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**LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
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"of kith and kin": A Biographical and Critical
Study of Cultural Influences on the Prose of
A.M. Klein

Roslyn Lester,

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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ABSTRACT

"of kith and kin": A Biographical and Critical
Study of Cultural Influences on the Prose of

A.M. Klein

Roslyn Lester

Klein's writing is defined by his Jewish experience. His Judaic culture stands at the centre of all his activities be they in literature or in public life. Klein's Montreal Jewish background with its roots in the East European shtetl clearly inspired his work and life. His prose envisions man within a chaotic world bounded by the historical reality of the Jewish people from biblical times onward. Klein's writing projected his ethical idealism as he stressed the necessary unity between artist and society.

This thesis is a biographical and critical evaluation of Klein's journalism and short fiction analyzing cultural influences of his Jewish heritage and Montreal background on his creativity. The biographical element of the thesis identifies the autobiographical nature of Klein's writing.

Chapter 1 establishes Klein's literary influences, tracing his East European heritage and the experiences which followed immigration to Montreal. Chapter 2 deals with Klein's early life in the Montreal Jewish ghetto and his emergence as a scholar and writer. The chapter

additionally examines the existing French-English duality in Montreal at the time of Klein's development. Chapter 3 focuses on Klein's journalism, which marks a large and crucial part of his writing and has been largely neglected to date. The final chapter links Klein's short fiction and his novella, "The Bells of Sobor Spasitula", to his negative perception of the artist's plight in society. This perception mirrored Klein's own growing fears of victimization and isolation.

At the height of his creative powers, Klein abruptly ceased writing, wrapping himself in a blanket of silence. For nearly two decades prior to his death in 1972, he lived in relative obscurity, cut off from the mainstream of life. The tragedy of his last years, however, does not diminish his tremendous contribution to Canadian literature. Klein incorporated a Jewish vision within his writing, integrating it with humanistic ideals and giving voice to one of the most unique interpretations of the Canadian landscape.

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I am especially grateful to my advisor Patricia Morley who first introduced the idea of writing a thesis on the work of A.M. Klein. Her invaluable guidance and inexhaustible patience kept me to the task. I am most grateful for her continuous encouragement.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<u>CP</u>	<u>Collected Poetry</u>
<u>BS</u>	<u>Beyond Sambation</u>
<u>SS</u>	<u>Short Stories</u>
<u>CJC</u>	<u>Canadian Jewish Chronicle</u>
C. Th.	Caplan's Thesis

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the final lines of his poem "Autobiographical",

A.M. Klein writes:

Hence comes my sadness in remembered joy
Constriction of the throat;
Hence do I hear as heard by a Jewboy,
The Hebrew violins,
Delighting in the sobbed Oriental note.¹

His distinct nostalgia for a more innocent time is uttered within the context of a rich culture imbedded within the ancient history and traditions of his people. It is the core from which the poet reached out and the very foundation of all his ensuing work.

Klein's creativity as a writer, whether it is in poetry, fiction or social commentary, stems from an intense Jewish experience. He was the first Canadian poet to express the Jewish sensibility in English. Previously, as Ludwig Lewisohn notes in 1940, Jewish poets writing in English relied heavily on assimilated experience, while those who wished to express their cultural experience wrote in Yiddish.² In

¹The Collected Poems of A.M. Klein, ed. Miriam Waddington (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1974), p. 273. All further references to this work appear in the text and to this edition as CP.

