederick Jackson Turner. In his seminal study, "The Significance of the Frontier in

⁵ Krista Comer's discussion of a minor episode in American literary history in her monograph *Landscapes of the New West* nicely illustrates how the Western landscape has served as a touchstone for American masculine identity. In 1962, a year after the publication of *A New Life*, John Haase, a novelist in California, lambasted Eastern critics for their view that John Steinbeck was an unworthy recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature, suggesting that their objection to Steinbeck was driven by a distaste for Steinbeck's manly, Western-inflected poetics. "When Haase invokes 'western man,' she writes, 'he puts into play a system of meanings that signifies a good deal more than biological male humans living in the geographic terrain to the west of the 98th meridian. The West, in Haase's geographic imagination, *is* America. Western character as Haase forwards it—robustly masculine, natively hopeful, maverick, full of the promise of youth, suited intuitively to the rigors of the outdoors...—signifies both regional but also national character. Far more than a discussion of literary values, then, Haase...[is] fighting about national direction, national politics, national character and identity—in short, national manhood.'" See Comer, 22-23.

American History” (1893), Turner lamented the imminent “closing” of the frontier, a space he believed had singularly conditioned the nation’s democracy and related manly character. The frontier, he wrote, “offered an exit into a free life and greater well-being among the bounties of nature, in the midst of resources that demanded manly exertion and that gave in return the chance for indefinite ascent on the scale of social advance” (92). Theodore Roosevelt, another expositor of the nation’s manly attributes, was among the first to embrace Turner’s thesis. He wrote that Turner had “put into shape a good deal of thought that has been floating around rather loosely” (Slotkin 619), and his own multivolume *The Winning of the West*, written between 1889 and 1896, promulgated many of the same themes. So did his famous “The Strenuous Life” speech, which was delivered before a Chicago men’s club in 1899 when Roosevelt was governor of New York. The speech opened with these words:

In speaking to you, men of the greatest city of the West, men of the State which gave to the country Lincoln and Grant, men who pre-eminently and distinctly embody all that is most American in the American character, I wish to preach, not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife; to preach that highest form of success which comes, not to the man who desires mere easy peace, but to the man who does not shrink from danger, from hardship, or from bitter toil, and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate triumph. (3)

Central to Roosevelt’s “strenuous life” regime was what Gail Bederman calls “virile imperialism”—race war, essentially—which allowed “American men to enact their superior manhood” (Bederman 174). For Roosevelt, racial conquest recapitulated the predatory ways of nature as postulated by Darwin, which he had first learned about as a sick child reading boys’ adventure books written by Mayne Reid. As Gail Bederman writes, the Reid books helped bring him “into imaginary contact with the aggressive masculine nature he identified with the fictional Western frontier, where boys demonstrated their heroic masculinity by killing fierce animals and battling wild Indians” (174). Importantly, at the turn of the twentieth century, Roosevelt numbered among those who regarded Jews as doing little to reinforce the nation’s rapidly

diminishing heroic character. In a 1901 letter he expressed the view that urban life had sapped Jews of the gallantry they had had in biblical times, but that they could counteract this by “develop[ing] that side of them which I might call the Maccabee or fighting Jewish type.” They might also cultivate their masculinity, he insisted, by undertaking the “rough, manly work” that was “no less necessary” than the mercantilist activities with which they occupied themselves in the nation’s urban centers (Dobkowski 154).⁶ Turner for his part believed that the country was imperiled by the influx of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, a cohort which included Jews. “Since 1860,” he wrote, “a change has been in progress. The south and east of Europe have risen in importance, while England, Ireland and Germany have declined... It is obvious that the replacement of the German and British immigration by southern Italians, Poles, Russian Jews and Slovaks is a loss to the social organism of the United States” (Trachtenberg 37).

Like Roosevelt, Turner didn’t identify Jews as having a uniquely pernicious effect on “the social organism of the United States,” but his writings were associated with a wider discourse that did. In *The Old World and the New* (1914), the well-known economist Edward Ross, for example, referred to Jews as “beaten men from a beaten breed... moral cripples, their souls warped and dwarfed by iron circumstances...”—hardly the type to move America’s “Noble Experiment” forward (Sachar 381). Many of the racist ideas of the era were conceived under the sign of Aryanism, European race theory that gave rise to the eugenics movement goal of engineering “desirable” racial qualities and eliminating those thought injurious to the nation’s

⁶ Roosevelt also famously believed that national regeneration depended entirely on white men (Jews occupied a liminal racial status nationally at least until the end of World War II), who, he asserted, must “reproduce as a matter of national honor; otherwise, the nation’s virility, its very blood, would become “mongrelized,” diluted.” See Comer, 156.

racial stock. In *The Races of Europe* (1899), William Z. Ripley warned that the Jews' "physical degeneracy...threatens to drain itself off into this country...unless we restrict its ingress." For writers such as Ripley, Jews were a "race somehow unwholesome," presenting "a threat not only to the national's cultural homogeneity but to its very physical and moral vitality" (Sachar 381).

Others implicated Jews in the nation's decline in ways more suggestive than explicit. In "The Evolution of a Cow-Puncher" (1895), for instance, Owen Wister, author of *The Virginian* (1902), the novel widely credited with inaugurating the genre of the Western, tells the apocryphal story of an over-refined English nobleman who finds his true vocation as a cowboy when he visits Texas for the first time. In Texas, Wister writes, "the untamed Saxon awoke in him, and mindful of the tournament, mindful of the hunting-field, galloped howling after wild cattle, a born horseman, a perfect athlete, and spite of the peerage and gules and argent, fundamentally kin with the drifting vagabonds who swore and galloped by his side."⁷ Wister's effete nobleman is transformed into a "Saxon boy of picked courage" in Texas, and but for him and his fellow cowboys, the nation would have been overrun by "hordes of encroaching alien vermin, that turn our cities to Babels and our citizenship to a hybrid farce, who degrade our commonwealth from a nation into something half pawn-shop, half broker's office."⁸ Peter Antelyes helpfully glosses the implicit anti-Semitic valences of Wister's essay thus:

[T]he exclusionary anti-Semitic logic of Wister's Western is unmistakable in the opposition between the given virtues of the "Saxon" and the linked evils of "vermin," urban "Babels," and a "hybrid farce" of "half pawn-shop, half broker's office," all of which were common anti-Semitic tropes. Jews were not to be at home on this particular range: where the authentic westerner was both individual and champion of individualism, the Jew was a creature of the tribe; where the westerner was a man of the physical world, the Jew was an intellectual; where the westerner

⁷ Cited by Antelyes, 18.

⁸ Ibid.

believed in the honest "sell," the Jew was a crafty bargainer; where the westerner found his proper element in nature, the Jew thrived in the darker domains of the urban world. (18).

Wister's canards can be seen to anticipate those of Henry James on the immigrant Jewish enclave of the Lower East Side in *The American Scene* (1907), but Wister's tone is arguably more indebted to the virulent anti-Semitic discourse then prevalent in Europe.

How did Jews respond to innuendo and direct charges that they were poorly adapted to America's outdoor spaces and therefore insufficiently masculine and heroic? Prior to the influx of Eastern European Jews beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, Jewish writers of German and Sephardic origin sometimes used their works to make the case that Jewish men were in fact no different from their gentile counterparts with respect to manliness. An early example is offered by Nathan Mayer's Civil War-themed novel *Differences* (1867), often considered the inaugural work of Jewish-American fiction. Here the German-Jewish protagonist Louis Welland possesses "the chest of Hercules" and on horseback gallantly leads his regiment in skirmishes against the Confederates. Emma Lazarus anticipates the salutary transformation of Wister's effete Englishman in Texas in her poem "In Exile," from *Songs of a Semite* (1883), a collection similarly regarded as inaugurating Jewish-American poetry. The poem commences with an "Extract from a letter of a Russian refugee in Texas," an epigraph of sorts in which Lazarus's interlocutor testifies that "Since that day [when he and other shtetl-dwellers fled the pogroms sweeping Russia] till now our life is one unbroken paradise. We live a true brotherly life. Every evening after supper we take a seat under the mighty oak and sing our songs." The poem itself, set at twilight at the end of another hard but invigorating day of physical labor, is a lyrical and deeply sentimental tribute to the Texas prairie and the Russian Jews working it who have been "redeemed by agrarian life" (Omer-Sherman 27): "Soft breezes bow the grass,/Day's sounds of various toil break slowly off"... "[u]p from the prairie the tanned herdsmen pass/With frothy

pails, guiding with voices rough/Their udder-lightened kine. Fresh smells of earth,/The rich, black furrows of the glebe send forth” (*Poems* II, 5). As Ranen Omer-Sherman observes, in such verses Lazarus “sought to build a new Jew with muscles”—this “years before the Zionist congresses would highlight the Jews’ return to the body and nature by displaying postcards and posters contrasting virile young farmers in Palestine with old and decrepit Orthodox Jews” (27). In “The Banner of the Jew” (1886), written a few years later in the wake of the Russian pogroms, Lazarus invokes “the glorious Maccabean rage” of the biblical Jew to remind Jew and gentile alike of the Jews’ capacity for martial heroism, anticipating Theodore Roosevelt’s exhortations some fifteen years later.

American Jews also availed themselves of non-figurative sites to prove their masculine prowess in the outdoors. Among these was the enterprise of Jewish camping, with the first Jewish camp founded in Connecticut in 1893. According to Jonathan Sarna,

[Jewish] [c]amping’s primary goals in the early years...were thoroughly antimodernist: they sought ‘to restore those values of life which come from living in the great outdoors...Jewish camping enthusiasts believed that their programs effectively countered anti-Semitic stereotypes concerning Jewish weakness and also promoted the great goal of Americanization. Campers were thus supposed to breathe in the ‘pure sweet air of American mountains, lakes and forests’ and to exhale any residual foreign traits. (Sarna 30)

Camping, then, offered Jews a simulacrum of the strenuous activity advocated by Roosevelt, and was a means by which Jews could counteract the putatively invidious effects of city living. Indeed, Camp Kennebec, a Jewish camp founded in Maine in 1907, explicitly included Roosevelt’s vision of the ‘strenuous life’ as part of its mission statement.

But by the early 1900s, a different, critical response to American masculinism is detected in a range of Jewish-American cultural productions. Among these are the Tin Pan Alley songs of Jews who had emerged from the Eastern European immigrant enclaves of New York City, and

which parodied the frontier myth by way of feckless *schlemiels* interpolated into rugged western settings as cowboys. The satirically ironic quality of these songs derives from the very idea of a Jewish cowboy, since, as the Tin Pan Alley composers well understood, Jewish male gender identity signified something decidedly other than masculine heroism. The cowboy *schlemiel's* declarations of his own toughness, a signature of the genre, did nothing to undo or weaken this signification; rather, as one might imagine, it served mainly to reinforce it. In "I'm a Yiddish Cowboy (Tough Guy Levi)" (1907), for example, the protagonist, who lives "[w]ay out West in the wild and woolly prairie land," defiantly sings in the chorus:

Tough guy Levi, that's my name, and I'm a Yiddish cowboy,
I don't care for Tomahawks or Cheyenne Indians, oi, oi,
I'm a real live "Diamond Dick" that shoots 'em till they die,
I'll marry squaw or start a war, for I'm a fighting guy.

Tough Guy Levi, we promptly understand, protests too much, since Levi's Jewish surname alone peremptorily militates against his being a "tough guy." This sense is only reinforced by Levi's inane and self-aggrandizing braggadocio, which if anything discloses anxiety that he is hardly what he claims to be. "Yonkel, the Cow-boy Jew," released the same year, is more explicitly dismissive of the idea that a Jew might be adapted to cowboy life in the rugged West. It relates the story of one Yonkel Finkelstein, who

Went out west one day,
Just to shoot wild Indians,
That's what the neighbors say.
Didn't care a snap for home,
Left his wife and little child;
Met a pretty cowboy girl
Then his Yiddish brain went wild
To his friends he sent a note,
And this is what he wrote.

Chorus:

Western life is fine and dandy
I have got no kick;

When I think of the pawnshop bus'ness
Oi, it makes me sick.
Ev'ry time I see some Indians
I just kill a few,
So I've changed my name from Finkelstein
To Yonkel, the Cowboy Jew.

As with “I’m a Yiddish Cowboy,” the killing of Indians here evokes Roosevelt’s preferred method of personal and social rejuvenation at the fin-de-siècle. To be sure (the Tin Alley songster tells us with a wink), race war is a particularly effective way for the Jew to overcome his characteristic weakness and the enervating effects of such urban vocations as the “pawnshop bus’ness.” But just when Yonkel thinks he has joined the estimable ranks of the cowboy, his miscegenous errand with a western girl lands him in trouble, giving him to see there is in fact great distance between himself and the cowboy ideal:

Now Yonkle made love to the girl
That he met out west;
But she told her beau on him,
And he then did the rest.
With a shooter in his hand
Cowboy made poor Yonkel dance;
Then he yelled, “You Tenderfoot,
Run while you have got the chance.”
Yonkel then commenced to pray
And swore he’d never say:

(Repeat Chorus)

Yonkel at the song’s end returns to his wife and child—to the privileged site of normative Ashkenazic masculinity—and will presumably forswear a life of masculinist pursuits going forward. But is there shame in this? The song’s rhetoric suggests that the answer is not, for the *schlemiel*’s turn from the hyper-masculinism emblemized by the cowboy is ironically imaged as his—the Jewish man’s—strength. Ruth Wisse in *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero* (1971) offers among the most nuanced assessments of the complex and often ambiguous Jewish cultural work performed by *schlemiels* such as Levi and Yonkel:

To the degree that Jews looked upon their disabilities as external afflictions, sustained through no fault of their own, they used the *schlemiel* as the model of endurance, his innocence a shield against corruption, his absolute defenselessness the only guaranteed defense against the brutalizing potential of might...in fashioning the *schlemiel*, the Jew admits how weak and foolish he appears to those who dominate him, and up to a point, he shares their view...Yet beyond that point he does not submit to self-hatred, and stands proudly on his record” (5).⁹

The symbolic refusal of the *schlemiel* to endorse the kind of manly aggression that has been used against the Jew in exile turns Jewish weakness into a virtue, and, accordingly, the *schlemiel* into a (Jewish) hero.

In film, a memorable instance of the *schlemiel* irreverently abrading the Western mythos is offered in the comedy *Whoopee* (1930). Based on the Ziegfeld play that first appeared on Broadway in 1928, Eddie Cantor reprises the role of Henry Williams, a hypochondriacal *schlemiel* who goes west to calm his nerves and improve his health. While Henry never plays at being a cowboy, the plot (such as it is) nonetheless shows how utterly unfit he is for the role, with his lack of courage implicitly signaling his effeminacy. “I’m not brave. I can’t even help myself,” he explains to his friend Sally when she tries to convince him to help her flee after being betrothed to a man she doesn’t love. Henry’s lack of fitness for Western life is also disclosed by his extreme fear of guns, the cowboy’s main instrument of conquest, of course. When Sally places one in his hands to use in their getaway, he screams “Put it away!” “I can’t stand the sight of guns! I hate guns! Put it away! I don’t like guns! Even when somebody says,

⁹ It should be noted that Wisse’s appraisal of the *schlemiel* has unquestionably shifted in the years since the publication of *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero* and as her political views, especially those regarding Israel, have moved steadily to the right. In a special commencement address to Jewish graduates of West Point in 2010, Wisse remarked that “we now know what happened to the people who created those [*schlemiel*] jokes. They were slaughtered in the millions. What we call the Holocaust targeted precisely the population that created *schlemiel* comedy. We learned from that episode that sweetness was no laughing matter and that joking—which momentarily releases tension—offered no defense against real belligerents. The *schlemiel* who initially made us laugh also taught us to raise our guard.” See Tracy, “The Schlemiel Goes to War.”

‘son of a gun,’ I almost faint!’ Perhaps the surest indication that Henry is poorly suited to be a cowboy lies in his implied homosexuality. This is revealed when he and a rich rancher, Underwood, look down each other’s pants, ostensibly to compare the scars from their respective below-the-waist surgeries. At the conclusion of the scene, Underwood exclaims suggestively, “Yes sir, my boy, that is some operation!”¹⁰

Among the most famous of the Jewish parodists of the frontier myth was Mickey Katz. In such 1950s tunes as “Borschriders in the Sky” and “Yiddish Mule Train” (parodies of “Ghostriders in the Sky” and “Mule Train”), Katz destabilizes the western songbook poetically (with decidedly unheroic thematics), linguistically (by singing traditionals in a dissonant admix of Yiddish and English), and sonically (punctuating the songs with blaring, disjunctive klezmer riffs). His song “Duvid Crockett” reimagines the legendary frontiersman of the Bill Hayes’ original as a *schlemiel* “born in the wilds of Delancey street/home of gefilte fish and kosher meat,” who in 1813 fought the “indianers” and then the “litvakes and the galitzianers”—cohorts of Eastern European Jews from Lithuania and Poland who vied for Ashkenazic hegemony.

Before heading west, Duvid goes

...down south, looking for a maidel,
Met a little tzatkale [girl] called daisy fraidel
From near and far, they came to the chippe [chuppa]
Elected him president of the bnei Mississippi [congregation].

Though Duvid is never installed as president of the synagogue, which is implied to be an authentically Jewish space, he does undertake his Western adventure with his “little tzatkale” by his side and, in doing so, abjures the solitary ways of the frontiersman. He travels to Las Vegas, where he rather unheroically “forlorn di heysn un he went on nakhet” (lost his pants and

¹⁰ Lenny bruce here?

continued on naked). The song's narrator says that due to this unfortunate turn of events, Duvid "felt very sad, that's my opinion, he would have said kaddish but he couldn't find a minyan," playfully invoking Jewish mourning rituals. By the end of the song Duvid quits his western sojourn and is "back on Delancey Street"—an outcome that reverses and voids the triumphant telos of the frontier myth.

In "Haim Afen Range," his 1947 Yinglish version of "Home on the Range," Katz deploys tropes of domesticity and co-opts stereotypes of Jewish materialism to disrupt the old classic. Whereas the singer of the original longs for a bucolic home "[W]here the buffalo roam/And the deer and the antelope play/Where seldom is heard a discouraging word/And the skies are not cloudy all day," Katz's singer pines for ... "a beautiful wife/Where the sheep and the goats run around; "Oh give me a house," he sings, "With healthy cowboys/And a hundred cattle to sell." The critic Josh Kun, following Robert Alter's characterization of Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud as "de-mythologizers" who deployed Jewish humor to puncture the conceits of literary high modernism, describes Katz's project here as one of using "rebellious mockery and subversive laughter of parody to deflate myths of American national identity and make a mockery of national institutions" (368). As with the Tin Pan Alley send-ups, Katz mobilizes the *schlemiel* to this end, targeting the manly heroism associated with the Western outdoors in particular.

That *A New Life*'s Levin at times destabilizes western masculinity with *schlemiel* performances that echo those of the likes of Katz's protagonists is undeniable. But his more fully developed persona as a *mentsh*, or an aspirational *mentsh*, in any case, offers an even more thoroughgoing critique of the Western mythos. Malamud begins to link his protagonist to *mentshlekhkayt* in the novel's opening scene, when a "[b]earded, fatigued, lonely" Levin "set[s]

down a valise and suitcase and look[s] around in a strange land for a welcome”¹¹ as he waits to be met at the train station in Marathon, Cascadia, by Gerald Gilley, his new English department supervisor at Cascadia College, after a long trip from New York. Levin here evokes a recently arrived Eastern European Jewish immigrant. His beard is of particular symbolic importance, inasmuch as it connects Levin to the Talmudic injunction that prohibits shaving, and thus to the rabbinical Judaism that is the vector of *mentshlehkhkayt*. His beard promptly draws the notice of Gerald Gilley, who questions Levin about it as they depart the train station:

“Just this small matter, Sy. Do you always wear that beard?”

Levin looked at him in embarrassment. “I have for the past year. It’s—er—given me a different view of myself.” He laughed a little.

“Then it’s not permanent?...This is sort of a beardless town...” (23)

In spite of his assurances that it is a “small matter,” Gilley will aim to keep Marathon a “beardless town” as he tries to discourage Levin from creating Jewish space in Cascadia.

Levin is also asked about his beard later by Pauline, Gilley’s wife, during their first encounter in the forest. Levin explains that he grew it after realizing that “life is holy,” and deciding he wanted to reconnect to that which “had been passed down to me but I had somehow forgotten. More than forgetting, I had lived away from it, had let it drift out of my consciousness. I thought I must get back to what belongs to me” (201-2). There is deep irony, of course, in Levin’s reflecting on what “had been passed down” to him as he stands in a landscape more commonly associated with fresh starts and radical reinvention. But here and throughout *A New Life*, Levin in the Cascadian wilderness is not preoccupied with forgetting the past and losing himself from historical antecedent, but with memory and connectedness, ideals central to Levin’s Jewishness. Importantly, the scene builds on one in which Levin, immersed in the outdoors for the first time

¹¹ Malamud, *A New Life*, 3. Subsequent references to the text are made parenthetically.

since his arrival in Cascadia, reflects on how memory is also ideally integrated into the lived present. Standing in his landlord's garden in late summer, Levin decides to till and replant a weed-filled garden and discovers "last season's walnuts and acorns." They move him to consider how "the past hides but is present" (56), a formulation evoking the cyclicity of Jewish temporality. Abiding the Deuteronomic imperative to choose life, Levin fights off melancholy over the approach of autumn and winter, since "he was now dead set against the destruction of unlived time" (59). One is reminded here of Abraham Joshua Heschel's comment in *God in Search of Man* (1955): "Just as clairvoyants may see the future, the religious man comes to sense the present moment. And this is an extreme achievement. For the present is the presence of God."¹² Notwithstanding his lack of Jewish ritual observance, Levin during his time in Cascadia will show himself to be very much the "religious man" of Heschel's formulation.

On the early spring day when Levin meets Pauline in the forest, the changing weather again brings on "a touch of habitual sadness at the relentless rhythm of nature; change ordained by a force that produced, whether he wanted it or not, today's spring, tomorrow's frost, age, death, yet no man's accomplishment; change that wasn't change, in cycles eternal sameness, a repetition he was part of..." (195). But Levin's spirit lifts when he reminds himself that it is in an appreciation of such repetition, of the seemingly prosaic, that renewal lies. Embracing the idea that equipoise is nothing less than "grace settled on the spirit in desire of life," Levin resolves to "enjoy this tender marvelous day instead of greeting it with news of everything I haven't got," (195) and enters the woods:

Levin took heart. He walked on soft ground among dark conifers, giants and dwarfs, and a large scattering of leafless other trees; but now he recognized fir, cedars, in green skirts touching the ground, blue spruce, and even hemlock, the trees in profusion, their branches interlaced...As he

¹² Heschel, 142.

came out of the woods into a clearing, a yellow-green, rich grassy meadow sloping downward, a flock robins...scattered noisily over his head...he located with his glasses a bird drilling away near the top of a dead fir. Hurriedly searching for his bird guide, he read with the greatest satisfaction that he had spotted a red-headed woodpecker...A moment later he turned pages hastily to identify first a Seattle wren, then a very blue, graybellied blue jay, exciting color; and a chickadee...also a yellow bird he couldn't identify, whose flight above the treeline Levin followed with pleasure until it disappeared...Who sees this in Manhattan Isle? None but the gifted. Here the common man rejoiced in what was naturally visible. (196-7)

Here Malamud gestures towards the cultivation of a kind of Hasidic joy in God's creation, a joy that is accessible to all, and puts the lie to the idea that Jews are urban creatures essentially unequipped to appreciate nature. The scene reaffirms Levin's earlier epiphany that "he had cut himself off...from longing for the East. Without regret. If Levin regretted anything it was not long ago having escaped the city" (95). The trees and birds inspire Levin to direct his gaze outward, to depart from "an ego-centered perception of the individual" and move instead towards what Heschel describes as a "theocentric discernment of unity encompassing animate nature, the cosmos, and human history."¹³ A key element of this unity is Levin and Pauline's intimate relationship, which begins under the forest canopy and culminates later when Levin, Pauline and her two children leave Cascadia for other points west at the narrative's conclusion. The interconnectedness and concomitant rejection of inwardness that their relationship instantiates is central to Malamud's project of introducing *mentshlekhhkayt* to the western landscape.

No less fundamental to Levin's attempt to make space for *mentshlekhhkayt* in the Western outdoors is his repudiation of what in Yiddish is called *goyim naches*. Translatable as "the joys of the gentiles," *goyim naches* entails such activities as hunting, athletic competitions and dueling, the physical and often violent outdoor pastimes that Ashkenazi Jews "traditionally despised, [and] for which they in turn were despised," as Daniel Boyarin writes (38).

¹³ Kaplan, "Reverence and Responsibility," 408.

Conceptually, *goyim naches* has an undeniably ethnocentric cast, but Boyarin prefers to emphasize its critical office, characterizing it as a constituent part of the “salient Jewish critique of European ‘manliness’” (51).¹⁴ For Ashkenazic Jews, *goyim naches* has traditionally been viewed as part and parcel of a Euro-American “culture of romance,” which, “while always contested—in large part by ‘feminized’ Christian religious men—maintained hegemony...ever gaining intensity through the nineteenth century and beyond” (Boyarin 5). In Malamud’s mid-twentieth century America, this hegemony was made manifest by, among other things, the popularity of Western-themed television shows and movies. As Jane Tompkins reports, “[i]n 1959”—two years before *A New Life* was published—“there were no fewer than thirty-five Westerns running concurrently on television, and out of the top ten programs eight were Westerns...John Wayne, the actor whose name is synonymous with Western films, became the symbol of American masculinity from World War II to Vietnam” (5).

Levin is shown to have entered a domain of *goyim naches* from the first pages of *A New Life*, when his trip-induced fatigue is set symbolically against the energy of his new colleague, Gerald Gilley, who arrives with Pauline to greet Levin at the train station. They appear in sports clothes and “stare[] at Levin—the man almost in alarm,” unsettled in part by Levin’s enervation. Gilley is “tall, energetic,” and strides “forward with his hand outstretched” to introduce himself (3). Levin, for his part, wears a fedora, and “removing [it], his teeth visible through his beard,” nervously introduces himself as “S. Levin...[f]rom the East” (4). Here the point of view shifts momentarily to Gilley, from whose gaze Levin registers as a kind of grotesquerie from the

¹⁴ Elsewhere, Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin discuss Jewish and other ethnic ethnocentrism more broadly, distinguishing between hegemonic and non-hegemonic forms and justifying the latter: “The Rabbis produced their cultural formation within conditions of Diaspora, and we would argue that their particular discourse of ethnocentricity is ethically appropriate only when the cultural identity is an embattled (or, at any rate, nonhegemonic) minority.” See “Diaspora,” 718.

archives of anti-Semitic propaganda. Placing his bags in the trunk of the Gilleys' car, Levin sees a set of golf clubs, and as they ride from the train station, a conversation ensues about golf, a metonym for the sporting life and *goyim naches* generally:

“Do you play?” Gilley asked Levin.

“Play?”

“Golf.”

“Oh, no.”

They drove a while in silence.

“I hope to learn some day,” Levin said with a broken laugh.

“Good,” said Gilley. (4)

Marc Kaminsky's explication of *mentshlekhkayt* offers insight into Levin's obvious discomfort here. “The concept of the *mentsh*,” he writes, “...exalts an ethics of the household, of the extended family, of the sphere of the domestic, and, from the purview of the masculinist ideals of the alien cultures in which [Ashkenazi] Jews lived, *refigured the feminization of Jewish men in ways that secular Jewish men had to be conscious of.*”¹⁵ The timidity signaled by Levin's “broken laugh” registers a recognition of the menace that inheres in Gilley's “Good,” as it begins to dawn on Levin that in Cascadia he will be expected to abide the masculinism associated with *goyim naches*.

Levin, however, is not interested in the outdoor contests that golf represents. This is made clear by his preference for enjoying the outdoors passively. Among the first glimpses of this passive mode is provided when, on the ride from the Marathon train station, a break in the conversation allows Levin to take in the passing scenery:

Levin relaxed and enjoyed the ride. They were driving along an almost deserted highway, in a broad farm-filled valley between distant mountain ranges laden with forests, the vast sky piled high with towering masses of golden clouds. The trees softly clustered on the river side of the

¹⁵ Quoted in Boyarin, 37. Italics are mine.

road were for the most part deciduous; those crawling over the green hills to the south west were spear-tipped fir...My God, the West, Levin thought (4).¹⁶

Presently, Malamud puts Levin's passivity in dialogue with Western history through his metanarrative deployment of the Nez Perce Indian Wars. After Gilley urges Levin to address him and his wife by their first names, explaining that "[p]eople aren't too formal out this way...[o]ne of the things you'll notice about the West is its democracy" (5), Pauline points to "a huge snow-capped peak" in the distance, which she identifies as "Mt. Chief Joseph." The name is a slightly altered version of the actual one given to Chief Joseph Mountain, the Wallowa, Oregon mountain named for a well-known chief of the Nez Perce tribe, which saw its territory dwindle in the 1870s to one-tenth its original size after the U.S. government broke treaties it had entered into with the tribe. When Chief Joseph refused to obey a federal order to leave the area in 1877, the cavalry was dispatched to remove the tribe forcibly. After three months of fighting that left the Nez Perce decimated and virtually landless, Joseph surrendered; when he died in 1904, his doctor said that a "broken heart" had killed him.¹⁷ By having Pauline immediately follow her husband's claims about Western democracy with a reference to the mountain, Malamud calls attention to Gilley's jingoism. In this subtle act of bearing witness for a fellow subaltern, Malamud holds out hope for a landscape that might one day be inscribed with a more pacific valence.

¹⁶ Levin's sense of wonder at Oregon's landscape reflects Malamud's own as related by his daughter, Janna Malamud Smith, in her 2006 memoir of her father. She writes that, when her father moved to Oregon in the late 1940s, the region's "natural beauty went way beyond anything [Malamud] might have seen before...What little he knew of nature and wilderness had come to him courtesy of city parks or writers such as Melville or Wordsworth" See Smith, *My Father is a Book*, 128.

¹⁷ Wilson, 76. The Nez Perce tragedy also provides the historical backdrop for *The People*, the novel that Malamud was writing when he died in 1986.

Malamud again foregrounds Levin's passivity when the car reaches the Gilleys' neighborhood and Levin takes note of its "lovely tree-lined streets and attractive wooden houses." He is impressed by the "many old trees and multitudes of green leaves," and, when they arrive at the Gilleys' house, Malamud has him note "a slender white birch on the lawn, its lacy branches moving in the summer breeze." Levin next identifies the flowers that line the curb of the Gilley home: "asters, marigolds, chrysanthemums, he guessed; in his valise was a copy of *Western Birds, Trees and Flowers*, a fat volume recently purchased" (6). Significantly, the nature guidebook is Levin's constant companion in Cascadia, emblemizing an implicit rejection of the usual proclivities of the western man and calling to mind the "feminist" praxis of the likes of Dorothy Wordsworth and Susan Cooper, nature lovers in whose sketchbooks "the figure of the experience is played down relative to the [natural] object described" (Buell 47).¹⁸ For them, nature is embraced not for the opportunity it affords for self-actualizing aggression, but for itself. Later, in the fall, on rambles through the forest, Levin, Thoreau-like, catalogues the trees around him: "White birches stood in baths of tiny yellow leaves. Elms had golden hair and naked black bodies. Chestnut trees in strong sunlight wore orange impasto. Vine maples, the only adventurers, flared yellow, red, and purple around green at the core" (123).¹⁹ By having

¹⁸ See Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, 47. Still, even if Levin's guidebook might be seen as emblemizing the way an Ashkenazi Jewish man might passively enjoy nature, it is still somewhat unexpected. This is brought home by the comic resonance of another Jewish male character's response to the natural world. I refer to Alexander Portnoy of Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), who, visiting the family home of his Iowa girlfriend for the first time, is more taken by the fact that she lives on "Elm Street"—a name whose pastoral connotations are so exotically gentle to him as to seem mythical—than by the flora itself. As he explains to his therapist, "What I see first in a landscape isn't the flora, believe me—it's the fauna, the human opposition, who is screwing and who is getting screwed. Greenery I leave to the birds and the bees, they have their worries, I have mine. At home who knows the name of what grows from the pavement at the front of our house. It's a tree—and that's it. The kind is of no consequence, who cares what kind, just as long as it doesn't fall down on our head..." (251). As with Woody Allen's New Yorker piece, Roth's portrayal of a Jew's engagement with nature vibrates comedically precisely because of its perceived truth.

¹⁹ Levin's emulation of Thoreau is made explicit earlier in the novel: "Watching a robin straining to snap a worm out of the earth Levin momentarily thought of himself as a latter-day Thoreau, but gave that up—he had come too late to nature" (56). Lawrence Buell's alignment of certain of Thoreau's writings, such as *Cape Cod*, with the

his protagonist drawn to “feminine,” non-hegemonic ways of practicing American naturism, Malamud endeavors to align Levin with those versions of American pastoral that would best seem to complement Ashkenazic constructions of Jewish male identity.

For his colleague, Gilley, on the other hand, the western landscape represents mainly the chance for what Lawrence Buell describes as “questing and conquest within nature” (47). Gilley’s preferred mode is made clear to Levin when he enters the Gilleys’ house for the first time and sees a prominently displayed “black and white print of a hunter shooting at a bird” (7). That Gilley believes questing and conquest is how men should engage the outdoors becomes apparent to Levin when, soon after, he “admire[s] a small purple-leaved tree in front of the house,” and senses that he is being monitored by Gilley: “Levin, out of the corner of his eye, watched the man [Gilley] watching him” (7). Thus Malamud offers what is a quite literal rendering of Mark Kaminsky’s cautionary that Jewish men should be “conscious” of their non-normative performances of male gender identity in the diaspora.

Gilley proceeds to ask Levin if he “won’t miss New York,” a question that aims to preempt Levin’s passive (mis-)appropriation of the Western landscape and reminding him of his proper Jewish place. Marathon “is a small town,” he tells Levin, a place where “...there isn’t much doing unless you get outdoors or are interested in football and such” (9). This discourse of rugged manliness is taken up by Pauline when her husband leaves the room:

“landscape-oriented” works of women writers such as Susan Cooper (*Rural Hours*) and Celia Thaxter (*Among the Isles of Shoals*) demonstrates interesting similitudes between Thoreau’s “effeminate” naturalist praxis and that of Levin, and should temper readings that take Thoreau to task for unrelenting masculinity. “Thoreau’s increasing commitment to minute realization of vignettes of local landscape and culture, during the 1850s,” writes Buell, “brought him into intersection with a thriving local sketchbook tradition that quite early in the antebellum period was taken over by women writers influenced by Washington Irving and Mary Russell Mitford and eventually culminated in late-century regional realism.” 26-27.

...[Gilley] does many things and gets a lot of pleasure out of his life. He fishes—this is the country for it if you're interested; he's a wonderful dry fly fisherman, and I've seen other fishermen stop what they were doing to watch him. He also hunts pheasants and ducks and loves to watch athletic events (15).

Hereupon Pauline shows Levin another item indicative of Gilley's manly preoccupations, a "prize-winning" photo titled "Pioneer Farmhouse," taken by Gilley during a camping trip. After she comments that "Gerald is in love with Americana," Levin responds with a rather perfunctory "Very nice—" (16), offering a muted demurral against Gilley's frontier adventurism.

Levin's failure to endorse such "authentic" American values will provoke a sharp response from Gilley later in the novel. By spring, Levin, now deeply mired in department and college politics, becomes aware of a special dispensation afforded to Cascadia College's football players. On the desk of George Bullock, an English department colleague whose western ethos aligns with Gilley's, Levin inadvertently discovers a letter that Bullock has written to the head coach of the football team listing English department faculty considered "lukewarm if not downright unsympathetic to athletes" (276). Levin's name, not surprisingly, is among those listed. "I frankly can't advise your key men," Bullock writes, "to take their classes. In fact I'd say lay off unless emergency threatens and then not to unless they've talked to me first" (276-7). When Levin shows the letter to Gilley, who is now campaigning to become department chair, he says that though he doesn't approve of such a list, he can't "see anything wrong with anybody wanting to look out for the boys on our teams. They have their place in college as well as anybody else. You know what the Greeks said about physical fitness and the well-rounded man. Athletes set certain standards of perfection which is part of your liberal education. Sports mold character... You could say they're really playing for America" (283). Here Gilley makes athletics and the outdoors integral to his definition of American manhood.

Gilley insinuates that Levin's indifference to athletics amounts to an insult of Cascadia and the nation when their discussion broadens into a discussion of American identity, and he attributes this indifference to Levin's regional provenance, a coded way of referencing his Jewish ethnicity. "You know, one thing I have never liked about you is the way you look around with an eye that says 'I've seen better.' ...you have the New Yorker's usual cockeyed view of the rest of the country. You are still an outsider looking in" (288). Gilley is unmoved when Levin protests that he doesn't "feel like an outsider," and turns to the topic of fishing to reinforce his point:

Gilley strode over to his long closet and pulled out a fishing rod, assembled and ready to strike. 'This is a spinning rod,' he said. 'Do you know it from a fly fishing rod or an African spear? This is the reel, the line—monofilament, eight pound test which I use for steel head—dropline, lure. I bet you thought we use worms... You've been here for almost a year and have never once, so far as I know, gone fishing... You ought to get out into the open and tone up your muscles. We have some of the best fishing streams in the world in Cascadia. Ernest Hemingway has fished here. How will you ever teach Thoreau... without ever in your life having been to a wild place?' ...God know I'm not against books...but I'm against only books (288-9).

Interestingly, Gilley's argument—that the American outdoors must be experienced energetically and actively for the experience to possess authentic cultural meaning—finds precedent in the writings of well-known cultural nationalists. In a blistering essay in *The Nation* in 1920, for instance, the Southwestern writer Mary Austin takes exception to Waldo Frank's insights about American culture in his recent book, *Our America*, writing that they are compromised by having been "magnificently predicated from a car window." Given in part that the Jew is merely a putative observer of the landscape rather than an active participant on it, she asks skeptically whether "the Jew can... become the commentator, the arbiter, of American art and American thinking?" (Ellis, 57-8).

Yet, crucially, and belying Gilley's characterization, Levin has gotten "out into the open," albeit not as the kind of sportsman that a figure such as Hemingway so famously personified.

Indeed, Levin answers Gilley by pointing out that he has visited Walden Pond. But Gilley remains dubious about Levin's American bona fides, and, continuing to argue his point, undertakes to "show" Levin exactly what he means:

[Gilley] raised his rod and flipped it as if casting. 'I don't think you can imagine what it means to wade into a swift icy mountain stream.'...Gilley moved into the cold, fast flowing stream... "The fisherman estimates the pull of the current from the froth on the rock so he knows how deep he can go in without being knocked over and carried away. One wrong step could mean his life. He's got to be careful with his footing when he jumps from one slippery scum-covered rock to another"...He raised his foot, jumped, and made it...Bravo, thought Levin... "Now he's in the water up to his chest," Gerald said, extending the rod over the desk, "his arms moving rhythmically as he searches the stream for a fish, pitting his sportsman's knowledge against the instinctive wisdom of the species. This is contentment, this is the good life"...Levin pictured himself in cold water up to his heart (ah the balm of it) enjoying the good life. (289-90)

For Gilley, the "good life" is one that recapitulates a Darwinian drama in which only the strongest survive. It is a fraught contest in which lives hang in the balance, in which men become heroic through their conquests in and domination of nature. The idea only bemuses Levin, whose mocking rumination at the end of Gilley's enactment is of a piece with his quiet rejection of all that Gilley's pioneer farmhouse photo represents. Gilley concludes his absurd performance by explicitly condemning Levin's naturism and calling Levin's American identity into question:

"You have seen almost nothing of this country. In the winter and spring vacations you stayed home. What the hell did you buy a car for?"