²Ludwig Lewisohn, "Foreword to Hath Not a Jew", A.M. Klein, Critical Views on Canadian Writers, ed. Tom Marshall (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1970), p. 12.

an article twenty-five years later, M.W. Steinberg concurs that Klein was the only Canadian writer whose work consciously focussed on the vast culture and traditions of his own Jewish People: "He was ... an intensely personal poet, his awareness and concern with himself probably being reinforced by the realization of the separateness of himself and his tradition in the general social milieu".³

Central to Klein's distinctive Jewish heritage is his Montréal Jewish background with its unique Yiddish literary circle and cultural institutions. He was born into an environment infused with age-old customs wrought out of a history rich in legends, biblical tradition, myth, as well as the tragic reality of persecution and alienation. In The Second Scroll, Klein refers to a real incident of his childhood, the retelling of a pogrom by two strangers who came from Volhynia to his Canadian home: "Murder by murder the pogrom was reconstituted for us by the passionate strangers".⁴

Klein's poetry and prose weave this background together with his vast knowledge of the Bible, the Talmud and Jewish scholarship. His heritage flows through the very veins of his work. Always integrated within his wider perspective of non-Jewish life is this intrinsic historical knowledge which intensifies his creativity.

³M.W. Steinberg, "Poet of a Living Past: Tradition in Klein's Poetry", ibid., p. 99.

⁴A.M. Klein, The Second Scroll, NCL 22 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), p. 25.

This thesis is a biographical and critical study of Klein's prose demonstrating the influence of his East European and Canadian Jewish heritage on his creative energy. It describes the Jewish literary and cultural milieu out of which Klein emerged and his literary and political activity during the turbulent times of the 1930s and 40s.

Over the years, critical analysis of Klein's work has largely concentrated on his published poetry and the one published novel, The Second Scroll. However, Klein produced an enormous body of published prose comprised of editorials, essays, short fiction, drama, translations and literary criticism. Klein also wrote a certain amount of fiction which was never published, including unfinished drafts of novels and one completed novel.

The thesis concentrates mainly on Klein's stories, some of his unpublished fiction, and portions of his journalism which are particularly relevant to his life and writing. The latter consists largely of material published in the Canadian Jewish Chronicle between 1938 and 1954. Brief reference will be made to his poetry, where it clarifies Klein's life or the cultural influences which affect his writing.

Klein was a poet who indeed embodied the Canadian mosaic. He brought to his prose and poetry a background rich with three distinct cultures. His work projected his strong Jewish identity within the surrounding French and English milieus, and he related this to his overall theme of the struggle of Universal Man. Henry Kreisel writes:

4.

Long before the term gained cultural and political currency, A.M. Klein demonstrated in his work the creative uses of multiculturalism and showed how the heirs of one cultural tradition could transmit the values of the tradition and at the same time bring a uniquely valuable perspective to the exploration of other themes and other realities of the Canadian experience so that a new level of understanding could be reached.

Kreisel goes on to say that Klein's early contribution to multiculturalism has yet to be fully explored. There has not yet been an extensive quest for the interaction between the different ethnic groups and the native people of the Canadian mosaic.⁶ Immigrant cultures tend towards ethnocentrism, while the artistic sensibility usually favours its own culture. Klein's early perceptions of the French in Quebec derived from his deep desire to reach out to another culture in order to appreciate its traditional beauty.

Canadian Jewish writers are indebted to Klein for paving the way to a literature which could self-consciously express Jewish experience within the Canadian landscape. Klein's blending of his European roots and Canadian life became a crucial influence on a succession of Jewish Canadian writers. Henry Kreisel's own beginnings as a Canadian Jewish writer were influenced by Klein's work:

It was A.M. Klein who showed me how one could use, with self-consciousness, the material that came from a specifically European and Jewish experience. I began to understand that identity was not something forever fixed and static. It was

⁵H. Kreisel, "The 'Ethnic' Writer in Canada", Identifications: Ethnicity and the Writer in Canada, ed. Jars Balan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 11, 12.

⁶Ibid., p. 12.

rather like a tree. New branches, new leaves could grow. New roots could be put down too, but the original roots need not be discarded. In the end I thought that I could perhaps use a double perspective that allowed me to see European experience through Canadian eyes, and to say something that, however modest, might have some value.

Kreisel's observations are very apt, as we see from the poetry of Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen, and the fictions of Mordecai Richler, Norman Levine and Adele Wiseman.