"I drive into the country," Levin said. "This spring I saw Scotch brume for the first time in my life, pure gold in the fields – marvelous. In the sky the drama of the clouds never ends –."

"I'm not talking about what you can see in the city parks," Gerald said. "I'm talking about *nature*. I mean *live* in it. *Camp alone* in it. I mean *climb* a real mountain. Then you'd know what this country means..." (290, italics in the original).

Malamud offers what is perhaps his strongest repudiation of Gilley's view that a man must be active ("*climb* a real mountain") and solitary ("*camp alone* in it") in nature in order to experience it in a manly way as *A New Life* comes to a close. For a previous disclosure by Pauline to Levin that she and Gilley chose to adopt children rather than have their own because her husband "has

no seeds” takes on added significance as Levin, Pauline and her two children leave Cascadia for San Francisco. Pauline, we have learned, has become pregnant by Levin, a man whose very maleness was called into question by Gilley. Now it is Gilley’s manhood which is called into question, since, unlike Levin, he “cannot give of himself what is ultimately a man’s to give a woman in the most intimate of shared experiences,” as Robert Alter writes.²⁰ If Gilley’s “physical sterility is emblematic of the general condition of moral withdrawal”²¹ that characterizes Cascadia—and Malamud would have us believe it is—then Levin’s fertility signals and affirms engagement and intimacy. It is with such alternative manliness, one infused with *mentschlekhkayt*, that Malamud makes Jewish space in the West.

Chapter 3

And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.

--Exodus, 25.8

In this chapter I seek to contribute to recent critical conversations in Jewish Studies on Jewish-American identity formation by considering how naturism mediates the identity of the eponymous, Jewish-American protagonist of Saul Bellow’s *Herzog* (1961). Mainly treated as an agon to Moses Herzog’s Jewishness in previous readings of the novel, nature, I argue here, in

²⁰ Alter, *After the Tradition*, 199.

²¹ *Ibid.*

fact complements and expands Herzog's Jewish identity,¹ and in so doing unsettles the trope of the American Jew as city dweller. Herzog's embrace of nature is not an uncritical one, however. Although his love of the natural world is rooted in pastoral, Herzog critiques that tradition's romantic and exclusionary impulses—and by extension American identity—from an implicit Jewish perspective. Thus Bellow in *Herzog* seeks not only to inflect Jewish-American identity with naturism, but to inflect naturism with Jewish ideals.

The importance of nature as a structuring episteme of Herzog's consciousness is glimpsed in the novel's opening scene, which finds Herzog convalescing in the yard of his Berkshires home in the wake of a nervous breakdown:

It was the peak of summer in the Berkshires. Herzog was alone in the big old house... Now and then he picked raspberries in the overgrown garden, lifting up the thorny canes with absentminded caution... Tall bearded grass and locust and maple seedlings surrounded him in the yard. When he opened his eyes in the night, the stars were near like spiritual bodies. Fires, of course; gases – minerals, heat, atoms, but eloquent at five in the morning to a man lying in a hammock...²

To begin to appreciate the quality and depth of Herzog's affinity for the natural world, we should note the extent to which Herzog in this opening scene already departs from what may be considered the archetype for an American Jew enjoying the mountains in summertime. Here I refer to those Jewish visitors to the Catskills who, liberated from the sweltering city for a few weeks, were typically more interested in the communal opportunities afforded by their mountain setting than the pastoral ones. As Irving Howe observes in *World of Our Fathers* (1976), these vacationers “possessed no articulate tradition of nature romanticism”—“...[m]any of the men

¹ A notable exception is Sarah Phillips Casteel's treatment of the novel in *Second Arrivals: Landscape and Belonging in Contemporary Writing of The Americas*. While she neglects to investigate thoroughly the way in which naturism and Jewishness inflect each other in *Herzog*, my argument in this chapter nonetheless builds on her understanding of the novel's nature poetics as a kind of “critical pastoralism.”

² Saul Bellow, *Herzog*, 1. Subsequent references to the text are made parenthetically.

preferred to play pinochle and many of the women to sit around gossiping, rather than commune with the famous beauties of nature..." (218).³ Herzog is quite unlike these Jewish men. For in a Massachusetts locale not far from Emerson and Thoreau's home base of Concord, he ambles by himself, in a garden, symbol of Arcadian retreat. The night sky is "eloquent" to him, the stars impressing him, in Transcendentalist fashion, as spiritual bodies. And soon we will learn that Herzog is a scholar of romantic thought, and, though his academic career is now moribund, that "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*" (4). Herzog, moreover, is no vacationer here, but rather a resident, of the town of "Ludeyville," a fictional place name that echoes with the nineteenth-century uprising in England by the Luddites, the anti-technology activists whose cause was championed by nature-loving British Romantics. Blending the valences of Ludeyville and Concord, Herzog will soon think to himself that he could be "Moses, the old Jew-man of Ludeyville, with a white beard, cutting the grass under the washline with my antique reel-mower. Eating woodchucks" (49). The reverie is lighthearted, of course, but its nod to Henry David Thoreau, who in *Walden* eats a woodchuck for the infusion of wildness he hopes it will impart to his constitution and spirit, nonetheless reveals Herzog's desire to somehow transubstantiate American nature more fully into his being. All of this is to say that Moses Herzog's embrace of nature's wonders clearly distinguishes him from his Catskills contemporaries.

But, crucially, this is an affinity which exists in tension with Herzog's Jewishness. Indeed, his mental collapse may be said to be brought on at least in part by his inability to integrate the

³ Howe expands on the theme in his essay "Strangers" in his collection *Celebrations and Attacks*, where he discusses the valences of Transcendental naturism for mid-twentieth-century American Jews. "Hardest of all [for Jews such as himself] to take at face value," he writes, "was the Emersonian celebration of nature. Nature was something about which poets wrote and therefore it merited esteem, but we could not really suppose it was as estimable as reality—the reality we knew to be social" (16).

conflicting Jewish and romantic values that predominate in his subjectivity. For some Jewish readers of the novel, Herzog attains equipoise only when he jettisons romantic naturism and restores his Jewishness to a pure(r) state. Liela Goldman, for instance, asks “Where has [Herzog] gone wrong?”, and promptly points to his rural abode. “The clue to the answer is his home in Ludeyville.” The “physical wilderness” of the Berkshires, she continues, “actually reflects his condition of [] barrenness as far as Judaism is concerned” After undergoing a process of introspection and suffering, however, she writes that Herzog is “ready to commit himself to fulfilling the contract he made with God – life” (114), a contract whose terms include abandoning Ludeyville and the idyll of nature it represents. Dan Vogel in an essay in the Orthodox journal *Tradition* takes a less condemnatory, though by no means sympathetic view of Ludeyville. He suggests that, although Herzog happens to reaffirm his commitment to Jewish values there, the setting contributes nothing to this reaffirmation since he can find “no alleviation in Nature” (74). And in the journal *Judaism*, Harold Fisch analogizes Ludeyville to Herzog’s girlfriend, Ramona, who signifies “an amoral or pre-moral nature-cycle.” For Fisch, Herzog’s attempt “to preserve an island of the spirit from the tide of nature...is an indication of a spiritual force still at work which could without distortion be described as Hebraic” (44-5). As I will show, these critics subscribe to the normative Jewish view expressed by all the novel’s Jewish characters (save Herzog) who happen to address themselves to the question of Jewishness and nature: that the two stand in fundamental opposition.

This irreconcilability, incidentally, is a proposition to which the novel’s gentiles generally assent. Bellow’s point seems to be that the Jewish nature lover is bound to meet resistance both from within and without his community, which is to say from just about everybody. His neighbors, for starters, consider Herzog an invidious and unwanted presence in the Ludeyville

woods. This is made clear when Herzog returns home after an extended absence to discover that an intruder has placed “a used sanitary napkin in a covered dish on his desk, where he kept bundles of notes for his Romantic studies” (48-49). Herzog understandably regards this as a sign of a less-than enthusiastic “reception by the natives,” and the sanitary napkin is an affront for obvious reasons. But it is also a highly symbolic one, for it underlines that, as a Jew, prototypical urban cosmopolitan, Herzog cannot be fecund here, cannot be the progenitor or even the expositor of a an identity which is organically outside his ken.⁴ The episode calls to mind Walter Benn Michaels’ argument that cultural identities are produced through an ineluctable racial(ist) logic, since, from the vantage of the rural intruder, “[p]eople cannot become what they aren’t” (122), as Michaels puts it. There is thus nothing, certainly not their *de jure* citizenship, that can alter Jews’ outsider status. For now Herzog is resigned to his reception, but later he will scold himself for thinking that his affinity for the woods might one day be accepted by his gentile neighbors, that he would be welcomed into this fraternity of fellow nature lovers: “Herzog’s folly! Monument to his sincere and loving idiocy...symbol of his Jewish struggle for a solid footing in White Anglo-Saxon Protestant America (‘The land was ours before we were the land’s,’ as that sententious old man [Robert Frost] declared at the Inauguration [of John F. Kennedy]” (309).

It is worth noting that the kind of repudiation of Jews’ “misappropriation” of American cultural materials experienced by Herzog here is a recurring motif in Bellow’s oeuvre. In *The Victim* (1947), for example, Kirby Allbee at a party condemns the singing of American

⁴ As George Mosse observes, cultural nationalists in Europe and the United States commonly “felt menaced by the big city, the apparent center of an artificial and rootless age...The village or small town close to nature...symbolized those eternal values that stood outside the rush of time...[t]he city was home to outsiders—Jews, criminals, the insane, homosexuals—while the countryside was the home of the native on his soil” (32). In the eyes of cultural nationalists, Jews’ habitation of the countryside could only threaten the purity of the native’s home.

“spirituals and old ballads” by Asa Leventhal’s close Jewish friend, Dan Harkavy. “Why do you sing such songs?” asks Allbee. “*You* can’t sing them...It isn’t right for you to sing them. You have to be born to them. If you’re not born to them, it’s no use trying to sing them” (40).

Elsewhere in the novel Allbee boasts of his purported connection to the Puritans and Massachusetts Bay Colony (“Do you know, one of my ancestors was Governor Winthrop. Governor Winthrop!”; 138)—to make clear that he can lay claim to American identity in a way that Leventhal, or any other Jew for that matter, cannot. Allbee also dismisses Jewish scholars who would make the American romanticism their field of study. “It may not strike you as it struck me...,” he tells Leventhal, “[b]ut I go into the library once in a while, to look around, and last week I saw a book about Thoreau and Emerson by a man named Lipschitz...[] it seems to me that people of such background simply couldn’t understand...”(132).⁵ The “background” to which Allbee alludes here is of course the Jewish one indicated by the surname Lipschitz.

Herzog’s naturism, as I’ve said, is no less disconcerting to his fellow Jews, who believe that it compromises his Jewishness and signifies assimilationism. There is, for instance, Ramsberg, the doctor who tends to Herzog after a car accident and expresses curious skepticism about Herzog’s motivation for residing in the Berkshires in the first place. Given Herzog’s condition, the doctor warns him against the kind of “heavy lifting, straining, chopping, or other violent exercise” he assumes Herzog to be accustomed to doing as an inhabitant of such a rugged environment—and as someone, a Jew, out to prove his manly bona fides (306-7). Yet Herzog is far from the embodiment of such a person. If anything he is the antithesis, typically enjoying his yard

⁵ The issue of perceived Jewish “encroachment” on American cultural materials was clearly a personal one for Bellow. “More than one [Jewish] poet flirted with Anglicanism and others came up with different evasions, dodges, ruses, and disguises,” he said in a 1988 talk. “I had little patience with that kind of thing. If the WASP aristocrats wanted to think of me as a Jewish poacher on their precious cultural estates then let them.” The talk was excerpted and published in the *New York Review of Books*. See “A Jewish Writer in America,” 28..

passively as he lies in his hammock, or ambling about his yard inspecting the amazing variety of plant life. Still, when he preemptively admits to the doctor that the nearest synagogue is miles away from his Ludeyville home, it becomes clear that Herzog understands the countryside is considered by many to be normatively proscribed for Jews. Indeed, no less an authority than Maimonides has weighed in on the difficulty of sustaining Jewish identity in rural areas. In a provocatively titled essay “The Unnatural Jew” (1982), Steven Schwarzchild writes that the medieval sage ruled that “Jews were not supposed to reside where there are no synagogues, physicians, artisans, toilets, water supplies, schoolteachers, scribes, organized charities, or courts” (362), and points to the absence of synagogues, among other Jewish institutions, in the countryside to make a prima facie case for the inhospitality of country living to Jewish piety.⁶

⁶ I hasten to add that Schwarzchild’s essay roiled certain Jewish scholars who might be said to share Herzog’s ecocentrism. The geographer Jeanne Kay, for example, in the same journal replied that “Schwarzchild bases his case for the “unnatural Jew” on the opinions of a few poets, philosophers, and rabbis who depicted Jews as alienated from the environment...[His] pairing of a normative Judaism unappreciative of nature with heretical minority opinions is certainly one way to interpret Jewish environmental beliefs; however, one could just as well and perhaps more profitably view the variety of Jewish environmental perspectives as different threads in the rich fabric of Jewish thought, for the Jewish love of debate and the many different ways of life within Jewish cultures around the world contradict simplistic interpretations of Jewish beliefs...[t]o the extent that Jews have been divorced from nature, historical rather than philosophical factors may be most critical...[t]he author’s concluding remarks about ancient Jews living close to urban services ignore the realities of agricultural life throughout most of the world until modern times...[t]he fact remains...that Jews through late ancient times were primarily an agricultural or even pastoral people, living close to their environment...I urge Schwarzchild to leave his office a little more often, to form a more accurate opinion of Jews in nature...I especially urge him to consider the implications of stereotyping the highly diverse Jewish people as ‘unnatural.’”

Moreover, Simon Schama’s discussion of Jewish communities of the Polish-Lithuanian borderlands in *Landscape and Memory* (1995) demonstrates that Jewish life has in fact thrived in rural areas, at least in pre-World War II Europe. “I had always thought of the Jews of the *Alte Land* as essentially urban types,” Schama writes regarding a visit to rural locales in Central and Eastern Europe, where Jews resided for generations, “even when they lived in villages: tradesmen and artisans; tailors and carpenters and butchers and bakers; with the rebbe as the lord of the *shetl*; microcosms of the great swarming communities of Wilno and Bialystok and Minsk. And so it often was, but the villages we walked through, these picture-perfect rustic cottages with their slanting timber eaves and crook-fenced gardens, had once been Jewish houses...So even if they had not worked the earth with their hands or cut hay in the fields, these Jews had been country people, no less than the villagers of the Cotswolds or the peasants of the Auvergne. And one group among them, people known to everyone in the border country of Poland and Lithuania, had even been people of the forest, the wilderness *puszcza*. See Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 27.

This normative Jewish bias against ruralism is reflected in the attitude of Herzog's longtime acquaintance, Sandor Himmelstein, who cannot imagine that Herzog would want to reside anywhere but the city (in this case, Chicago), the quintessential Jewish-American space. When in a conversation it becomes evident to Himmelstein that Herzog has no intention of leaving his Berkshires home after the breakup of his second marriage, Himmelstein can't believe what he hears. "Out in the sticks? Don't be nuts," he says, adding,

...Come back to the home town. You're a West Side Jew. I used to see you as a kid in the Jewish People's Institute...Can you sell that dump in the Berkshires?...We'll find an orthodox shul – enough of this Temple junk. You and me – we'll track down a good *chazan*..." Forming his lips so that the almost invisible mustache thinly appeared, Sandor began to sing, "Mi pnei chatoenu golino m'artzenu." And for our sins we were exiled from our land. "You and me, a pair of old-time Jews. He held Moses with his dew-green eyes. "You're my boy. My innocent kind-hearted boy." He gave Moses a kiss. Moses felt the potato love. Amorphous, swelling, hungry, indiscriminate, cowardly potato love. (90-91)

For Himmelstein, Reform Judaism ("this Temple junk") and life "out-in-the-sticks" symbolize a deracinated, inert Jewishness, while Orthodoxy and the "West Side"—the bustling urban district that was home to most of Chicago's Jewish immigrants in the first part of the twentieth century—signify a Jewishness that is vital and authentic. Himmelstein's derogation of the Berkshires effectively constructs the countryside as a kind of *galut* (exile), i.e., as a place (and ontological condition) that is far from the ideal Jewishly. Himmelstein's point receives ironic reinforcement when he chants the *musaf*, the pilgrimage festival prayer which serves to remind Jews that they shall remain apart from the land until covenantal obligations have been met.

Yet, in Herzog's mind, it is not he but Himmelstein who has imagined a kind of Zion into being, this through his profound attachment to the urban milieu. Himmelstein's chanting of the *musaf* is regarded by Herzog as a sentimental exercise performed in furtherance of this puerile attachment, and, relatedly, as a means by which Himmelstein looks to induce his friend to give up the Berkshires for the city. Such "potato love," as Herzog refers to the sentimentalism that

infuses Himmelstein's prayer, repels Herzog. It is entirely devoid of *kavanah*, of proper spiritual intention, and accordingly verges on a profanation to Herzog. Hana Wirth-Nesher gestures towards such a reading of Himmelstein's deployment of the *musaf* where she writes that "[i]nsofar as Hebrew, when it appears [elsewhere] in this novel, is ancestral, sacred, and eternal, the exalted biblical and liturgical phrases transcend sociology and history," whereas Himmelstein's prayer, "ambiguously straddles spiritual and ethnic Jewishness," directing it away from strictly sacral concerns (117).

Wirth-Nesher also incisively comments that Himmelstein's "notion of exile draws its sustenance from the assimilating Jew's nostalgic reconstruction of a traditional homogeneous 'home' in the past" (117).⁷ Chicago is the site of such "nostalgic reconstruction" for Himmelstein, who makes use of the *musaf* to perform what the sociologist Herbert Gans relatedly describes as "symbolic ethnicity," an ethno-religious identification imbued with "a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country," and "a love for and pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated into everyday behavior."⁸ Himmelstein's love of the city, then, registers as a kind of symbolic ethnicity bereft of the Jewish religio-spiritual meaning that is most important to Herzog. As we shall see, space for him can be made holy only to the extent that it is consecrated through covenantal living. And such living, as he shows, can be pursued no less in the countryside than in the city.

⁷ I don't mean to suggest, and I don't think that Wirth-Nesher does either, that the city serves only as a site of nostalgia for American Jews, even if nostalgia seems to be its primary attraction for Himmelstein. As Murray Baumgarten notes, to American Jews, the city has emblemized fuller participation in the cultural, civic, and political life historically denied them in Europe. It is a place wherein "[t]he marginal person emerges from the shtetl and seeks a place in [a] freer, more complex, and cosmopolitan life...in which protagonist and [his or her] people might participate in the general enterprise of western culture." For further discussion, see Eli Lederhendler, *New York Jews*, 5.

⁸ Gans's idea of symbolic ethnicity is nicely explicated by Vromen, 73.

Bellow pushes back on Jewish mystification and privileging of the city elsewhere in his oeuvre as well. In *Ravelstein* (2000), for instance, Chick, the character that serves as Bellow's stand-in, is unmoved by Socrates' pronouncement in *Phaedrus*, "that a tree, so beautiful to look at, never spoke a word and that conversation was possible only in the city, between men." The dictum is referred to by Ravelstein, Chick's Jewish friend and a longtime city dweller (modeled on Allan Bloom), who invokes it during a visit to Chick's New Hampshire country house (100). The same Socratic dictum is called into question in *Humboldt's Gift* (1975) by Charlie Citrine when he ruminates on how, during visits to New York City, he oftentimes wants to "run[] off into the scenery [of the countryside] instead of listening to my human companions" in the city. Socrates, he adds, "would have given me a low mark. I seemed rather to be on the Wordsworth end of things – trees, flowers, water" (97). Herzog himself symbolically renounces the city when, on a run-in with police on a trip to Chicago, he emphasizes that he is "[n]ot living in Chicago," but rather is a resident of "Ludeyville, Massachusetts" (292).