In "Heirloom" one of a group of poems under the heading "Of Kith and Kin", Klein points to his lineage with this strong sense of pride and identification. He describes his inherited worth as not being measured by material wealth, but by an ancestry rich in faith and history. The last two stanzas especially identify Klein's emotional attachment to his Jewish heritage. It is the centre of all his writing:

The snuff left on this page, now brown and old,
The tallow stains of midnight liturgy -
These are my coat of arms; and these unfold
My noble lineage, my proud ancestry!

And my tears, too, have stained this heirloomed ground,
When reading in these treatises some weird
Miracle, I turned a leaf and found
A white hair fallen from my father's beard. (CP 158)

It was this dense historical awareness which nurtured the young Klein and which eventually led him to ponder his own reality (in relation) to inherited Jewish history and to a secular life within the Canadian non-Jewish world.

⁷Ibid.; p. 8

An important influence on Klein's writing was the historical and literary legacy of the East-European shtetl from the Middle Ages to its demise in the twentieth century. A short summary of shtetl history is essential to an understanding of his work. From 1830 until 1914 millions of Jews were packed into a small area in Russia between the Baltic and Black Seas, referred to as The Pale of Settlement. When in 1881 the Czar of Russia, Alexander II, was assassinated, the Jewish population was terrorized by waves of violent pogroms.⁸ The result was the beginning of a large emigration of East-European Jews to North America and other parts of the world. By the end of World War II all the shtetlach were destroyed and with them a remarkable cultural era in Jewish history.

It was during the nineteenth century (especially 1830-1881) that Yiddish secular culture flourished. Living separately but in relative harmony with the surrounding, often antagonistic, gentile population, they were free to develop their own religion and culture. The shtetl world represented a totally indivisible Jewish community with strong religious ties; it marks one of the most vibrant epochs of cultural evolution in Jewish life.⁹ However, life in the shtetl was never easy and, although there are stereotyped versions of an idyllic uncomplicated existence, the reality, as Irving Howe relates was somewhat different:

⁸See Irving Howe, World of Our Fathers, The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976), p. 5.

⁹See Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, Life is with People, The Culture of the Shtetl (New York: Schocken Books, 1962), p. 34.

... Given the pressures from without and a slow stagnation within, this world was bound to contain large portions of the ignorant, provincial, and even corrupt. One of the motivating forces behind the communal and political movements that sprang up during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, as well as of the Yiddish poetry and fiction written at the same time, was a desire to stir the blood of a society that had gone sluggish, to cleanse the life of a people that had suffered too long from isolation, poverty, and violence.

Locked into a backward economy, the Jews of Eastern Europe continued to act and think primarily in pre-modern, pre-bourgeois terms.¹⁰

The continuous struggle for livelihood, however meagre, was never the priority of Jewish life in the shtetl. Great respect was given to the Talmudic scholar, and women were often the sole breadwinners of their families, leaving their husbands time for the precious pursuit of scholarship. Intense study of the Torah was indeed a prestigious occupation, as the intellectual goal was solely for an intimate relationship with God. It was the custom for officials, the wealthy, as well as true scholars to sit at the Eastern Wall of the synagogue near the Holy Ark. Klein's father was himself highly respected as a Talmudic scholar in his shtetl community. As Usher Caplan mentions, he sometimes had the role of dayan, an arbiter of disputes involving Jewish law.¹¹

God was an integral part of daily living. The shtetl mentality responded to the essence of ritualistic deeds rather than to aesthetic things. Therefore God was a God of deed and not of things.

¹⁰Howe, World of Our Fathers, p. 8.

¹¹See Usher Caplan, "A.M. Klein: An Introduction" (Stony Brook State University of New York, Ph.D. Thesis, 1976), p. 3. All further reference to this work appear in the text referred to as Caplan Thesis (C. Th.).

There were no ornate synagogues, only simple wooden structures.

The uniqueness of the liturgical music and the designs of the Holy Ark and even of prayer shawls projected the acknowledged presence of God in daily life.¹² Howe observes that: "Yiddish culture was a culture of speech, and its God a God who spoke. He was a plebeian God, perhaps imminent but hardly transcendent... Because the East European Jew felt so close to God he could complain to Him freely, and complain about Him too".¹³ The rich Yiddish literature from this period, literature in which Klein was well versed, abounds with stories of intimate conversations by the common folk to God.

The shtetl strongly discouraged secular learning, seeing it as an evil undoing of traditional Jewish life. Ratno, the shtetl from which Klein's parents came, was in fact steeped in Chassidic tradition and served its area as a bulwark against secularism. This bias against secularism undoubtedly resulted in a kind of inbred narrowness which recognized scholarship as the sole means to a Godly life. It was inevitable, however, that this way of life would soon feel the encroachment of the wider secular world as the urgency of its turmoil became tragically felt in the small musty corners of the Beth Hamidrash (House of Study).

Despite the problems, the world of the shtetl remained the bedrock of Jewish culture in Eastern Europe. It functioned within a

¹² See Howe, World of Our Fathers, pp. 8-11.

¹³ Ibid., p. 11.

hostile anti-semitic environment, while attempting flexibility with regard to the customs of the surrounding non-Jewish communities. Yiddish was both a spoken and written language, whereas Hebrew generally functioned as a language of prayer and liturgy and official communication. Klein often referred to his own childhood as "Yiddish-speaking and Hebrew-thinking". (C. Th. 87) Other languages were used only to communicate with gentile neighbours. Outside the shtetl, in the larger cities, there began a gradual rebellion against the Torah as the only authority for Jewish life. The shtetl resisted change until finally the murdering Nazi regime tragically squashed its presence as one of the most colourful and traditional communities in Jewish history.¹⁴

In its passing, the shtetl has left a rich reservoir of literature. By the middle of the nineteenth century there began a fervour of literary activity which developed into a secular Yiddish literature, mirroring life in the shtetl. It also reflected the stirrings of new political and cultural movements which competed for social awareness by the masses. Its major figures were I.L. Peretz, Shalom Aleichem and Mendele Mokher Sforim, writers whom Klein read in the original Yiddish. During the late nineteenth-century period of the "Enlightenment", Jewish writing generally ridiculed the shtetl, seeing it as a stagnating influence on Jewish progress. Their fictions usually depicted the shtetl as an outmoded place, an impediment to intellectual growth. But towards

¹⁴See Zborowski and Herzog, Life is With People, p. 34.

the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth, Yiddish writers returned to a more traditional or favourable depiction of the shtetl.¹⁵

Klein was intrigued and attracted by a way of life which maintained a gentle balance between traditional ritual and daily routine. He saw that life as being entirely centred around synagogue and home, but always bound by the reality of poverty and persecution. Many of Klein's stories and much of his journalism detail the folklore of the shtetl. His writing is tinged with the nostalgic yearnings of a way of life dominated by religion and tradition. It symbolized for him an ageless innocence where learning and strict orthodoxy were among life's highest achievements. Klein sensed its fragile relevance for the modern Jew, and lamented the brutal destruction of a people whose rich contribution to Judaism was largely lost. He wrote: "The city of joy and laughter is reduced to an abattoir and a charnel-house. How is she fallen, who was full of joy and frolicking! How is she become a place for the murder of old men and the stifling of infants, she who once brought back youth to the aged, and gave to the child its wisdom!"¹⁶

Klein's parents came from Ratno, a shtetl in the province of Volhynia, the northwestern part of the Ukraine. Abraham Moses Klein was born there on February 14, 1909, and was brought to Canada by his

¹⁵ See Howe, World of Our Fathers; and Joachim Neugroschel, The Shtetl, A Creative Anthology of Jewish Life in Eastern Europe (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1982), passim.

¹⁶ A.M. Klein, "The City of Chelm", Canadian Jewish Chronicle, March 5, 1943, p. 4. Subsequent references to The Chronicle will be referred to as CJC.

parents in 1910. (C. Th. 1, 2)¹⁷

Kalman and Yetta Klein had married in Ratno in 1897. It was a second marriage for both of them. They already had five children between them and together had two more daughters. Twin sons were born to them ten years later. A.M. Klein, one of the twins, survived his brother who, according to Usher Caplan, died as an infant during the passage from Russia to Canada.