Still, it is a sign of his psychological complexity that Herzog is not only keenly aware of the tendency for Jews to be sentimental about the city, but perhaps susceptible to such sentimentalism himself. This becomes apparent when he sinks into melancholic memories of the Napoleon Street Jewish ghetto in Montreal, where, like Bellow himself, Herzog grew up. The trigger for the memories is his sighting of a childhood playmate, Nachman, who in his later years had become a feeble, broken old man. Herzog remembers how Nachman had run from him when they'd spotted each other on 8th Street in Manhattan, thinking he would be asked to make good on an old debt. Attempting to understand the meaning of his years in the ghetto, Herzog recalls Ravitch, the Russian-Jewish boarder who stayed with the Herzog family and nearly drank himself to death pining for his wife and children left behind in Russia; his immigrant father, who

in America could only fail in business because “he lacked the cheating imagination of a successful businessman” (138); and his mother, herself mired in memories, of “her father the famous *misnagid*, her tragic mother, her brothers living and dead, her sister, and her linens and servants in Petersburg, the dacha in Finland...Now she was cook, washerwoman, seamstress on Napoleon Street in the slum. Her hair turned gray, and she lost her teeth, her very fingernails wrinkled. Her hands smelled of the sink” (139). The urban memories are no doubt painful for Herzog, but they also evoke the familiar and thus are also a comfort, something which Herzog is fully aware of—and disturbed by:

the insidious blight of nostalgia...softening, heart-rotting emotions, black spots, sweet for one moment but leaving a dangerous acid residue...To haunt the past like this – to love the dead! Moses warned himself not to yield so greatly to this temptation, this peculiar weakness of his character. He was a depressive. Depressives cannot surrender childhood – not even the pains of childhood. He understood the hygiene of the matter. (141, 143)

The “hygiene of the matter” for Herzog in part is that “to haunt the past and “love the dead” is to turn away from the present. But that Herzog is hard on himself is made evident by another, crucial memory of his Napoleon Street childhood, one which features him and his brother reciting prayers:

Moses and his brothers put on their caps and prayed together, ‘Ma tovu ohaleha Yaakov...’

‘How goodly are thy tents, O Israel.’

Napoleon Street, rotten, toylike, crazy and filthy, riddled, flogged with harsh weather—the bootlegger’s boys reciting ancient prayers. To this Moses’ heart was attached with great power... The children 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. What was wrong with Napoleon Street? thought Herzog. All he ever wanted was there. (140)

For good reason Andrew Furman calls the Napoleon Street ghetto the place where Herzog's "spiritual core" develops.⁹ It was here that liturgy such as the *Ma Tovvu* (chanted by Herzog and his brothers) made him aware of the covenant and urged resilience in the face of challenging circumstances.¹⁰ And it was here that he became aware of his link to a people who had "opened their eyes on one strange world after another, age after age...eagerly loving what they found."¹¹ Far from "loving the dead," from melancholically living in the past, then, Herzog avails himself of the tradition with which he came of age in the Montreal ghetto and which helps him navigate the challenges of adulthood. In this way the city is shown to be more Judaically significant for Herzog than it is for Himmelstein, the urban absolutist whose relationship to Jewish sources seems superficial at best.

Furthermore, though Herzog first learned the *Ma Tovvu* in an urban setting, the prayer itself works against reification of the city as the quintessential Jewish space, inasmuch as its source is a biblical passage of *Numbers* that is replete with pastoral lyricism evoking a collective Jewish life lived close to the land.¹² The prayer surely resonates for Herzog at least partly for this

⁹ Furman, 42.

¹⁰ The *Ma Tov* prayer, traditionally recited on entering a synagogue, in full reads:

How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel!
As for me, O God abounding in grace,
I enter your house to worship with awe in Your sacred place.
I love your house, Eternal One, the dwelling-place of Your glory;
humbly I worship You, humbly I seek blessing from God my Maker.
To You, Eternal One, goes my prayer: may this be a time of your favor.
In Your great love, O God, answer me with Your saving truth.

¹¹ Bellow once expressed a similar sentiment in an interview in which he said, "I think a person finally emerges...when he becomes aware that his life has a much larger meaning he has been ignoring—a transcendent meaning. And that his life is, at its most serious, some kind of religious enterprise." See Sanford Pinsker, "Saul Bellow in the Classroom," 977.

¹² The passage reads:

reason, since it is in natural places that he feels most Jewishly connected. In the scene which follows Himmelstein's recitation of the *musaf*, for instance, Herzog has arrived at Woods Hole, Massachusetts, where he waits for a ferry that will transport him to a friend who lives in Martha's Vineyard. Dipping his toes in the sea, he

...looked through the green darkness at the net of bright reflections on the bottom. He loved to think about the power of the sun, about light, about the ocean. The purity of the air moved him. There was no stain in the water, where schools of minnows swam. Herzog sighed and said to himself, "Praise God – praise God." His breathing had become freer. His heart was greatly stirred by the open horizon; the deep colors; the faint iodine pungency of the Atlantic rising from weeds and mollusks; the white, fine, heavy sand; but principally by the green transparency as he looked down to the stony bottom webbed with golden lines. If his soul could cast a reflection so brilliant, and so intensely sweet, he might beg God to make such use of him. (91)

One may object that Herzog's meditation here evinces a sensibility less Jewish than romantic, with tropes which even seem to recall Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey." Indeed, Mark Sandy goes so far as to call the passage a "reimagin[ing]" of that poem's "trinity" of air, water and light" (60).¹³ But though there are undeniably similitudes in the poetics of Bellow and Wordsworth's passages, there is a divergence of significant moment. For though Sandy neglects

How fair are your tents, O Jacob,
Your dwellings, O Israel!
Like palm-groves that stretch out,
Like gardens beside a river,
Like aloes planted by the LORD,
Like cedars beside the water;
Their boughs drip with moisture,
Their roots have abundant water. (*Numbers* 24.6-24.8)

¹³ An excerpt from "Tintern Abbey" in fact shows strong correspondences:

And I have felt
presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,

A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things

them in his discussion, Herzog's benediction ("Praise God—praise God") and soulful lament ("[i]f his soul could cast a reflection so brilliant, and so intensely sweet, he might beg God to make such use of him") inflect the meditation with an ethical monotheism which distinguishes it from the overt pantheism inscribed by the tropes of "presence," "motion," and "spirit" in Wordsworth's poem. Importantly, the divine presence of Herzog's meditation exists apart from and superordinate to Herzog and the natural wonders he witnesses, with God affirmed as the creator of them all. Herzog's feeling that nature brings him closer to God in fact calls to mind Abraham Joshua Heschel, who in *God In Search of Man* (1955) writes that "[t]o think of God man must hear the world. Man is not alone in celebrating God. To praise Him is to join all things in their song to Him. Our kinship with nature is a kinship of praise. All beings praise God. We live in a community of praise" (95).¹⁴ Bellow also seems to gesture towards the Halachic in the scene, insofar as his meditation abides the commandment enjoining gratitude in the presence of natural wonders. As Maimonides' explains in the *Mishneh Torah*,

when a person observes God's works and God's great and marvelous creatures, and they see from them God's wisdom that is without estimate or end, immediately they will love God, praise God and long with a great desire to know God's Great Name...And when a person thinks about these things...[one] realizes that they are...endowed with slight and slender intelligence, standing in the presence of God who is perfect in knowledge.¹⁵

¹⁴ Admittedly, Heschel's neo-Hasidism is thought to exceed the bounds of monotheism by certain Jewish thinkers who align with a rationalistic, or *mitnagged*, Jewish perspective. The Jewish philosopher Emil Fackenheim, for example, thought Heschel to be "frankly pantheistic" for the way he "experienc[ed] God as identical to the natural world," a theology which Fackenheim believed could lead dangerously to "moral indifference." For further explication of Fackenheim's understanding of Heschel, see Kaplan, *Spiritual Radical*, 124. That literary scholars largely refract *Herzog* through Fackenheim's kind of *mitnagged* prism is made clear by their belief that Herzog's naturism is tantamount to a Jewish lapse. As is probably obvious by now, my own view is that the Herzog imagines a God who is within nature yet, crucially, also apart from it. Accordingly, I see Herzog's God as a transcendent one, and thus Herzog's theopoetics as monotheistic.

¹⁵ *Misneh Torah*, Sepher Madah, Hilkhoh Yesodei Ha-Torah 2:1-2.

Expressing gratitude for God's creation, Herzog enacts the response called for by Maimonides. And in acknowledging and embracing his own imperfection and subordinate standing to God, Herzog resists the Transcendentalist premise that a qualitative equivalence obtains between God and the human soul. It also resists Christian notions of divinization, as is suggested by "Frost at Midnight," the Samuel Coleridge poem which inspired Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey." In the excerpt below, the narrator, a stand-in for Coleridge, considered the more conventionally Christian of the two British Romantic poets, equates natural phenomena with the "Great universal Teacher":

By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,
Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores
And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language, which thy God
Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, all things in himself.
Great universal Teacher! He shall mold
Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.

Ernest Rubinstein's exposition of Franz Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption* (1921) clarifies how natural phenomena become divinized in Christian theology. Rubenstein writes that, according to Rosenzweig, "to redeem the world, Christianity must to some extent conform to the world...God actualizes through his power all that he infinitely is. As infinite, God cannot be confronted by anything that he does not self-incorporatingly divinize. Applied to the relation between God and the world, this axiom of divine omnivorousness elevates all God touches to godly status. Trees, rivers, and human beings become divine." (44).

I highlight the contrast between a Judaic approach to the relation of nature and God, on the one hand, and romantic and Christian approaches on the other, to suggest the way in which Bellow uses Herzog's ethical monotheism to amplify his protagonist's distance from the latter.

Such a distancing is central to *Herzog*, whose Jewish poetics converge with those of certain other contemporary Jewish writers, particularly Cynthia Ozick, who in both her fiction and non-fiction makes a point of conflating Christianity and romanticism. In her essay “Toward a New Yiddish” (1970), for example, she writes that her “dispraise of Diaspora...is centered on a revulsion against the values—very plainly I mean the beliefs—of the surrounding culture itself: a revulsion against Greek and pagan modes, whether in their Christian or post-Christian vessels...It is a revulsion—I want to state it even more plainly—against what is called, strangely, Western Civilization” (156).¹⁶ Bellow in an interview hints at a similar contempt:

I think people in Western countries live Romanticism all the time. They don't even know it, but they do. They think of the proper mode of being as highly stimulated, ecstatic, a life of infinite possibilities, the individual utterly free, his main responsibility to fulfill himself and to realize his own desires as richly as he can...It becomes a nightmare when you have as many people on junk...as you do in this country. It's purely a Romantic thing. The great junk-users of the nineteenth century were also the great painters and writers of the nineteenth-century...It's sort of a secession on individualistic terms from the collective life...(Pinsker 978)

Herzog, we will see, comes to realize that romantic pastoral attracts him at least in part because it has allowed such “a secession on individualistic terms from the collective life.”

Notably, Herzog engages gentile thinkers in making his case against pastoral ideology. In a letter to his old friend, Shapiro (unsent, as with all of Herzog's letters), for example, Herzog writes that the romantics “caused confusion between aesthetic and moral judgments. They began

¹⁶ Ozick's muse here is the German-Jewish rabbi and thinker Leo Baeck, whose book-length essay “Romantic Religion” (1922) she credits as inspiring her eventual disavowal of the romanticism she had flirted with as a young woman; see her New York Times essay “A Youthful Intoxication.” In *Romantic Religion*, Baeck writes that “Christianity accepted the inheritance of ancient—Greek and oriental—romanticism...It had all the traits of romanticism: the exuberance of emotion, the enthusiastic flight from reality, the longing for an experience. Holy consecrations and atonements were taught and enthusiastically tasted with reeling senses. They aimed to relate man to the beyond; they aimed to make him one with the god and thus grant him redemption from primordial sin and original guilt. For this, it was said, could not be attained by mortal man with his own power, but must be a gift of grace which had to descend from hidden regions and to which a mediator and savior, a god, who once had walked on earth had shown the way...Mystical music dramas, showy, phantastic presentations, seemingly removed into mysterious distances by the twilight, granted the weary, drowsy soul the beautiful dream, and the sentimental longing its fulfillment: the faith that it belonged to the elect.” Leo Baeck, “Romantic Religion, 196-7.

with anger over the industrial defilement of landscapes...and ended by losing sight of the old-fashioned moral characteristics of the Ruskins” (176).¹⁷ To a Dr. Mossbach he writes that he, too, is “repelled by the ‘dampness,’ as [Hulme] called it, and the swarming of Romantic feelings. I see what a villain Rousseau was, and how degenerate” (129). In his essay “Romanticism and Classicism” (1911), Hulme says “the root of all romanticism” is “that man, the individual, is an infinite reservoir of possibilities; and if you can so rearrange society by the destruction of oppressive order then these possibilities will have a chance and you will get Progress” (116). For Hulme, romanticism bastardizes an otherwise salutary human yearning for transcendence by permitting individuals to achieve it by following their own unreliable, and often immoral, hearts.¹⁸

Notably, Bellow does not have Herzog himself refer explicitly to any Jewish thinkers or sources in making his critique of romantic pastoral. This was the sort of “omission” that led Maurice Samuel to lament *Herzog*’s putative lack of Jewish content in a richly imagined review of the novel. In one passage Samuel has Willy, Herzog’s Jewishly aggrieved brother (who doesn’t exist in the novel), ask a friend why he thinks it is that Herzog “has [] never written a

¹⁷ John Ruskin himself famously looked askance at Wordsworth’s predilection for solipsism, and preferred the poetics of “The Excursion” to those of “The Prelude,” as the former poem embodied for him “the Christian values of selflessness, faith, and charity,” and the latter, narcissism. See Daley, 20.

¹⁸ Although Bellow presents Hulme and Ruskin as mostly sharing a revulsion for romanticism, Hulme in “Romanticism and Classicism” casts Ruskin as the paradigmatic Romantic, stating that, like other Romantics, he equates aesthetics and morality and thereby valorizes imagination so strongly as to sacralize it. This, for Hulme, amounts to sacrilege, with aesthetics masquerading as morality. “Romantic aesthetes collate[] all beauty to an impression of the infinite involved in the identification of our being in the absolute spirit. In the least element of beauty we have a total intuition of the whole world. Every artist is a kind of pantheist (131).” Hulme offers an excerpt from Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* (1843) to make his point: “Imagination cannot be serious; she sees too far, too darkly, too solemnly, too earnestly, ever too smile. There is something in the heart of everything, if we can reach it, that we shall not be inclined to laugh at...Those who have so pierced and seen the melancholy deeps of things, are filled with intense passion and gentleness of sympathy” (“Romanticism and Classicism,” 129). The romantic aesthetic, according to Hulme, is loath to “admit the existence of beauty without the infinite being in some way or another being dragged in” (128).

word about us, about the Jewish problem?...And why...does he have to write [] about Romanticism and Christianity?...Never a line about the wonderful things we've done in Israel...Or if not about Israel, then something about Jewishness" (418). What Samuel neglects to say is that when Herzog writes about romanticism, and less explicitly, Christianity, it is to offer a critical assessment of them, even if he frequently fails to apply this critique to his own life. More importantly, Samuel ignores how Herzog comes to resist romanticism and Christianity performatively. Such muted indirection accords with Bellow's remarks in a talk: "Jewish writers, if they wish to exercise their option to reject the nihilistic temper may do so, but it will be all the better for them—for us all—if they do not get themselves up as spokesmen for conscience or try to give the world the business, as it were, by their moralizing" ("A Jewish Writer in America").

Bellow in part exercises this "option" by way of Herzog's first book, *Romanticism and Christianity*. What was the book about? The narrator will say only that it "showed by objective research what Christianity was to Romanticism" (187). Regarding Bellow's apparent circumspection here, Liela Goldman writes that "Bellow has taken the major beliefs of the contemporary world, brought them together in one title, and, with only slight references, leaves the reader to draw the connection" (135). The circumstances surrounding the book's production help us do this. Deciding that a remote, rustic location will help him complete his monograph, Herzog, together with his (first) wife, Daisy, and their young son, Marco, rents a house in rural Connecticut. The site appeals to Herzog not only because "[f]or a big city Jew he was particularly devoted to country life" (118), but, relatedly, because the Connecticut countryside seems to offer a simulacrum of the pastoral and implicitly Christian environment celebrated by the romantics, thus promising to stimulate his thought and give insight into the topoi of his

scholarship. Before long, however, his book project is in jeopardy, the potential casualty of a marriage about to come apart due to the sort of myopic interiority against which Herzog's study should have warned him:

[Herzog] had forced Daisy to endure a freezing winter in eastern Connecticut while he was writing *Romanticism and Christianity*, in a cottage where the pipes had to be thawed with candles and freezing blasts penetrated the clapboard walls while Herzog brooded over his Rousseau or practiced on the oboe. (188-119)

In his lack of concern for Daisy, Herzog belies Sandor Himmelstein's earlier description of him as a "kind-hearted boy"; to be sure, rather than evincing the sensitivity of a *mentsh*, Herzog "brooded over *his* Rousseau," attempting not only to explicate the French paragon of feeling but emulating his extreme interiority, thereby contravening Jewish ethical teachings. Daisy will leave Herzog, at least for a time, ostensibly to tend to her sick father in Ohio. But, significantly, we also learn that "[t]he chapter on 'Romantics and Enthusiasts' nearly did [Herzog] in—it almost ended them both" (127), implying another, no less compelling reason for her departure.

With Daisy and Marco gone, Herzog finds his sense of isolation intensify, his barren interior state mirrored in the stark, melancholic landscape of the New England winter:

It was a winter of rocklike ice. The pond like a slab of halite—green, white, resonant ice, bitterly ringing underfoot. The trickling mill dam froze in twisting pillars. The elms, giant harp shapes, made cracking noises. Herzog, responsible to civilization in his icy outpost, lying in bed in an aviator's helmet when the stoves were out, fitted together Bacon and Locke from one side and Methodism and William Blake from the other. His nearest neighbor was a clergyman, Mr. Idwal...Mrs. Idwal made graham-cracker pies filled with chocolate gelatin, and left them, neighborly, on Moses' table. He returned from his solitary walks on the pond, in the woods, and found pies in big Pyrex plates on which he warmed his numb cheeks and fingertips. (127)

Here Herzog is satirized and satirizes himself for having been blind to his wife's needs at the same time he was so attuned to his "obligations" to civilization. His personal and spiritual destitution puts the lie to Emerson's conviction, which Herzog remembers expounding as the class orator of his high school in 1934, that "[t]he private life of one man shall be a more

illustrious monarchy...than any kingdom in history” (160). Moreover, the apparent deepening of his relationship with the Idwals, imaged as avatars of romantic religion, portends a deepening of his own inwardness, that is until

the minister started to give [Herzog] testimonials by orthodox rabbis who had embraced the Christian faith. The photos of these rabbis in fur hats, bearded, were put down with the pies...Moses...thought it was time to get away from the snowbound cottage...Herzog made a mistake in rejecting Idwal’s rabbis. The clergyman was keener than ever to convert him and dropped in every afternoon for theological discussions until Daisy returned. (128)

Reverend Idwal’s invitation to convert serves as a wake-up call for Herzog, forcing him to become more cognizant of his attraction to the complex of ruralism, Romanticism, and Christianity, and to see that he has become estranged from his Jewish identity. Now the appeal of isolating himself in the countryside finally begins to fade for Herzog, and it is only when Daisy and Marco return to the cottage in late winter that the landscape begins to look less bleak. By the time spring arrives, his equanimity—and love of nature—are almost fully restored: “In spring the blackness of night was filled with shrilling cheepers. Herzog’s heart began to warm toward the country. The blood-colored sunsets of winter and solitude were behind him” (128). It is perhaps here that Herzog for the first time realizes that engagement with pastoral settings doesn’t obligate him to a solitary existence. Later, looking back on the episode after his divorce from Daisy, Herzog regrets this narcissistic phase, his focus on self and intensity of feeling retrospectively pictured as both his and Daisy’s bane:

By my irregularity and turbulence of spirit I brought out the very worst in Daisy. *I* caused the seams of her stockings to be so straight, and the buttons to be buttoned symmetrically. *I* was behind those rigid curtains and underneath the square carpets. Roast breast of veal every Sunday with bread stuffing like clay was due to *my* disorders, my huge involvement—huge but evidently formless—in the history of thought. She took Moses’ word for it that he was seriously occupied. Of course a wife’s duty was to stand by this puzzling and often disagreeable Herzog (126-127, italics in the original).

This realization, which ties Herzog's "disorders" to his embrace of romantic subjectivity, comes to Herzog only later, as he tries to come to terms with his life while recovering from his mental collapse. Yet, in what is portrayed as a kind of romantic relapse, Herzog is first destined for another solipsistic round, determined in spite of his terrible experience in Connecticut to immerse himself in the country to work on a second book, this time in the Massachusetts Berkshires with his second, and pregnant, wife, Madeline. In fact, it is in hopes of finishing this book, *The Phenomenology of Mind*—a book which intended to address "the importance of the 'law of the heart' in Western traditions, the origins of moral sentimentalism and related matters, on which he had distinctly different ideas" (118)—that Herzog decides to buy the house in Ludeyville, the quiet countryside once again "seem[ing] the ideal place" for him to explore romantic ideas. This time around he is sure that his own ideals are "distinctly different" from those of the Western tradition, for it seems to him that now, after his trials in Connecticut, he is no longer under the sway of the romantic interiority that had cost him his first family, that he understands the dark temptations of pastoral. Remarried and applying himself to his writing in Ludeyville, he plans to include these insights in his latest book:

He was going – he smiled secretly now, admitting it – to wrap the subject up, to pull the carpet from under all other scholars, show them what was what, stun them, expose their triviality once and for all. It was not simple vanity, but a sense of responsibility that was the underlying motive...He took seriously Heinrich Heine's belief that the words of Rousseau had turned into the bloody machine of Robespierre..." (119)

Aligning himself with Heine, cagey expositor of romantic self-absorption and excess (and a Jewish convert to Christianity), Herzog assumes that he has turned a corner. He sees more clearly than ever that romantic imagination and feeling has led to self-absorption.

Yet, once again, Herzog fails to apply what he has learned from his studies to his own life and marriage, which unravels much as his first marriage did, and for much the same reason. He'd

thought himself a changed man, but Madeline's aunt, Zelda, reminds him that he has in fact fallen back on old ways: "Your big mistake was to bury yourself in the country so you could finish that project of yours—that study of whatchamajig." When Zelda asks what he had been writing about anyway, Herzog "tried to explain...that his study was supposed to have ended with a new angle on the modern condition, showing how life could be lived by renewing universal connections; overturning the last of the Romantic errors about the uniqueness of the Self" (39), fixing attention on the considerable gap between his commendable ideals and selfish behavior. Hearing this, Zelda again takes the opportunity to point out the obvious: "It sounds very grand. Of course, it must be important. But that's not the point. You were a fool to bury yourself and her, a young woman, in the Berkshires, with nobody to talk to" (39). Herzog pleads guilty to her charge ("Yes, I was stupid – a blockhead"), thereby conceding that he'd contributed to the downfall of yet another of his marriages, this while pursuing a project supposedly intended to foster human connectedness and intimacy.

If there is anything that can be said to mitigate Herzog's responsibility for his failed second marriage, it is his ex-wife, Madeline. For whereas Daisy, his first wife, was generous and loving, Madeline is unfaithful and mendacious. She is moreover a fanatical Catholic convert (formerly Jewish) consumed by apocalyptic thinking and obsessed with miracles, aesthetics, and states of ecstasy, and someone who gives short shrift to ethics and relationships. For Herzog Madeline's infatuation with the sacraments, skeptically defined by Leo Baeck as "the means of grace and blessedness, the sacred objects and rites, baptisms, anointments, meals which always produce a union of the deity with the human being" (220), signals above all her tremendous investment in self. Bellow presents her, in other words, as the personification of romantic religion.

As with the Idwals in Connecticut, Madeline's romantic religiosity acts to call Herzog back to his Jewish identity, which will become foundational to his new life in Ludeyville after his divorce. But first he must attend to matters in Chicago, where Madeline has relocated with their daughter and her lover, the cuckold Valentine Gersbach, Herzog's former best friend. The trip turns into an ordeal in which Herzog variously feuds with Madeline, plots to kill Gersbach, gets into a car accident, and is jailed on gun charges. It is while waiting for his brother Will, a Chicago resident, to get him out of jail that we find Herzog beginning to spurn the romantic ethos once and for all. He starts a mental letter to his current girlfriend, whom he recently has been avoiding: "Dear Ramona, I owe you a lot. I am fully aware of it...I intend to keep in touch" (304). When Will arrives and expresses deep concern over Herzog's physical and mental well-being, Herzog in turn expresses his own brotherly affection: "I know what it is...You're worried." He had to lower his voice to control it. "I love you too, Will" (304). Abashed at his chronic neglect of family and friends, Herzog utters a Hebrew prayer asking God's forgiveness: "Dear God! Mercy! My God! Rachaim olenu...melekh maimis...Thou Kind of Death and Life...! (304).

Returned to Ludeyville at the novel's conclusion with plans to put his property up for sale, Herzog renounces what had become his reflexive withdrawal from society and immersion in self. But before long he reconsiders his decision to sell the house, for he regards his property as a source of his recent sense of well-being, and believes it has a role to play in his ongoing renewal. Herzog vibrates to the vitality and promise of his property when he inspects it after having been away for some time:

The house was two miles beyond the village, in the hills. Beautiful, sparkling summer weather in the Berkshires, the air light, the streams quick, the woods dense, the green new. As for birds,

Herzog's acres seemed to have become a sanctuary. Wrens nested under the ornamental scrolls of the porch. The giant elm was not quite dead, and the orioles lived in it still...(309)

Here, Herzog's land is said to have transformed into an avian "sanctuary," but the term of course connotes more than simply birds. For now that Herzog has rededicated himself to a life of connectedness to others, Ludeyville also recalls the tabernacle of the book of *Exodus*, in which God tells Moses to "let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them" (25.8). Like his namesake atop Mt. Sinai, Herzog cries out *Hineni!*—"I am here!"—signaling his readiness to be of service to God, to honor the covenant. To be sure, far from materializing the fears of the rabbis of *Pirkei Avot* that nature distances a Jew from the covenant, Herzog is shown to have never been more conscious of it. The novel's final, crucial scenes at Ludeyville intermingle naturism with Herzog's thoughts of those to whom he wants to draw closer. "How marvelously beautiful it is today," he thinks to himself, stopping in his yard. There he "shut his eyes in the sun, against flashes of crimson, and drew in the odors of catalpa-bells, soil, honeysuckle, wild onions, and herbs" (309). Turning his attention to the house itself, Herzog inspects his stores of canned food, making "his inventory with a sort of dreamy curiosity about his onetime plan for solitary self-sufficiency," and pondering the lessons of the Shelley sonnet "Ozymandias":

"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:/Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!" But self-sufficiency and solitude, gentleness, it all was so tempting, and had sounded so innocent, it became smiling Herzog so well in the description. It's only later you discover how much viciousness is in these hidden heavens." (311)

The narcissism that Shelley's sonnet impugns serves to put Herzog's new commitment to others into sharp relief. Again he pays tribute to his girlfriend, and in a mental epistle implies how their relationship felicitously turns his focus away from himself:

Dear Ramona. Only "Dear"? Come, Moses, open up a little. Darling Ramona. What an excellent woman you are...Since the last question, also the first one, the question of death, offers us the interesting alternatives of disintegrating ourselves by our own will in proof of our

‘freedom,’ or the acknowledging that we owe a human life to this waking spell of existence, regardless of the void. (After all, we have no positive knowledge of that void) (314).

Going forward Herzog will honor his “human life” by renouncing the false freedom that inwardness brings, precisely what he has neglected to do on his previous sojourns in the natural world. To his son Marco, whom he will soon pick up at summer camp in the Catskills, he begins another letter: “I’ve come up to the old homestead to look things over and relax a bit. The place is in pretty good shape, considering. Perhaps you’d like to spend some time here with me, only the two of us – roughing it – after camp” (314). Herzog now walks “quietly into the woods, the many leaves, living and fallen, green and tan, going between rotted stumps, moss, fungus disks; he found a hunters’ path, also a deer trail. He felt quite well here, and calmer” (325). He tells Will, now arrived at his house to help him assess its marketability, that he would like to transform his property into a family compound: “It can be lovely here. But you know, we might make it a Herzog summer resort. For the family. Everyone put in a little money. Cut the brush. Build a swimming pool” (331). Over and again, the natural setting of Ludeyville figures intimately in Herzog’s plan to live a life built on community and connection, thereby integrating his love of nature with those parts of his Jewish identity he values most.

At the novel’s end Herzog awaits Ramona’s arrival in Ludeyville in a scene that underlines for a last time the protagonist’s new regime of covenantal naturism, with Herzog moving beyond his former celebration of interiority and against pastoral conventions:

As soon as the sun lost its main strength the hermit thrushes began, and while they sang their sweet fierce music threatening trespassers, the blackbirds would begin to gather in flocks for the night, and just toward sunset they would break from these trees in waves, wave after wave, three or four miles in one flight to their waterside nests...Now on one side the hills lost the sun and began to put on a more intense blue color; on the other they were still white and green. The birds were very loud....“Thou movest me”...Something produces intensity, a holy feeling, as oranges produce orange, as grass green, as birds heat...But this intensity, doesn’t it mean anything? Is it an idiot joy that makes this animal, the most peculiar animal of all, exclaim something? And he thinks this reaction a sign, a proof, of eternity...But I have no arguments to make about it. ‘Thou

movest me.” “But what do you want, Herzog?” “But that’s just it – not a solitary thing.” (339-340)

Among major Jewish-American novelists, only Bernard Malamud rivals Saul Bellow in advancing in the mid-to-late-twentieth century an imaginative model for the American Jew who looks to leave the familiar city streets of the immigrant milieu to find spiritual value in nature. Yet Bellow is arguably unique in the way his protagonist Herzog clings to a religiously sourced Jewishness as he moves into rural America. Once in thrall to the romanticism that profoundly molded his experience of nature, Herzog finally and decisively turns away from it to recommit to the world that exists outside his imagination, one which mandates reciprocal relations, ethics, and love. In so doing, Bellow perhaps provides an alternative to, or at least inflects, an American naturism that has long valorized the individual.

Chapter 4

The pastoral stops here and it stops with circumcision. That delicate surgery should be performed upon the penis of a brand-new boy seems to you the very cornerstone of human irrationality, and maybe it is...But why not look at it another way? I know that touting circumcision is entirely anti-Lamaze and the thinking these days that wants to debrutalize birth and culminates in

delivering the child in water in order not even to startle him. Circumcision is startling all right, particularly when performed by a garlicked old man upon the glory of a newborn body, but then maybe that's what the Jews had in mind and what makes the act seem quintessentially Jewish and the mark of their reality...There is no way around it: you enter history through my history and me. Circumcision is everything that the pastoral is not and, to my mind, reinforces what the world is about, which isn't strifeless unity.¹

Unlike Saul Bellow, Philip Roth is uninterested in exploring and affirming the religio-spiritual power, Judaic or otherwise, of rural places. If anything, his strenuously rationalistic poetics aim to empty rural places (and all other sites) of metaphysical and ideological meanings and in general to wrest them from the domain of pastoral, which William Empson famously defined as “oppos[ing] simple to complicated life, to the advantage of the former” (Abrams, 127). For Roth, though the pastoral impulse—the desire for a life divested of conflict, confusion, and instability—is hardly uncommon, it is unrealistic and puerile, and worse, potentially dangerous, and therefore deserving of the harshest censure. This, as I show below, Roth metes out regularly in his oeuvre, especially in those novels narrated by Nathan Zuckerman. In the process of doing so, Roth fashions a Jewish naturism that, in its drive to demystify, reinscribes exurban places and spaces with an empirical facticity that restores them to their proper, earthbound realm. In this way Roth's nature poetics, such as they are, can (perhaps unexpectedly) be seen to be among the most ecocentric of any of the canonical Jewish-American novelists.

A passage from *The Human Stain* (2000), in which Zuckerman satirizes recent urban transplants to his Berkshires town who attribute almost magical properties to the fresh milk sold

¹ The quote is from Roth's *The Counterlife*, 323. References to the text are hereafter cited parenthetically.

by a local farm, offers an introduction to these anti-pastoral nature poetics. “[I]n the local weekly,” says Zuckerman,

a letter to the editor will regularly appear from someone who has recently found a better life out along these rural roads, and in reverent tones mention will be made out of Organic Livestock milk...as the sweetening country purity that their city-battered idealism requires. Words like “goodness” and “soul” crop up regularly in these published letters, as if downing a glass of Organic Livestock milk were no less a redemptive religious rite than a nutritional blessing. “When we drink Organic Livestock milk, our body, soul, and spirit are getting nourished as a whole. Various organs in our body receive this wholeness and appreciate it in a way we may not perceive.” Sentences like that, sentences with which otherwise sensible adults, liberated from whatever vexation had driven them from New York or Hartford or Boston, can spend a pleasant few minutes at the desk pretending that they are seven years old. (46)

Unwilling to face up to the challenges their lives present, Zuckerman’s new neighbors find respite in what amounts to a rustic elixir. This Zuckerman finds highly objectionable, and their absurdity for him rises practically to the level of moral transgression. It is surely with this kind of indignant response in mind that Zuckerman’s editor in another Roth novel, *The Counterlife*, eulogizes the author as someone who “tried to lead the ethical life” (211).

Zuckerman is introduced to pastoral-free rural living by his literary hero, I.E. Lonoff, whom he meets in *The Ghost Writer* (1979). Inspired by Roth’s friend, Bernard Malamud, the character for years has lived reclusively with his wife on “an unpaved road twelve hundred feet up in the Berkshires” (4-5), a lifestyle choice which bemuses the publishing-industry types whom Zuckerman has recently met at a Manhattan party as the novel opens. To them it is “comical” that “a Jew of [Lonoff’s] generation, an immigrant child to begin with, should have married the scion of an old New England family and lived all these years ‘in the country’—that is to say, in the *goyish* wilderness of birds and trees where America began and long ago had ended” (4). Like all Jews, Lonoff, they believe, naturally belongs in and to the city, and they suspect that his living in rural New England has more to do with a desire to assimilate and become an authentic, non-hyphenated American than it does with any kind of genuine appreciation for the mountains.

Zuckerman can understand the irony of a Jew preferring to live in the country, but he also surmises the extra incentive his idol has to live where he does: "...From what I saw at that party," Zuckerman says, "I could begin to understand why hiding out twelve hundred feet up in the mountains with just the birds and the trees might not be a bad idea for a writer, Jewish or not" (5). Zuckerman understands that by living in the woods, Lonoff avoids the distraction that comes with living amid the clatter of the publishing types in the city and is thus able to focus on what matters most, his writing. Indeed, so taken is Zuckerman with the idea that the countryside might facilitate the writer's vocation that, on this first visit to Lonoff's mountain abode, he resolves that "[t]his is how I will live" (4).² Roth presents the woods as appealing to Zuckerman, as it does to Lonoff, then, not for pastoral reasons, but decidedly utilitarian ones.

Later Zuckerman novels such as *The Human Stain* reveal that the writer has made good on his oath—in his hero's Berkshires, no less—and it is worth noting how regularly Roth takes pains in these to emphasize that he does so not from escapist motivations. The eulogizing editor of *The Counterlife*, for instance, says that Zuckerman was "a great defender of his solitude" in the woods "not because he particularly liked or valued solitude but because swarming emotional anarchy and self-exposure" that were so necessary to his craft "were possible for him only in isolation"(211). In *American Pastoral* (1997), Zuckerman at a high-school reunion says that living "up in the woods" has allowed him to solve his most vexing problems as a writer, implying his main reason for residing in them. Hearing this, his interlocutor is incredulous. "Who are you, Socrates?" he asks. "I don't buy it. Purely the writer. The single-minded writer. Nothing more." To which Zuckerman replies (without a trace of irony), "Nothing more all along

² In what is a case of life imitating art, Roth himself chooses to live in a remote rural area, having resided in the Connecticut Berkshires since the 1970s.

and I could have saved myself a lot of wear and tear” (63-4). And in *Exit Ghost* (2007), Roth’s last novel, Zuckerman has “hardly been off [his] rural mountain road in the Berkshires” in eleven years, living alone “in a small house on a dirt road in the deep country, having decided to live apart...”(1). He says that he writes “every day of the week,” and then adds, again without a hint of irony, that he is “tempted by the thought of not publishing at all—isn’t the work all I need, the work and the working” (3). In foregrounding Zuckerman’s work ethic, Roth not only edifies the reader with regard to the exigencies of his character’s (and own) craft, but disassociates Zuckerman’s ruralism from any suggestion of pastoral desire.

As I show below, many of Roth’s other Jewish protagonists and characters are not nearly as circumspect as Zuckerman is about pastoral. Rather, they are profoundly attracted to exurban areas, and mostly for the way these sites seem to promise a Jew escape from his perceived Otherness, much as the publishing-industry people of *The Ghost Writer* imply. In its ultimate dream of escape, then, the Jewish pastoral that Roth anatomizes is not so different from other versions of pastoral. Yet Roth is keen to show how the vicissitudes of Jewish experience and history give rise to a pastoral with a particular cast. And it is perhaps this pastoral that Roth, as a Jew, finds most distressing. As the epigraph with which I begin this chapter suggests, Roth is firm in a conviction that, given the inescapable history of which Jewish ritual is a reminder, Jews, of all people, should understand just how puerile and self-abnegating pastoral is.

“Jewish camping enthusiasts...believed that their programs effectively countered anti-Semitic stereotypes concerning Jewish weakness and also promoted the great goal of Americanization. Campers were thus supposed to breathe in the ‘pure sweet air of American mountains, lakes and forests’ and to exhale any residual foreign traits.” (Sarna 30)

Roth’s second published work, “The Contest for Aaron Gold” (1955), is set in the years immediately following World War II at Camp Lakeside, a Jewish summer camp in the

Berkshires. The eponymous Aaron Gold is an eight-year-old camper who prefers ceramics class to the swimming class that follows it and for which he chronically arrives late. His tardiness is of concern to the camp's proprietor, Leo Steinberg, and the swim instructor, Lefty Schulberg, who believe that Aaron's strong interest in non-athletic, indoor pursuits is undesirable, and that it is being encouraged by the ceramics instructor, Werner Samuelson, significantly, a European Jewish refugee who has lived in Philadelphia ever since "the Germans [] chased him from his studio in southern Austria" in 1940 (554). "If there's one thing we don't want here it's one-sided kids," Steinberg tells Samuelson. "Just let's not hold this kid back any more—I won't stand for it. Lefty tells me how he sees you hold the kid back" (556).

In the "contest" for the boy announced by the reprimand, Roth stages a struggle in the Berkshires woods over the contours of Jewish-American identity, pitting the normative Jewishness of Samuelson and Aaron against the assimilationism of Schulberg and Steinberg. To the latter, Aaron's affinity for ceramics and his lack of interest in swimming signify passivity, and thus a Jewish male gender identity lamentably defined by the traditional, "effete" interior spaces of home and yeshiva.

Steinberg's own opposed masculinism is glimpsed early in the story when he greets Samuelson as the camp season is about to get under way:

"Werner, Werner Samuelson! The man in the peaked cap jogged over and swung a sweaty arm around [Samuelson]. In his sporty outfit he did not seem the gray-suited businessman who had stepped unexpectedly into Werner's Philadelphia ceramic shop back in March and offered him a job. "How are you, Werner?"

"A little hot."

Get out of those clothes and get down to the lake for a dip. For Christ sake, you're in the country—". (550)

Emphatically active and outdoors oriented, Steinberg here prods Samuelson to be more like himself, more like a man, anticipating the proprietor's attitude towards Aaron, whose own passive, "non-manly" proclivities Steinberg will soon disparage as "peculiar."