Ratno was a typical shtetl of some two thousand people, where poverty and piety braced everyday life. Its inhabitants were Chassidim, resisting the inroads of modernism which was slowly creeping into the shtetl by the late nineteenth century. They still remained immune to Jewish Haskalah (Enlightenment), with its socialism and Zionism.

In Ratno, Kalman provided for his family as a pottery merchant. It necessitated his travelling to the surrounding town in Volhynia, which resulted in long absences from the home. He apparently was a fine letter writer, as his letters were looked forward to, and read, by almost all the Ratno folk.¹⁸

Ratno is where Klein's emotional and literary attachments are rooted. Although he was only a baby when he left Ratno and spent his formative years in Montreal; nevertheless it was what this shtetl stood for that remained an important influence on his creative life. Klein

¹⁷ Caplan writes that there is some ambiguity surrounding Klein's birth and the family's arrival date from Europe. It has been assumed that Klein was born in Montreal after the family's immigration in 1909, but Caplan suggests that Klein was born in Europe and arrived in Montreal as a baby.

¹⁸ See Usher Caplan, Like One That Dreamed, A Portrait of A.M. Klein (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1982), pp. 17-18.

was, as Caplan aptly states, "a child of two worlds. The first was the world of East-European Judaism ... The other was the New World ..."¹⁹

Klein's parents came to Canada at the peak of a wave of Jewish immigration which had slowly begun around 1760 and which eventually established a Jewish communal structure with which this new immigration could identify and from which it could receive help. One of the first records of Jewish immigration to Quebec is that of a Portuguese Jew in 1731. He was a prosperous landowner and was the forerunner of wealthy Jews who began to trickle into Quebec to trade with the colonies. But the first sizeable Jewish immigration to Canada, particularly to Quebec, occurred during the time of British rule. In 1760, laws excluding non-Catholics from Canada were lifted, allowing Jews to immigrate and legally settle. Philip Hart, who originated from England, was one of the most prominent Jewish settlers of the time. His descendents later became very active in Canadian political life. He paved the way for subsequent Jewish immigration from Britain. This Jewish population was small and their growth was proportionately slow. They were mainly educated middle class and wealthy people. The men usually were successful businessmen and the group generally experienced a high standard of living with hardly any problems of integrating within the surrounding non-Jewish sector. As English was their mother-tongue, there were no communication difficulties, and they mixed freely with the upper crust of Montreal society.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 17.

This period, then, from 1760 to 1840, marked the first major Jewish immigration to Canada. Montreal, for most, was the city of settlement.²⁰ They formed a small community, always maintaining their distinct Jewish identity, completely devoted to Jewish ideals and traditions. They were the founding fathers of the Jewish Canadian community. The first congregation was formed in 1768; the first Canadian synagogue was established in Montreal in 1777.²¹

The early Jews of Montreal aligned themselves to the English-speaking rather than the francophone segment of the population, moving up to the heights of Westmount and buying mansions next to British noblemen.²² Joseph Kage describes this group of Jews as pioneers in laying down the foundation for the following waves of Jewish immigration:

It took time until the settlement attained a measure of community stability. This development was of great significance for the future Jewish immigration to Canada. Firstly, there was established a Jewish communal structure with which the newly arrived immigrant could extend a guiding hand to the immigrant in his adjustment to the socio-economic conditions of the country.²³

The next significant Jewish immigration to Canada was in 1840, with Jews arriving from western continental Europe, followed in the late

²⁰See Joseph Kage, With Faith and Thanksgiving (Montreal: Eagle Publishing, 1966), pp. 2-11.

²¹Ibid., p. 8.

²²See Ema Paris, Jews, An Account of Their Experience in Canada (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1980), pp. 19-30.