As great as Steinberg's manly vigor seems, it is surpassed by that of Schulberg, who, as Steinberg proudly tells Samuelson, was formerly a "professional basketball player...and once, in a Tarzan movie had an underwater battle with Johnny Weissmuller" (551). Not surprisingly, Schulberg is contemptuous of Aaron's seeming meekness. Late in the story, "trousers tucked neatly into brown combat boots," Schulberg leads his young charges in military formation to the basketball court, with Aaron, struggling to hold on to a basketball, appointed to a position immediately behind Schulberg. Schulberg is furious when Aaron falls out of step, screaming, "Suck that gut in, Gold!" The narrator reports that "[t]he other boys howled. Aaron almost dropped the big basketball" (557), with the reader's sympathy directed to Aaron.

That Aaron rejects the kind of hyper-manliness represented by Schulberg becomes evident as he works on his ceramic shop project. While the other boys decide to make the usual clay creations ("snakes were the favorite, turtles a close second"), Aaron undertakes to create a knight, classic symbol of chivalry. Crucially, however, Aaron is unable to finish his project. Though he seems to work diligently on it, the knight is still without arms as Parents' Day approaches. Steinberg, already angry over Aaron's chronic lateness to swim class, is apoplectic, believing that the boy and Samuelson are trying to sabotage him and make the camp look bad. "What kind of game are you and that little queer trying to play anyhow!" (559), he screams, invoking a trope that identifies Jewish males with homosexuality.

Attempting to placate Steinberg, Samuelson decides to finish Aaron's project himself, and proceeds to attach arms to Aaron's unfinished knight. Aaron, however, becomes enraged when he learns what his teacher has done:

"He got arms, Uncle Werner."

"Uh-huh."

"He got arms."

Werner nodded.

"Who put them arms on?"

"I did," Werner said.

"He got arms," Aaron said.

"Well," Werner said, watching him, "you didn't expect him to fight without arms, did you?"

Aaron didn't move an inch. Werner reached a hand toward his shoulder and, instantaneously, Aaron leaped back, as though it were a game of tag and if Werner touched him that would make him "it."

"Aaron—"

"You ruined him," the boy suddenly shouted, pulling at his yellow hair. "You ruined him." He ran to the screen door and began kicking at it. "You ruined him, you did, you did..." And then he ran out the door and off along the edge of the lake, like a small wild animal who gets out of a blazing forest just as fast as he can (561).

It is noteworthy that Aaron refuses to engage Samuelson on his insistence that a knight without arms is rendered incapable of carrying out the chivalrous office expected of him. This silence, and his failure to complete the knight in the first place, suggest the boy's indifference to, even contempt for, the kind of chivalric masculinity prized by Steinberg and Schulberg. The incapacitated knight, we might say, represents the boy's ethical vision more than it does his artistic one. Roth's story concludes with a distraught Samuelson pummeling the knight to dust in what is a symbolic show of solidarity with Aaron, and then abruptly decamping for the city, a site implied to be more accommodating of the normative Jewishness represented by Aaron and himself.

A similar poetics animates Roth's novella *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959), though here it is the suburbs which serve as the exurban repository of assimilationist desire. Neil Klugman, the story's protagonist, is a Newark native and recent graduate of Rutgers who wiles away the first

year of his working life at the Newark Public Library. His job is monotonous, but for now he is content to spend his days in the city he calls home, taking pleasure in serving the library's urban patrons, among them a young African-American boy who takes a particular interest in an art book of Gauguin reproductions. Though Roth refuses to idealize the library as a racial Shangri-La—one of Neil's coworkers is unquestionably a bigot—Neil's positive relationship with the black child allegorizes the metropolis as a racially and culturally diverse space conducive to fostering respect and tolerance among its residents.³

This vision is a far cry from the state of affairs in suburban Short Hills, where Neil's new girlfriend, Brenda Patimkin, lives. Her domain is almost exclusively white, with only black domestics such as Carlota, the Patimkin's maid, disrupting the monochromatic idyll. The black domestics are essential to the Short Hills Jewish community's sense of itself, however, inasmuch as they permit these suburban Jews to define themselves against blackness and reinforce their standing as whites.⁴ Still, that they are anxious about being associated racially with something other than whiteness is made clear when Brenda asks Neil in a phone conversation before their first date if he is a "Negro" after he describes his complexion as dark, and later, when Neil hears a woman at the Short Hills country club say that her new sun hat was purchased "from the cutest little *shvartze* when we docked at Barbados" (14). By participating in the ambient prejudice

³ The city as a repository of pluralist values is thematized frequently in Roth's oeuvre. In *The Counterlife*, for example, Zuckerman on a trip to Israel imagines apprising his friend's father, an ardent Zionist, of the impressive diversity of American urban centers: "My landscape wasn't the Negev wilderness, or the Galilean hills, or the coastal plain of ancient Philistia; it was industrial, immigrant America—Newark where I'd been raised, Chicago where I'd been educated, and New York where I was living in a basement apartment on a Lower East Side street among poor Ukrainians and Puerto Rican" (53).

⁴ Jews' complex negotiation of their once ambiguous racial inscription is treated in such studies as Michael Rogin, *Black Face, White Noise – Jewish immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot*; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft*; Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About America*; and Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness – Jews, Race, and American Identity*.

against blacks, the Jews of Short Hills try to distance themselves from their racial liminality. There is perhaps no surer sign of these racial anxieties than the fact that Brenda has recently had her nose “bobbed,” a procedure, she tells Neil, that her brother Ron will soon undergo as well. As Sanford Gilman has observed, even as Jews crossed the color line into whiteness in the twentieth century, the “Jewish nose” remained a salient marker of difference that some Jews could not abide. “The desire for invisibility, the desire to become ‘white,’” says Gilman, “lies at the center of the Jew’s flight from his or her own body” (235). Such a flight could be facilitated by rhinoplasty.

As in “The Contest for Aaron Gold,” Roth in *Goodbye, Columbus* portrays athletics as a key site of exurban assimilationism. The Patiminks’ obsession with sports is previewed early, when Brenda suggests that Neil meet her at the local Short Hills tennis courts for their first date (Brenda is finishing off her opponent as Neil arrives). Later, on his first visit to the Patimkin house, Neil is transfixed by two oaks in the backyard, which he refers to as “sporting-goods trees”: beneath their branches lie a plethora of sporting goods equipment, including “two irons, a golf ball, a tennis can, a baseball bat, basketball, a first-baseman’s glove, and what was apparently a riding crop” (22). Some of the equipment belongs to Mr. and Mrs. Patimkin, an avid golfer and a former state tennis champion, respectively, but it is mainly the property of Ronald, an all-around sportsman. Observing him from a distance at the Short Hills Country Club pool, Neil was earlier taken by his sheer “immensity,” and says that the first time they were introduced, “Ron stepped forward and shook my hand, vigorously, as though he hadn’t seen me since the Diaspora” (38)—a witty remark that underscores how unlike the typical American Jew Ronald seems to Neil, and how much of one Neil seems to himself by comparison. Neil’s sense of himself as normatively unathletic is confirmed by Brenda, who is disturbed by Neil’s relative

lack of fitness. After convincing him to run with her at the high school track, she says, “Let’s do this every morning... We’ll get up and have two grapefruit, and then you’ll come out here and run. I’ll time you. In two weeks you’ll break four minutes, won’t you, sweetie. I’ll get Ron’s stop watch” (72). Ron, like Lefty Schulberg, also excels at basketball, even having played semi-professionally in a summer league, and he dreams of being a sports coach when he finishes college. In “The Suburbs of Babylon,” a review of the novella whose title gestures to the rampant assimilationism of American Jews in the suburbs at mid-century, Irving Howe writes that Ron appears “more gentile than the gentiles” and “fulfill[s] the bonehead pattern of the All-American boy.” The portrayal, Howe concludes, is a “harsh” one, but, as with Roth’s treatment of the other suburban characters, “alas true” (37).

Here it is worth noting that, although Howe had famously changed his mind about *Goodbye, Columbus* by the early 1970s, considering Roth’s portrayal of Jews in the suburbs to be seriously undermined by a pervasive “contempt and animus,” his review, like Roth’s story itself, stands as a discursive artifact of the intra-communal discussion then taking place over the viability of Jewish life in the suburbs, to where American Jews were moving in unprecedented numbers after the Second World War.⁵ Despite his criticism of *Goodbye, Columbus*, Howe like Roth had serious doubts about whether Jewish-American life could be sustained outside the city, the site where one’s Jewishness did not depend on the “self-conscious choices, membership, or necessary activity” that characterized Jewish life in the suburbs; instead “[i]t was about being in a place rather than participating in any particular facet of it,” as Riv-Ellen Prell writes (71); such

⁵ See Howe’s essay, “Philip Roth Reconsidered,” *Commentary* 54.6 (December, 1972), 69-77.

a conception, as Prell observes, implied a spatial rather than an affiliative construction of Jewish identity.

It is just such a spatial construction that is privileged by Neil's sympathetically drawn Aunt Gladys, a lifelong resident of Newark. "Since when do Jewish people live in Short Hills? They couldn't be real Jews believe me" (58), she tells Neil when he mentions that he will stay with Brenda's family for a week during the summer. Unlike Mrs. Patimkin's participation in B'nai Brith and Hadassah, Jewish organizations which in the story evoke what Prell terms the "Suburban Paradox"—of "doing more but feeling less Jewish" (69)—Aunt Gladys's membership in the Workingmen's Circle, the American-Jewish fraternal organization committed to *Yiddishkeit*, social activism, and Jewish communalism, is implied to be authentically Jewish by virtue of its being an urban institution. For Roth and Howe, as for other observers of Jewish-American life in the 1950s and 60's, this transition from a Jewish identity defined by urban space to one defined by suburban affiliation amounted to a step away from Jewish authenticity. Thus does *Goodbye, Columbus* document, as few works of Jewish-American fiction have, a "relationship between city and suburb [that] emerged as a new polarity in defining postwar American Jewish life."⁶

Roth casts an even more critical eye on suburban Jewish assimilationism in "Eli, the Fanatic" (1959), a story which pits postwar, suburban American Jews against a yeshiva that opens in their midst in Woodenton, "a progressive suburban community whose members, both Jewish and Gentile, are anxious that their families live in comfort and beauty and serenity" (261). This, in any case, is how Eli Peck, a town resident and unofficial spokesperson for Woodenton's Jews,

⁶ Prell, 73.

describes the community to the yeshiva's headmaster in a letter imploring him and the yeshiva's other Hasids to vacate their suburban town. The story's rhetorical frame privileges a quite different view of Woodenton, however, one which suggests there is very little about the community that is "progressive," unless that descriptor is meant to gesture ironically towards the universalizing juggernaut of Enlightenment humanism that nourished the Holocaust, a cataclysm of which we are reminded by the eighteen young DP's who reside at the yeshiva. Roth uses the polysemy of "anxious" in Eli's letter to profound effect: Do Woodenton's Jews look forward to the "comfort and beauty and serenity" of the suburban life that seems to be on offer in Woodenton, we wonder, or do they share a sense of dread living there? Roth gestures toward the latter meaning, since Woodenton's Jews clearly worry that their gentile neighbors might associate them with their pious co-religionists—Jews who belong in the city, if they can be said to belong anywhere. As one of Eli's neighbors exclaims: "A Yeshiva!..Eli, in Woodenton, a Yeshiva! If I want to live in Brownsville, Eli, I'll live in Brownsville" (255).

That unease over Jewish difference drives Woodenton's Jews' rejection of the yeshiva is made explicit by its headmaster, Leo Tzuref. "Happiness?" "They hide their shame. And you, Mr. Peck, are shameless," he replies when Eli says that Woodenton's Jews, in pressuring the yeshiva, merely look to "protect what they value, their property, their well-being, their happiness—" (266). Such shame is elicited in particular by the Hasid whom Woodenton's Jews disparagingly call the "greenie" (for greenhorn), an older DP often seen ambling about town. His long beard, his sidelocks, his "Talmudic" coat and hat—all these proclaim a difference which Woodenton's Jews would rather their gentile neighbors not see, and their sense of scandalization is made manifest in the two conditions that Eli, in another letter to Tzuref, says the yeshiva must honor if it hopes to remain, unmolested, in Woodenton:

1. The religious, educational, and social activities of the Yeshivah of Woodenton will be confined to the Yeshiva grounds.
2. Yeshiva personnel are welcomed in the streets and stores of Woodenton provided they are attired in clothing usually associated with American life in the 20th century (262).

The conditions confirm Tzoref's sense that the efforts of Eli and his suburban cohort are shame-driven and aim at eliding Jewish particularity. This second term in particular recalls the embarrassment of certain illustrious *maskilim*, advocates of *Haskalah*, or Jewish Enlightenment, in eighteenth-century Europe. The Russian *maskil* Hirsh Ber Hurwitz (1795-1857), for instance, thought that Jewish religiosity could be reformed only through government decree; more than anything else he "wanted the Tsarist government to forbid traditional garb which, to him, was a badge of shame" (Dawidowicz, 18). Zygmunt Bauman anatomizes the assimilatory dilemma that beset Europe's politically emancipated Jews in his incisive essay "Exit Visas and Entry Tickets: Paradoxes of Jewish Assimilation"; I quote from it here at length for the insight it offers into the tortured psychology informing the Woodenton Jews' terms.

In the eyes of the [gentile] majority which had emancipated them, they remained members of the accursed emancipated minority. They continued to carry the stigma of their membership for everyone to see. If they declared their disgust toward the less "individualized" members of the native community and refused to concern themselves with what the majority saw as their "humanization," they were branded as accomplices to the crime of difference. If they succumbed to majority expectations and engrossed themselves in communal self-improvement, this was immediately taken as proof of their partaking of the collective stigma...[The unassimilated] were a sore in the assimilationists' eyes. They were too reminiscent of the assimilationists' own past, brought unscathed into the present for everybody to see...What followed was what Peter Gay once called the *selective* anti-Semitism of the assimilated Jews. If one could only convince native opinion that there were Jews and Jews, that they had even less in common than the hosts had with Jewry as such, and that the native majority and the assimilated Jews were for all practical purposes in one camp, jointly facing the common threat lurking in the uneducated and uneducable aliens of Jewish persuasion. (51, 55-6).

Notwithstanding the significant differences obtaining in the situations of Jews in Europe and the United States in the mid-twentieth century, Bauman's mapping of the psychological terrain of the assimilating European Jew brings into sharp focus the extent to which psychological complexes have endured in the Jewish diasporic imaginary across time and place. Bauman's

explication of “the anti-Semitism of the assimilated Jews”—of Jewish self-hatred— can be seen to apply no less to Woodenton’s Jews than it did to their European counterparts.

By the story’s end, a guilt-driven identification with the yeshiva Jews that has been building in Eli becomes full-blown. Hoping to facilitate compliance with the second condition, he offers one of his own suits to the greenie. The greenie accepts the suit and then leaves his own clothes with Eli, which Eli promptly changes into, apparently no longer wanting to repudiate his Jewish identity. Eli proceeds to walk through town dressed in Hasidic garb—his fellow suburban Jews aghast at “the man in black”—with his final destination the town’s hospital, where his wife has just given birth to a baby boy. Seeing Eli dressed as a Hasid, she implores him to change his clothes, plaintively asking, “Can’t we just have a family?” The question is reflective of the Woodenton Jews’ desperate, bourgeois desire to be free of the perceived baggage of communal antecedent. Eli’s answer is a decisive “No.” And it is a decisive “yes” to a friend who intercepts him at the hospital to ask, “Should you be walking around like this?” The story ends with Eli forcibly removed from the baby viewing area by two interns, symbolic enforcers of the “ideal” homogeneous community. They tear off Eli’s jacket and sedate him; “The drug,” the narrator intones ominously, “calmed his soul, but did not touch it down where the blackness had reached” (298). Such darkness imbues Roth’s vision of the condition of American Jews in the suburbs.

“If the political project of Zionism was to be a nation like all other nations, on the level of reform of the Jewish psyche it was to be men like all other men.” (Boyarin 27)

In *The Counterlife* (1986), Roth examines how non-normative Jewish male gender identity functions as a form of pastoral, much as it did in such works as *Goodbye, Columbus* and “The

Contest for Aaron Gold.” But here the interrogation is conducted not within a matrix of exurban America, but in Israel, where Jewish masculinity is given sanction by Zionism and relatedly reinforced by cultural constructions of the natural landscape. Roth’s 1961 essay, “Some New Jewish Stereotypes,” suggests that the proximate inspiration for *The Counterlife* may have been Leon Uris’s *Exodus*, published in 1958. In the essay, Roth reacts to an interview Uris had recently given to the *New York Post*, in which Uris states that he felt he needed to write *Exodus* because

[t]here is a whole school of Jewish American writers who spend their time damning their fathers, hating their mothers, wringing their hands and wondering why they were born... Their work is obnoxious and makes me sick to my stomach... I was just sick of apologizing—or feeling it was necessary to apologize... Jews are not what we have been portrayed to be. In truth, we have been fighters (138).

Though Roth is not mentioned by name in the interview, he could well assume that he was among those writers to whom Uris’s comments referred, for at this juncture he had already published “The Contest for Aaron Gold,” “Goodbye, Columbus,” and “Eli, the Fanatic,” stories valorizing Jewish passivity and satirizing Jewish masculinity and assimilationism. Among other things, Roth had this to say in a blunt rejoinder:

“In truth, we have been fighters.” So bald, stupid, and uninformed is the statement that it is not even worth disputing. One has the feeling that, single-handed, Uris has set out to counter with his new image of the Jew, the older one that comes down to us in those several stories, the punch line of which is, ‘Play nice, Jakie—don’t fight.’ However, there is not much value in swapping one simplification for the other. (138)

Roth goes on to say that what *is* of value to him is the kind of searching interrogation of Jewish militarism found in such works as Elie Wiesel’s *Dawn* (1961). Its hero is a Holocaust survivor who, as a member of the Irgun, the Zionist paramilitary group, executes a British military officer in Mandatory Palestine. “I should like to tell Uris,” says Roth, “that Wiesel’s Jew is not so proud to discover himself in the role of a fighter, nor is he able to find justification for himself in some

traditional Jewish association with pugnacity or bloodletting” (139). Though Roth here implicitly disavows the racist notion of a Jewish essence, passive or otherwise, he does take pains to point out that Jews have traditionally demurred from the “pugnacity or bloodletting” of their wider societies. The topos gets further play in Roth’s autobiography, *The Facts* (1988), where Roth remembers how, growing up in Newark, there was no “stigma attached to taking flight from a violent melee” between boys in the schoolyard. “[B]y and large,” he writes,

it was considered both shameful and stupid for a bright Jewish child to get caught up in something so dangerous to his physical safety, and so repugnant to Jewish instincts. The collective memory of Polish and Russian pogroms had fostered in most of our families that our worth as human beings, even perhaps our distinction as a people, was embodied in the *incapacity* to perpetrate the sort of bloodletting visited upon our ancestors (28, italics in the original).

Roth regrets that this traditional Jewish repudiation—his “instincts” and “*incapacity*”—of force has been overturned in Israel. There, Roth writes, the Jew is “no longer looking out from the wings on the violence of our age, nor is he its favorite victim; now he is a participant” (“Some New Jewish Stereotypes” 146).

In *The Counterlife*, Zuckerman’s brother Henry clearly finds greater inspiration in the Jew of *Exodus* than he does in the Jew of *Dawn*. In the novel’s “Judea” section, he has left his wife and children in Newark, New Jersey and moved to the West Bank settlement of “Agor,” in the Hebron hills, where under the tutelage of the settlement’s militant leader, Mordechai Lippman, he looks to become the “authentic” Jew of Uris’s formulation, which is to say an aggressively powerful one. Before leaving for Israel to find his brother and convince him to return to his family, Zuckerman is informed by Henry’s estranged wife that Lippman (and the settler’s pistol) is “all [Henry] talks about” when he calls to speak to his children. Later, Zuckerman’s Israeli friend, Shuki, describes Lippman as someone who often “drives into Hebron with his pistol and tells the Arabs in the market how the Jews and Arabs can live happily side by side as long as the

Jews are on top. He's dying for somebody to throw a Molotov cocktail. Then his thugs can really go to town" (83). Shuki tells Zuckerman he understands Lippman's appeal to American Jews like Henry. "The American Jews get a big thrill from the guns," he says.