²³Kage, With Faith and Thanksgiving, p. 8.

1800s by a massive tide of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe.²⁴

It was at this point that pogroms began to hit the shtetlach in the Pale of Settlement with much regularity; thousands of Jews were brutally murdered in one anti-semitic vendetta after another. Jewish massacres in Czarist Russia reached their peak between 1894 and 1917. From 1903, beginning with "the Kishinev slaughter", hundreds of thousands of Jews began fleeing for their lives.²⁵

Klein's family was a part of this massive wave of East-European immigration to North America. They helped form a prolific community in Montreal with its unique cultural and religious institutions. It was essentially an orthodox population which generally adjusted to Canadian life but whose homes still contained remnants of the shtetl world left behind. Klein was reared in an environment where ancient traditions of the shtetl mingled with the realities of living in Canada. Klein's father was unemployed for more than a year because he could not obtain employment which would allow him to be free on the Sabbath.

(C. Th. 3, 4)

It was this Jewish ghetto which nurtured the young Klein and provided him with a solid Jewish identity. Klein nostalgically referred to his childhood as a time when life seemed uncomplicated, revolving around religious rituals and a loving family. In "Autobiographical" he speaks of his youth when "Never was I more alive/All days thereafter are a

²⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

²⁵ Nathan Ausubel, The Book of Jewish Knowledge (New York: Crown Publishers, 1964), p. 345.

dying off, /A wandering away/From home and the familiar. The years
doff/Their innocence./No other day is ever like that day". (CP 273)
In a sense, it is this memory of a pure simple life, devoid of the
rush of modern living, to which the adult Klein clung. Yet he knew
it was an illusion, lost forever in time, except in the mind's
imagination. Klein's Jewishness, then, lies at the centre of all his
endeavours.

In order to further understand Klein's artistic impulses,
it is also important to realize the cultural environment of Montreal out
of which he emerged. He was the product of an East-European ghetto
with its strong Judaic influence situated within the city of Montreal,
a mosaic of French and English cultures. It is this layered background
which undoubtedly stimulated his creativity. As he began to venture
out of the ghetto, he took his Jewish eyes with him into the gentile
world. Throughout his life, Klein always had one foot in the shtetl
and the other in contemporary Montreal. It is this tension that defines
the man and his work.

The following chapter will detail Klein's early life with
respect to his ghetto roots as well as the socio-political background of
the Montreal Jewish community. In addition, a short discussion of the
existing duality of French and English in Montreal is necessary to
illuminate the city's cultural mosaic just at the time of Klein's
development.

CHAPTER 2

JEWISH MONTREAL

CHAPTER 2

JEWISH MONTREAL

The Montreal Jewish ghetto in which Klein grew up was a community with a rich intellectual and religious life. It developed its cultural institutions and synagogues with the benevolent aid of an older and more established Montreal Jewish community and it functioned within two distinct societies of wider Montreal, the French and the English.

Klein was a baby when his family arrived in Canada in 1910 to settle in Montreal. Speaking only Yiddish, they were amidst thousands of East-European Jews who were pushed into "low housing" slums, bordering the St. Lawrence Street area. They first lived at 30 St. Charles Borromée between Craig and Vitre Streets. Five years later the family moved north to 96 3B Hôtel de Ville between Duluth and Rachel, moving again after four years to 1381 Clarke between Rachel and Marie Anne. Here they stayed until 1930. (C. Th. 1, 2)

The Kleins were among the many poor Jewish immigrant families who formed a thriving Jewish Montreal ghetto from the turn of the century to the early 1950s. Centred on St. Lawrence Street, "the Main" was an area ~~between~~ by ten city blocks square, between St. Catherine and

Van Horne Streets on the north and south, and St. Denis and Mount Royal Streets on the east and west.¹

Yetta and Kalman Klein were poor. Kalman was employed as a presser in the sweat shops of clothing manufacturers. The Kleins were extremely pious Jews and their Montreal home continued to reflect the strict orthodox Judaism of their previous Ratno life. Kalman Klein was reputed to have originated from a long line of Chassidim and was steeped in the scholarly study of the Torah. (C. Th. 3-22)

The environment in which Klein grew up, then, was a transplanted shtetl.

As a result of this influx of poor East-European Jews to Montreal, there emerged two social groups. The immigrants residing in the downtown ghetto became known as the "downtowners", while Jews belonging to the élite, the more established and wealthy families, were referred to as "uptowners". Many of the latter lived in Westmount, the most affluent part of Montreal, but continued to aid their needy fellow Jews.² The distinct wedge created between these two social stratas lasted well into the fifties until many more Jews had moved into western or suburban Montreal and the old ghetto was dispersed and replaced by a variety of ethnic groups. It is interesting to note that in the 1930s and 40s, Klein functioned between these two areas of Jewish society, even enjoying a long-lasting liaison with the wealthy Montreal

¹Roberta Lyons, "Jewish Poets from Montreal, Concepts of History in the Poetry of A.M. Klein, Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen" (Carleton University, Master's Thesis, 1966), p. 9.

²See Erna Paris, Jews, An Account of Their Experience in Canada, p. 30.

industrialist, Samuel Bronfman. He continued to reside within the vicinity of his childhood homes, keeping close ties with that traditional community, while at the same time adapting to a more secular way of life professionally and artistically.

The ghetto community was a bustling one, crammed with corner stores and various small businesses. Although it was predominantly Jewish, there was a sprinkling of French Canadians. But mainly Montreal was a city divided into two distinct milieus, the French Catholics who lived in the east end and the English Protestants who lived in the west. The Jewish immigrants functioned within the context of this French-English dualism, making it easier for them to resist assimilation while allowing them to maintain and strengthen their own cultural bonds. Their acculturation process was slowed down because of the deep divisions within the larger society. The Jewish population tended to identify more with the Anglo-Saxon segment, many of whom were descendants of wealthy British families. They were more affluent than the French, whose entrepreneurial skills were repressed by the Catholic Church.³ Canada in general was not a melting pot of various ethnic groups as in the United States. It was made up of a mosaic society dominated by an Anglo-Saxon colonial culture. Mervin Butovsky argues that before the Second World War, Jews had to relate to an Anglo-Saxon culture:

The comparison between our experience and the American experience is relevant ... I think that what Jews faced in Canada was a much more formidable, coercive notion of Anglo-Saxon culture.

³ See Caplan, Like One That Dreamed, p. 20.

It was something that they had to join, something they had to belong to. In consequence, we don't have a Jewish literary culture until after the Second World War. When we speak of A.M. Klein and Irving Layton as prominent writers, we are speaking of 1950s and 1960s. They had been writing before that, but they were obscure figures.⁴

Butovsky adds that it is this Canadian society that discouraged freer ethnic interplay within the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture.⁵ The Jewish immigrant community in Montreal flourished especially within the city's linguistic solitudes. Rooted in their shtetl ways, they not only formed orthodox synagogues, but also organized secular institutions which represented Yiddish culture in the arts and letters. Orthodoxy represented by the synagogue, served more as a nostalgic reminder of their old life in Europe, while its intellectual life flowered with the founding of a Yiddish library, newspapers, schools, literature and theatre.⁶ On the political side, those socialist and Zionist movements which had originated in Europe began making their presence felt within the community. It was these shtetl immigrants who laid the foundation for a dense Jewish culture in Montreal; the Jewish community there remains one of the largest still functioning in North America. As historian David Rome notes: "Insofar as Quebec Jewry is concerned, the

⁴Mervin Butovsky, "Jewish Culture and Canadian Culture", The Canadian Jewish Mosaic, eds. M. Weinfeld, W. Shaffir, I. Cotler (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons, 1981), p. 319.

⁵Ibid.