They see Jews walking around with guns and they think they're in paradise. Reasonable people with a civilized repugnance for violence and blood, they come on tour from America, and they see the guns and they see the beards, and they take leave of their senses. The beards to remind them of saintly Yiddish weakness and the guns to reassure them of heroic Hebrew force... The fantasies about this place make me sick. And what about the beards? Is your brother as thrilled by the religion as by the explosives? (83-84).

When he finally meets up with Henry in the West Bank, Zuckerman discovers that, in his militancy and aggression, his brother has come to resemble Lippman. Echoing the settlement leader, Henry tells Zuckerman that the Arabs "don't respect niceness and they don't respect weakness. What the Arab respects is power" (106). The notion that in Israel he is capable of forcefully imposing his will makes Henry recoil at the thought of his former incarnation as a "weak" American Jew: "I shudder when I remember everything I was" (107)." But the pistol which in Israel serves as Henry's constant companion marks for Zuckerman "the distance he'd traveled from the powerless nice Jew that he'd been in America," and functions as an "astounding symbol of the whole complex of choices with which he was ridding himself of that shame" (108). Over lunch in Hebron, Henry says that it is there, in Judea, "where the claim" to Jewish identity is realized, adding, "*This* is Judaism, *this* is Zionism, *right here* where we are eating lunch!" (109).

Zuckerman's response to Henry's assertions about the provenance of his Jewish identity is sardonically dismissive: "In other words, it didn't all begin up that outside flight of wooden stairs where Grandma and Grandpa lived on Hunterdon Street. It didn't begin with Grandma on her knees washing the floors and Grandpa stinking of old cigars. Jews didn't begin in Newark, after all" (109). For Zuckerman, the touchstone of his own and Henry's Jewishness is Newark's

urban milieu, not, as his brother would have it, Judea and Samaria. Roth here recapitulates his understanding of American-Jewish identity as being largely coterminous with American urban spaces. “The kitchen table in Newark,” he tells Henry, is “the source of your Jewish memories.”

Later he underscores this when he adds that

in our family the collective memory doesn't go back to the golden calf and the burning bush, but to 'Duffy's Tavern' and 'Can You Top This?' Maybe the Jews begin with Judea, but Henry doesn't and he never will. He begins with WJX and WOR, with double features at the Roosevelt on Saturday afternoons and Sunday doubleheaders at Ruppert Stadium watching the Newark Bears. Not nearly as epical, but there you are. (133)

It is the diaspora, and specifically, prosaic Newark, Zuckerman says, that has molded Henry's Jewish self-identity, and he wants his brother to know there is no shame in this. But neither does Zuckerman think there was any shame in the life his brother would come to lead later in South Orange, New Jersey, where with his family he had been “ensconced in the sort of affluent, attractive Jewish suburb that he'd aspired to all his life” (112). Notably, here for the first time in his *oeuvre* Roth endorses the suburbs as a legitimate site of American Jewishness—an endorsement which, as I show below, is arguably most emphatically affirmed in *American Pastoral* (1997).

Yet Henry stands firm in his classical Zionist conviction that neither American city nor suburb—or any diaspora locale, for that matter—can function as the crucible of Jewish identity. For him Jewishness and the land of Israel are necessarily intertwined. Zuckerman looks to complicate his brother's claim, however, when, following his friend Shuki, he suggests that Henry's militancy subserves desires that have nothing at all to do with Jewish authenticity. This is articulated in part through Zuckerman's meditation on Henry's relation to the Judean desert, an “unfinished, other-terrestrial landscape” that acts as “a correlative of the sense of himself” which Henry “would now prefer to effect, the harsh and rugged pioneer with that pistol in his

pocket.” Given the desert’s “theatrically at sunset,” which seems to attest to its “[t]imeless [s]ignificance,” Zuckerman can understand how his brother “might well imagine self-renewal on the grandest scale of all, the legendary scale, the scale of mythic heroism” (119).⁷ Zuckerman here suggests the way his brother’s Zionism operates to sublimate anxieties related to his prior incarnation as a putatively weak American Jew in New Jersey. “What purpose is hidden in what [Henry] now calls “Jew”—or is “Jew” just something he now hides behind?” Zuckerman wonders. “He tells me that here he is essential, he belongs, he fits in—but isn’t it more likely that what he has finally found is the unchallengeable means to escape his hedged-in life?” (119).

It is in this sense that Henry’s Zionism operates as a pastoral, for though the Judean “moonscape” is far removed from the bucolic countryside of traditional literary pastoral, it no less symbolizes those “irrepressible yearnings...to be taken off to the perfectly safe, charmingly simple and satisfying environment that is desire’s homeland,” as Zuckerman later writes to his wife, Maria, regarding her own need in England for “pastoralization” (322). He also portrays Zionism as functioning for the Jewish collective much as it functions for Henry. By repudiating “the dirty, disfiguring reality of the piled-up years” of diaspora existence, Zionism ahistorically aims to create a new Jewish reality liberated of the distortions wrought by centuries of subjection. Zionism, Zuckerman writes in a letter to Henry after he leaves Israel,

[o]riginated not only in the deep Jewish dream of escaping the danger of insularity and the cruelties of social injustice and persecution but out of a highly conscious desire to be divested of virtually everything that had come to seem, to the Zionists as much as to the Christian Europeans, distinctively Jewish behavior—to reverse the very form of Jewish existence...It was a species of fabulous utopianism, a manifesto for human transformation as extreme...as any ever conceived.

⁷ It is worth noting how Henry’s relation to the natural environment here shares much in common with that of American settlers of the West, who believed that the sublime landscape surrounding them somehow authorized their own many enterprise of settlement and subjugation. As Lawrence Buell writes of the American matrix, “representations of natural sublimity came to be seen as an arm of American manifest destiny, creating for the Euro-American male a ‘a veritable world where he could rewrite and reread national policies of...expansionism in quite ideal terms’” (35).

A Jew could be a new person if he wanted to...All over the world people were rooting for the Jews to go ahead and un-Jew themselves in the their own homeland. I think that's why the place was once universally so popular—no more Jewy Jews, great!...(147)

Zuckerman here credits Zionism's goal of providing refuge to Jews victimized by anti-Semitism. But he also detests its implicit rejection of diaspora Jewishness, its aim of changing Jews into the kind of people the rest of the world will find more palatable. As Zuckerman shows, Henry was hardly the victim of anti-Semitism in Newark, and thus he can only think that Henry's Zionism is motivated by his brother's desire to be more like the gentiles whose approval Henry appears so desperately to need.

Though I mainly focus here on Roth's interrogation of Jewish pastoral in *The Counterlife*, Roth, as I've suggested, also puts other groups' place-based pastoral desires in the crosshairs as well. In later chapters, for example, he takes aim at the intense nostalgia that Zuckerman's English wife, Maria, expresses for her native Gloucestershire, where the two visit prior to taking up residence outside London. Though Zuckerman glances at the pastoral potential of Maria's home village of Chadleigh when he describes it as "a picturesque cluster of streets and lanes, situated dramatically across the valley from a hanging beech woods," with farms on the outskirts "parceled off like New England fields with old dry stone walls, meticulously laid layers of tilelike rock the color of the houses" (267), it is left to Maria to invest the site with full-blown pastoral meaning. She calls the beech woods where she used to spend time "very haunting," telling Zuckerman that it was a space where as a child she'd have "visionary feelings of the world being one. Exactly what Wordsworth describes—the real nature mysticism, moments of extreme contentment. You know, looking at the sun setting and suddenly thinking that the universe all makes sense" (273-4). Maria's ancestral home, "The Barton," has a similar pastoral valence. Zuckerman reports that the estate was "quite isolated, behind a high ivy-colored wall

on a dirt road several miles outside of Chadleigh...at the back, she said, were the stables, the barn, and a walled kitchen garden with rose patches; beyond was a duck pond...and beyond that a nut woods, another haunted place full of glades and birds, wildflowers and bracken...Her earliest memories were all poetic and associated with that woods” (274). Zuckerman response to Maria’s nostalgic reflections about her childhood is deflatingly pithy and dismissive. “[I]t is all extremely foreign to me, Maria,” he tells her (275), expressing both an ignorance of and distaste for Maria’s memory of a narcotizing idyll.

But English pastoral mirrors Henry’s Zionist pastoral for Zuckerman not only in the way it offers puerile comfort, but also in its potential for breeding insularity and prejudice. This is brought home by the anti-Semitism of Maria’s mother, Mrs. Freshfield, whose rustic surname anticipates Roth’s more thoroughgoing satire of her. She makes it clear to Zuckerman that she is “not very good at American geography” (268) and that she doesn’t “read very much American literature” because she find[s] it “difficult to understand the people”(270). This may seem like harmless snobbery, but it shows itself to be something more pernicious when, over a “very English, perfectly nice, and rather bland” lunch, she broaches the topic of the other half of Zuckerman’s hyphenated identity. This she does this by telling him, “with what seemed to be a most ambiguous smile,” that “[t]here is no garlic in the lamb” (269)—a metaphor for the excess, impurity, and lack of gentility she imputes to his ethnicity.

He is again subjected to “ethnic implication,” as Zuckerman calls Mrs. Freshfield’s anti-Semitism, when he and Maria have dinner at a London restaurant, and a woman at the next table asks the waiter to open a window because “there’s a terrible smell in here...the stink in here is abominable” (291). As Zuckerman says to Maria, “It is a racial insult, it is intended to be that...[t]he emanations of Jews. She is hypersensitive to Jewish emanations” (292). Zuckerman

goes on to make explicit the connection between English pastoral and English xenophobia:

“These people with their dream of the perfect, undiluted, unpolluted, unsmelly ‘we.’ Talk about Jewish tribalism. What is this insistence on homogeneity but a not very subtle form of English tribalism. What’s so intolerable about tolerating a few differences?” (301). Zuckerman here makes plain that English pastoral draws its strength from a parochial embrace of region, which, as Robert Dainotto writes, serves as

the commonplace of an organic community...In search of a shared communal identity, region is the rhetorical opposition of the modern city. It is the commonplace of what has never been debased by industry, capital, and, above all immigration...Whereas contemporary life and culture make us face the *pasticcaccio* [awful mess]...of a multicultural Babel, regionalism concocts for us the pacifying, relaxing, New Age image of organic traditions and communities. (23).

As her name implies, Mrs. Freshfield yearns for a pre-lapsarian time of pastoral purity, an era before Jews and other ethnic others despoiled by their race and culture what was once a homogeneously idyllic England.

With *American Pastoral* (1997), Roth’s interrogation of the intersection of Jewishness and place returns to the United States. As mentioned earlier, Roth’s poetics had by the time of the novel’s publication already begun to posit the American suburbs as a site of genuine Jewish identity. Accordingly, in *American Pastoral*, to live out their pastoral dreams Jews must go farther afield, here specifically to “Old Rimrock,” New Jersey, a well-to-do town some “thirty-odd miles west of Newark, out past the suburbs”(14).⁸ It is here that Seymour Irving Levov, formerly of Newark and otherwise known as the Swede, lives with his wife and infant daughter in a 170-year-old stone farmhouse on the redolently named Arcady Hill Road, on a “hundred-

⁸ Despite Old Rimrock’s being located beyond the suburbs, a number of critics refer to its fictional setting as suburban and thereby neglect how Roth had come to acknowledge the American suburbs’ potential as a Jewish site. One of Roth’s most astute critics, Mark Schechner, for instance, writes that “*American Pastoral* is a return to the turf of...*Goodbye, Columbus*, Newark, New Jersey, and its surrounding suburbs (155).

acre farm on a back road in the sparsely habitated hills beyond Morristown” (14). And it is here that the Swede’s ostensibly idyllic life will be upended when, as a teenager during the Vietnam War era, his daughter becomes a violent radical involved in the killing of four people—a tragedy that Zuckerman, the novel’s narrator, implicitly ties to the Swede’s pastoral ambition in rural Old Rimrock.

A brief overview of the Levov family’s pattern of settlement in America, beginning with the Swede’s paternal grandfather, provides important context for making sense of the implosion of the Swede’s Arcadian existence, the issue that is of main concern to Zuckerman. He reports that the Swede’s grandfather arrived in Newark “from the old country in the 1890s,” and that the Swede’s father, Lou, though bred in the slums of Newark, managed after becoming successful in the glove-making business to move his family to the upper-middle class precincts of Newark’s Keer Avenue, a “grid of locust-tree-lined streets into which the Lyons farm had been portioned during the boom years of the early twenties [when] the first postimmigrant generation of Newark’s Jews had regrouped into a community that took its inspiration more from the mainstream of American life than from the Polish shtetl their Yiddish-speaking parents had recreated around Prince Street in the impoverished Third Ward” (10). Zuckerman acknowledges the Americanizing strides of the “postimmigrant generation” when he observes that “[t]he Keer Avenue Jews, with their finished basements, their screened-in porches, their flagstone front steps, seemed to be at the forefront, laying claim like audacious pioneers to the normalizing American amenities” (10). But it is important to note that for all the acculturation these tastes and acquisitions imply, the Keer Avenue Jews still show obeisance to ideals and ethnic styles which Zuckerman regards as normatively Jewish. Lou Levov, for instance, is “one of those slum-reared Jewish fathers whose rough-hewn, undereducated perspective goaded a whole

generation of striving, college-educated Jewish sons... [l]imited men with limitless energy; men quick to be friendly and quick to be fed up; men for whom the most serious thing in life is to keep going despite everything” (11). Not only does Lou Levov embody the archetypal traits of a certain generation of American Jews, but he also lives among fellow Jews on Keer Avenue, a choice that aims to fortify Jewish communal affiliation and peoplehood.

In deciding to move to Old Rimrock, the Swede makes a very different—and, to his father, inexplicable—choice. Lou Levov can’t understand why his son would want to buy a property so remote, so dilapidated, so expensive to heat, and, at one hundred acres, so impractically large. But Lou Levov’s strongest objection to Old Rimrock has to do with a feeling that the town is a bastion of racial intolerance and anti-Semitism. “Let’s be candid with each other about this—this is a narrow, bigoted area,” he tells the Swede on a visit to Old Rimrock before his son decides to purchase the property,

The Klan thrived out here in the twenties. Did you know that? The Ku Klux Klan. People had crosses burned on their property out here... This is rock-ribbed Republican New Jersey, Seymour. It is Republican out here from top to bottom... I’m talking to you, son, about bigots. Not about the goose step even—just about hate. And this is where the haters live, out here. (309)

Lou Levov had tried to convince his son to move to a more liberal area, and one where Jews resided. The South Orange, New Jersey suburb of Newstead was one such place. “In Newstead,” he said, “it would be rock-ribbed Democrat. In Newstead [you] could live with [your] family among young Jewish couples, the baby could grow up with Jewish friends” (310).

But living among Jews is not something the Swede ever wanted. In fact his move to Old Rimrock enacts a longstanding desire to break free from the community of his birth. This desire manifested early and was so strong that it seemed even to inflect his appearance. Indeed, his Nordic nickname was bestowed on him because, even if there were a few other “fair-

complexioned Jewish students” in his mostly Jewish public high school in Newark, “none possessed anything remotely like the steep-jawed, insentient Viking mask of this blue-eyed blond” (3).

The Swede’s gentile-ness manifested, too, in a love of sports. Zuckerman reports that in high school, the Swede was a star athlete, something unexpected since “[p]hysical aggression, even camouflaged by athletic uniforms and official rules intended to do no harm to Jews, was not a traditional source of pleasure in our community—advanced degrees were” (3). And the Swede’s love of physical pursuits persisted beyond his school years. According to Zuckerman, the Swede was “eager to be in on the fighting that ended the war,” and so in 1945 joined the Marines—this despite “notorious Marine Corps anti-Semitism” and the fact that his parents strongly opposed his decision. But the Swede “...would not be dissuaded from meeting the manly, patriotic challenge” (14). The Swede’s marriage a few years later to Dawn Dwyer, a blond, former Miss New Jersey and non-Jew, hardly came as a surprise at this point. In light of this record—of the “[t]he Jewishness that [the Swede] wore so lightly”—Zuckerman retrospectively can only wonder: “Where was the Jew in him?” (20).

Given his “unconscious oneness with America” (20), it makes sense that the Swede would be drawn to the Old Rimrock property. It was “[a] hundred acres of America,”

[I]and first cleared not for agriculture but to furnish timber for those old iron forges that consumed a thousand acres of timber a year...A barn, a millpond, a millstream, the foundation remains of a gristmill that had supplied grain for Washington’s troops...Just after the Revolution, the original house, a wood structure, and the sawmill had burned down and the house was replaced by this one—according to a date engraved on a stone over the cellar door and carved into a corner beam in the front room, built in 1786, its exterior walls constructed of stones collected from the fireplaces of the Revolutionary army’s former campsites in the local hills... (307-308)

The Swede takes deep pleasure in his property in part for the way it allows him to prove his connection to America and thus help obscure whatever might remain of Jewish otherness. “I want to see the land. I want to see the streams running everywhere. I want to see the cows and the horses. You drive down the road, there’s a falls there... We don’t have to live like everybody else—we can live any way we want to now... We can go anywhere, we can do anything. Dawnie, we’re free!” (308). The lovely rural setting itself surely pleases the Swede, but that it offers an escape from the way “everybody else”—and here he is thinking specifically of the community into which he was born—lives, from the Jewish city and suburbs, no doubt pleases him even more.

But the Swede’s sense of freedom, of having been loosed from communal antecedents, winds up being short lived. Learning “that his new neighbors were originally city kids to whom the rural Morris Highlands was an unknown landscape,” Bill Orcutt, the scion of a venerable WASP family with a history in the region going back to the American Revolution and beyond, offers to give the Swede a tour of his adopted county. The Swede is happy to accept, but it will ultimately force him to reconsider his “isomorphism to the Wasp world” (89), inasmuch as it makes plain to him the unassailability of Orcutt’s American identity and the seeming shallowness of his own. As the Swede tells Dawn afterwards, Orcutt’s forebears were personally acquainted with notables of American history: “John Quincy Adams. Andrew Jackson. Abraham Lincoln. Woodrow Wilson. His grandfather was a classmate of Woodrow Wilson’s... He told me *everything*. And all we were doing was walking around a cemetery out back of a church at the top of a hill. It was something. It was *school*” (306). School it may have seemed to the Swede, but Orcutt’s ability to “spin out ancestors forever” is decidedly more disconcerting to him than it is edifying.

To relieve the anxiety over his comparatively superficial connection to the landscape of Morris County and by extension America, the Swede latches onto a figure not so concretely tied to local and national history: the legendary Johnny Appleseed. “Johnny Appleseed, that’s the man for me,” the Swede muses,

Wasn’t a Jew, wasn’t an Irish Catholic, wasn’t a Protestant Christian—nope, Johnny Appleseed was just a happy American. Big. Ruddy. Happy. No brains probably, but didn’t need ‘em—a great walker was all Johnny Appleseed needed to be. All physical joy. Had a big stride and a bag of seeds and a huge spontaneous affection for the landscape, and everywhere he went he scattered the seeds. What a story that was. Going everywhere, walking everywhere. The Swede had loved that story all his life. Who wrote it? Nobody, as far as he could remember...Johnny Appleseed, out there everywhere planting apple trees. (*AP* 316)

By identifying with Johnny Appleseed, the Swede mystifies his American provenance by redirecting his claims from history to folklore. Now he insists on a bodily connection to the land, a claim which in any case seems quite apposite for someone who has always taken pride in his physicality. But the Swede’s attempt to establish his connection to the American landscape by whatever means necessary—and to elide his own genealogy in the process—does not go unnoticed by his daughter. When the Swede’s daughter, Merry, is “old enough for bedtime stories,” she insistently asks, “Who told him to do it?”—Who told Johnny Appleseed to scatter seeds?”—a question which begets an exchange between father and daughter notable for the Swede’s attempt to dodge and evade:

Who told him? Nobody told him, sweetheart...He just takes it on himself.” Who is his wife?” “Dawn. Dawn Appleseed. That’s who his wife is.” “Does he have a child?” “Sure he has a child. And you know what her name is?” “What?” “Merry Appleseed!” (316).

Through her attempt to situate Johnny Appleseed in a familial matrix, Merry tries to glean insight about her own origins, information that is essential to the construction of her self-identity. She is unable to understand why her father, like Johnny Appleseed, would “scatter seeds” that “nobody told him to,” i.e., why it is that he would propagate something other than what has come

down to him through his forebears. It is a question of particular concern since she is herself confused about what materials she should “scatter” in her own life.

This confusion builds as Merry gets older, and manifests in the stutter that she develops as a teenager. The stutter becomes especially pronounced when she addresses her father’s choice to live in the country, which she implicates in his evasion of his origins: “You just can’t keep hiding out here in the woods...All you can deal with is c-cows. C-cows and trees. Well, there’s something besides c-c-c-c-cows and trees” (109). The link between the Swede’s desire to escape his Jewishness and Merry’s own unformed and chaotic identity is articulated most forcefully by Rita Cohen, Merry’s Jewish radical comrade-in-arms and the go-between for the Swede and his daughter when Merry goes into hiding after she bombs the Rimrock post office to protest the Vietnam War. Rita, who evokes for Merry her own stillborn Jewishness, suggests that the Swede’s flight from his roots has created a vacuum of identity which Dawn exploits to “completely colonize[] her daughter’s self-image” (135). Specifically, she claims that Dawn wants to “make her daughter into a debutante,” an assertion that the Swede tries to rebut by pointing out that his daughter in fact “shoveled cowshit from the time she was six...was in the 4-H Club... rode tractors.” The Swede adds that, even now, “Merry’s mother works on a farm all day. She works with animals all day, she works with farm machinery all day....” Rita is dubious about the Swede’s claims, charging that what he says is

Fake. All fake. The daughter of the beauty queen and the captain of the football team—what kind of nightmare is that for a girl with a soul. The little shirtwaist dresses, the little shoes, the little this and the little that...Merry has to have dancing lessons. Merry has to have tennis lessons. I’m surprised she didn’t get a nose job...Her mother hated her, Swede. It’s a shame you’re so late in finding out. Hated her for not being petite, for not being able to have her hair pulled back in that oh-so-spiffy country way... You know why else she hated her? She hated her because she’s your daughter. It’s all fine and well for Miss New Jersey to marry a Jew. But to raise a Jew? That’s a whole other bag of tricks. You have a shiksa wife, Swede, but you didn’t get a shiksa daughter. Miss New Jersey is a bitch, Swede. Merry would have been better off sucking the cows if she wanted a little milk and nurturance. At least the cows had maternal

feelings... Don't you know what's made Merry Merry...Sixteen years of living in a household where she was hated by that mother. (135-137)

To Rita it is clear that in depriving Merry of the Jewishness she felt was her birthright, Dawn distorted her daughter's developing sense of self. This, Rita suggests, the Swede abetted by trying to escape his Jewishness, and thus does he bear responsibility for the angry and violent person Merry has become. As Timothy Parrish writes, deprived of identity, "Merry projects herself into the bombs she explodes as she explores the furthest boundaries of the self" (139). Thus the damage wrought by the dream of a pastoral release from his Jewishness ranges well beyond the Swede himself.

The Plot Against America (2004), Roth's dystopian reimagining of World War II America, reprises and amplifies *American Pastoral's* portrayal of rural America as the site of both American-Jewish assimilationism and a related blood-and-soil anti-Semitism. It is narrated by the character Philip, who as an adult recalls the trials his family faced after the anti-Semitic aviator Charles Lindbergh, an admirer of Hitler, defeats Franklin D. Roosevelt by a landslide in the 1940 presidential election. As the narrative makes clear, the keys to Lindbergh's victory are his isolationism and anti-Semitic entreaties. While campaigning, Lindbergh appears before the *America First Committee*, a powerful political group advocating an isolationist and anti-Semitic politics. He identifies the country's Jews as being among the "most important groups who have been pressing this country toward war," and states that "Americans cannot allow the natural passions and prejudices of other peoples to lead our country to destruction" (371).

According to the novel's postscript, Lindbergh in fact spoke these words before an actual *America First* rally at the end of 1941. The postscript also indicates how Lindbergh's rhetorical flourishes were informed by the xenophobia and anti-Semitism of the day's agrarian populists,

who believed agriculture and ruralism to be foundational to the nation's health, and the urban areas from which most Jews hailed to be the locus of whatever ailed the country. They "looked backward with longing to the lost agrarian Eden," Richard Hofstadter writes of the populists in *The Age of Reform* (1955),

to the republican America of the early years of the nineteenth century in which there were few millionaires and, as they saw it, no beggars, when the laborer had excellent prospects and the farmer had abundance, when statesmen still responded to the mood of the people and there was no such thing as the money power... In Populist thought the farmer is not a speculating businessman, victimized by the risk economy of which he is a part, but rather a wounded yeoman, preyed upon by those who are alien to the life of folkish virtue. A villain was needed, marked with the unmistakable stigmata of the villains of melodrama, and the more remote he was from the familiar scene, the more plausibly his villainies could be exaggerated (62, 73).

Since they resided mostly in cities and often worked in commerce and finance, American Jews perfectly incarnated the idea of the villain for agrarian populists. Among the historical figures in *The Plot Against America* who trade in populist-inspired canards are Charles Coughlin, the Roman Catholic priest famous for weekly anti-Semitic radio shows that were broadcast nationally, and Henry Ford, who published anti-Semitic screeds in his newspaper, *The Dearborn Independent*, and pamphlet, *The International Jew*. Ford's "notorious anti-Semitism of the 1920s, along with his hatred of 'Wall Street,'" writes Hofstadter, "were the foibles of a Michigan farm boy who had been liberally exposed to Populist notions"(81).⁹ In *The Plot Against America*, Ford is nominated by Lindbergh to be his administration's Secretary of the Interior.

Though by the 1940s agrarianism could not by itself sustain a national political movement, *American Pastoral* underlines its perennial appeal to the American polity. After his election, Lindbergh introduces a variety of programs inspired by the agrarian ethos, administered by the

⁹ Writing in roughly the same years that *The Plot Against America* is set, Alfred Kazin said that "In some respects the demagoguery of populists anticipated the Know-Nothing native Fascists of our own time, for Populism was essentially a groundswell of protest, an amorphous rebellion that caught all the confusions and hatreds of the time." See Alfred Kazin, 30.

newly created Office of American Absorption (OAA), which aims is to encourage “America’s religious and national minorities to become further incorporated into the larger society.” The ostensible inclusiveness of this mission statement notwithstanding, Philip points out that “the only minority the OAA appeared to take serious interest in encouraging was ours” (85), underscoring Jews’ standing as a group perceived to be especially in need of rural rehabilitation. One OAA program, Homestead 42, endeavors to make Jews over into agriculturalists by giving them a “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to move their households, at government expense, in order to strike roots in an inspiring region of America previously inaccessible to them,” namely, the rural Midwest, a region which offers “a challenging environment steeped in our country’s oldest traditions where parents and children can enrich their Americanness over the generations” (204-5). In an act of Jewish self-affirmation, Philip’s father, an employee in Newark of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, declines when he is offered a transfer to Danville, Kentucky, through Homestead 42, and Philip is happy to be staying in Newark, the city where he was born and raised and feels most comfortable. He also senses that danger lurks for Jews in rural Kentucky: “A child of my background had a sixth sense in those days, the geographic sense, the sharp sense of where he lived and who and what surrounded him” (212). Philip’s “sixth sense” turns out to be prescient, indeed: a Jewish woman who relocates to Danville under Homestead 42 is beaten to death and burned by Klansmen in what amounts to a modern-day pogrom soon after her arrival. Under increasing pressure to move to the rural heartland—the foremost site of Roth’s “nightmarish vision of America’s anti-Semitic fury” (342) in the novel—many Jewish families decide to relocate to Canada instead.

Another OAA endeavor, “Just Folks,” is “a volunteer work program introducing city youth to the traditional ways of heartland life” (84). Its goal is “to remove hundreds of Jewish boys

between the ages of twelve and eighteen from the cities where they lived and attended school and put them to work for eight weeks as field hands and day laborers with farm families hundreds of miles from their homes” (84-5). Philip’s older brother, Sandy, is eager to enroll in Just Folks for the chance it will afford him to experience life on a farm, and his father reluctantly gives him permission to participate. In the summer Sandy boards a train for Kentucky, and later, sounding nothing like a Jewish kid from urban Newark, tells his family in letters home that his adoptive farm has brought in “a bumper crop of blackberries,” that “[t]he steer are being driven crazy by flies,” that “today they’re cutting alfalfa” (90).

By the time he returns to Newark at the end of the summer, Sandy has undergone a dramatic physical transformation. Philip reports that he was

...some ten pounds heavier than when he’d left and his brown hair blondish from his working in the fields under the summer sun. He’d grown a couple of inches as well, so that his pants were now nowhere near his shoe tops, and altogether my impression was of my brother in disguise (91).

Just Folks would seem to have accomplished its Americanizing mission in spectacular fashion, with Sandy transforming from a putatively enervated Jew from the city into a hale, blond-haired farmer, i.e., a gentile. Notably, Sandy’s Aunt Evelyn is ecstatic over her nephew’s metamorphosis. “Hey farmer,” she calls out to him at the Newark train station on his return, “Over here!” “Sandy,” Philip says, “came loping in our direction, swinging his bags at his sides and sporting an outdoorsy new walk to go with the new physique” (92).¹⁰ And at the dinner table

¹⁰ Here it is worth recalling a scene from another novel in which Roth focuses on (and satirizes) the Jewish dream of agrarian masculinism. In the “Aloft” chapter of *The Counterlife*, a fellow American-Jewish airline passenger tries to elicit Zuckerman’s impression of Israel’s farmers:

“You’re Jewish,” he said, smiling.

“I am.”

“Well, didn’t you have any feelings when you saw what they’ve done?”

the evening of his return, Sandy extols the skills of the tobacco-farmer patriarch of his Just Folks family, Mr. Mawhinney (his equine surname was obviously irresistible for Roth), who knew how to

...[s]addle a horse, drive a tractor, operate a thresher, ride a fertilizer drill, work a field as easily with a team of mules as with a team of oxen; he could rotate crops and manage hired men...he could repair tools, sharpen plow points and mowers, put up fences, string barbed wire, raise chickens, dig sheep, dehorn cattle, slaughter pigs, smoke bacon, sugar-cure ham – and he raised watermelons that were the sweetest and juiciest Sandy had ever eaten (93).

For Sandy, Mr. Mawhinney possesses an essential rural skill-set that Jews, sadly, do not. What's more, identifying with the anti-Semitism with which he has been dosed in the heartland, Sandy contemptuously refers to his family as "ghetto Jews."

Sandy will reclaim his urban Jewish identity by the end of the story, but other Jewish characters prove to be stalwart supporters of the idea of the new agrarian Jew. As I've suggested, among them is Sandy's Aunt Evelyn, who applauds Sandy's farm boy vigor on his return from Kentucky. More surprisingly, so too is Lionel Bengelsdorf, the prominent Newark rabbi and a supporter of Lindbergh, who later appoints the rabbi to be the first OAA director for the state of New Jersey. If Evelyn's belief in the virtues of the OAA is shown to be at least partly the product of her romantic involvement with the rabbi (she later becomes his wife), Bengelsdorf's stems from a conviction that rural immersion will help strengthen American Jews'

"Don't have feelings."

"But did you see the citrus farms? Here are the Jews, who aren't supposed to be able to farm—and there are those miles and miles of farms. You can't imagine my feelings when I saw those farms. And the Jewish farmers!

I thought, while listening to him, that if his Galician grandfather were able to drop in on a tour from the realm of the dead upon Chicago, Los Angeles, or New York, he might well express such sentiments, and with no less amazement: "We aren't supposed to be Americans—and there are those millions of American Jews! You can't imagine how American they looked!" How do you explain this American-Jewish inferiority complex when faced with the bold claims of militant Zionism that they have the patent on Jewish self-transformation, if not boldness itself? "Look," I said to him, "I can't answer these kinds of questions (142).

identification with the nation, something he believes to be sorely lacking. “In his sermons and talks,” Philip reports,

calling “the development of American ideals” the first priority of Jews and “the Americanization of Americans” the best means to preserve our democracy against “Bolshevism, radicalism, and anarchism,” the rabbi frequently quoted from Theodore Roosevelt’s final message to the nation in which the late president said, “There can be no divided allegiance here. Any man who says he is an American but something else also, isn’t an American at all. We have room for but one flag, the American flag” (34).

Heartland agrarianism is for Bengelsdorf precisely the kind of American ideal that remains undeveloped in the nation’s Jews. Its cultivation, he believes, will go a long way towards mitigating Jews’ susceptibility to the leftist, wholly un-American ideologies he enumerates. Not coincidentally does he reference Theodore Roosevelt in this regard. For arguably more than any other modern public figure, it is Roosevelt who popularized the idea that authentic Americans make a life of strenuous outdoors activity central to the construction of their national identity. The irony of having a rabbi, the traditional personification of normative male Jewish passivity, align himself with such a doctrine was evidently something that Roth, who famously goaded the American-Jewish religious establishment over the course of his career, could not pass up.

One might say that in the novel’s conclusion Roth retreats from the lines of argument he has been advancing all along. The Jewishness of Philip’s family and most other American Jews has remained mostly intact and vital. America’s Jews have not traded their urban inclinations for rural ones. And the nation as a whole ultimately rejects Lindbergh’s anti-Semitic populism. This becomes evident after Lindbergh mysteriously vanishes while flying in his private airplane one day. With Jew-hating agitators blaming his disappearance on a Jewish conspiracy, and anti-Semitic violence flaring across the country, Lindbergh’s wife dismisses such speculation and appeals for calm, which is restored in short order. With Lindbergh nowhere in sight, an emergency election is called, and Franklin D. Roosevelt emerges the victor. When the Japanese

attack Pearl Harbor, the United States enters the war, and the travails of America's Jews finally come to an end.

Yet, the ostensibly happy ending of the novel does nothing to vitiate a feeling that the blood-and-soil nationalism evoked remains an ominous presence in American culture and society—not when appeals to it are made with such regularity. Thus, as with his other works considered in this chapter, *The Plot Against America* asks us above all to contemplate—and to disavow—the retrograde meanings with which exurban places are often inscribed. Importantly, Roth intends this and his other anti-pastoral allegories no less for Jews than gentiles, for these narratives demonstrate pastoral's potentially strong appeal for those historically denied social and civic inclusion. Finally, in Israel, and especially on the West Bank, pastoral works for Roth in the reverse, as a means by which Jews seek to buttress their own exclusionary claims. In the final analysis, Roth's poetics privilege American cities, a preference which, as Zuckerman's own for the Berkshires demonstrates, has nothing to do with some kind of inherent Jewish aversion to nature and rural places. Although in his mid to late works the grassy American suburbs become a viable Jewish site, the city remains for Roth a premier site of tolerance, mutual respect, and civic-mindedness, and as such the most welcoming place for minorities such as Jews.

Conclusion

According to a report issued in 2013 evaluating the surge in the United States in recent years of Jewish-themed community supported agriculture, organic food coops, camping and backpacking, environmental bike rides, outdoor holiday retreats, and environmental policy advocacy, the focus on the outdoors this programming and activity reflects amounts to “a new concern in Jewish life” (4).¹¹ While the scale of (and the institutional support for) the concern today is certainly impressive, the literary naturism I’ve examined in this study shows that American Jews’ affinity for the outdoors is hardly unprecedented. More accurately, it represents only the latest iteration of an interest which extends previous Jewish-American “incursions” into the outdoors, themselves an iteration extending the naturism of Haskalah thinkers.

But if the muse for the *maskilim* in this regard was Jewish religiosity and traditionalism, in important respects it is urbanism for the Jewish-American writers I’ve discussed here. By portraying Jews at home in the countryside and, extra-narratively, by expounding rural themes, they subvert reifications of the American Jew as solely an urban type. The Yiddish poets’ role in such a project in particular is unexpected. Morris Rosenfeld, Yehoash, and I.J. Schwartz were not, after all, versed in American pastoral conventions, at least not in the way that the homegrown Jewish-American writers were. Moreover, their literary sensibility was influenced most immediately by the Yiddish writers of Eastern Europe with whom they shared a common

¹¹ The report, commissioned by Hazon, a Jewish non-profit dedicated to environmental sustainability, and six other funders, gives this outdoors-oriented programming the acronym JOFEE (Jewish Outdoor, Food and Environmental Education). The report can be read at http://issuu.com/hazon/docs/jofee_report.

orientation. The poetics of this milieu, as Irving Howe reminds us, were profoundly shaped by the fact of the Jews' subjection and *de facto* deterritorialization there: "The virtue of powerlessness, the power of helplessness, the company of the dispossessed, the sanctity of the insulted and the injured—these, finally, are the great themes of Yiddish literature" (38). One would not guess that celebration of land (and the implicit sense of belonging that usually attends it) would emerge as a favorite motif for those so culturally proximate to "dispossessed" writers such as Sholem Aleichem.

But of course the Yiddish poets were not subjected and did not feel deterritorialized in the United States, a certain amount of anti-Semitism notwithstanding. Rather, they likely felt liberated in the "goldene medina," able to celebrate landscape in ways prohibited to their forerunners in the Old Country, where identification with national territory was greatly circumscribed by anti-Semitism. This celebration can be seen to supplement the aesthetic project of Chaim Zhitlovsky, who encouraged the translation of Occidental pastoral poetry into Yiddish as a means by which to "remedy [a] Jewish lack and supplant the absence of 'nature' in [Jews'] cultural self-knowledge," as he said of Yehoash's translation of Longfellow's "Song of Hiawatha" into Yiddish (Trachtenberg 157). The "naïve" embrace of landscape by the Yiddish poets is likely also a function of the relative unity of their Jewish self-perception, inasmuch as they were fairly recent immigrants from relatively hermetic Jewish milieus. They likely did not consider whether and how writing nature lyrics might challenge their Jewish identities (though Schwartz's *Kentucky* indicates that this was beginning to change by the mid-1920s).

The same cannot be said for the Jewish-American writers who come after them. Their stories and novels suggest that they do take naturism as a potential sign of assimilationism and therefore as something to be reconciled with their Jewishness. This does not lead them to abjure exurban

places, however—far from it. As we have seen, Malamud’s Levin and Bellow’s Herzog prefer to live in rural places, and even find their Jewish spirituality and religiosity enhanced by them. Roth’s decidedly secular and cosmopolitan Zuckerman also prefers to live in the countryside, his reticence about its beauty reflecting not indifference but rather his rejection of pastoral ideals he considers agonistic to Jewishness. This rejection—of solipsistic inwardness, escapism, and masculinism—is observed in the work of Bellow and Malamud as well, and arguably marks the exurban Jewish space-making of the Jewish-American writers I have examined most emphatically. Thus do the Jewish-American writers, borrowing from both Jewish and American cultural traditions, find a way to integrate the tensions inhering in their diasporic identities where naturism is concerned.

In his autobiography *How to Talk Dirty and Influence People* (1965) the comedian Lenny Bruce quipped, “To me, if you live in New York or any other big city, you are Jewish...If you live in Butte, Montana, you’re going to be goyish even if you’re Jewish...” (5). Bruce’s joke registers the widely held views that urbanism and authentic Jewishness are essentially coterminous, while ruralism and Jewishness are mutually exclusive. Similarly, Irving Howe’s famous assertion in his introduction to his edited collection *Jewish American Stories* that Jewish-American literature “has probably moved past its high point” (16) because its presumed lifeblood, the immigrant experience, is receding inexorably into the past, is informed by a belief that Jewish-American identity remains viable only insofar as it maintains a vital connection to the American city. The writers I have examined obviously hold a different view of the matter. To them, rural space no less than the urban space teems with Jewish potential.

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