⁶See Caplan, Like One That Dreamed, p. 20.

first quarter of the twentieth century was one of the best periods in its history. It witnessed the establishment of a firm and profound cultural, and hence political, alliance between the Jews and the anglophones to the exclusion of the francophones".⁷

When the Kleins arrived in Montreal, its Jewish community was at the threshold of growth. The vibrant ghetto environment nourished the young Klein as he was growing up. He also derived much comfort from a caring network of relatives and teachers. His formative years were thus spent in a religious home where life revolved around the daily observances of Jewish custom and ritual. In his youth, Klein thought of studying for the rabbinate, but eventually decided against it. Although, in his adulthood, Klein slowly relinquished most of the strict orthodox habits of his upbringing, adopting a more secular way of life, he nevertheless remained attached to the traditions and Talmudic studies of his childhood. It must be emphasized that it is this religious background with its strong familial ties that informed all his writing throughout his life. Caplan aptly assesses Klein as being totally compatible with his environment. His family always remained a source of comfort for him in the inevitable struggles of life:

As the "baby" of the family, Klein probably received more than his share of acceptance and caring attention from parents and sisters. Growing up in such an environment made him receptive to the influence of his parents, their values and the symbols of their culture ... One imagines that at an early age he internalized their own strong sense of duty and responsibility, and began trying to live up to their great expectations. He perhaps saw himself

⁷David Rome, "Jews in Anglophone Quebec", The English of Quebec, from Majority to Minority Status, eds. Gary Caldwell and Eric Waddell (Quebec: Institut Québécois de Recherche sur la Culture, 1982), p. 170.

as the child who could bring honour to his clan and thus rescue it from its obscurity and marginal existence. If that struggle ever became too difficult, he could always find shelter and renewed strength in the family's cohesion and stability. (C. Th. 10)

This environment is lovingly recalled by Klein in an unfinished story written in the mid-1940s.⁸ Its protagonist reminisces about his childhood, one that is clearly Klein's own.

They are forever part of me, the ceremonials of my childhood... Nor have the days of my childhood really passed; I am still that child who with patriarchs and prophets peopled St. Lawrence Boulevard, and City Hall Avenue; the big tree on the corner was the Oak of Mamre to me, and any day I expected an Angel to stop at my door, to leave some happy message for my father, away at work. Over the street where I played my childhood games, hiding under the legs of staircases when it rained, it was Noah's Rainbow which shone for me, like the wrapper of some new chocolate bar. And O the days when I bore the heavy folio of the Talmud through the streets. I walked with Tannaim, my head full of the subtleties of its most clever rabbis, and of the romance of Resh Lakish, gladiator turned scholar, and of Rabbi Akiva, poor, and sitting on the window-sill of the academy, hearkening Torah, and Rabbi bar bar Huna. Time, and the advent of worthies from other spheres, speaking other accents, had not banished them. They still escort me, like good wishes on my way.⁹

The above passage not only suggests Klein's symbolic relationship with the innocence and purity of childhood, but it evokes Klein's deep affinity with Talmudic and biblical scholars. It is no accident that he

⁸ Usher Caplan, both in his thesis and published biography of A.M. Klein, pointed the way to all of Klein's unpublished material in the Klein Collection, found in the Ottawa Public Archives. He saw passages such as this as obviously autobiographical; I concur.

⁹ A.M. Klein, "Stranger and Afraid", unfinished story, Klein Collection, Public Archives of Ottawa, microfilm 3762.

refers to those scholars who embody life's purest ideals. The "Oak of Mamre" identifies Abraham Klein with the biblical Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation. The narrator then dreams of walking with "Tannaim", the elite of biblical sages, who were legal advisors and representatives before the Roman civil authorities. They were spiritual leaders who additionally were involved with the social and political welfare of the Jewish people. Reference is made to Resh Lakish, Rabbis Akiva and bar bar Hunah who were renowned men of truth. They ascended from meagre beginnings to the heights of greatness both in scholarship and leadership, while manifesting the spirit of universalism in their teachings.¹⁰ The high morals personified by these Jewish historical patriarchs became part of Klein's ethos, as he strove to emulate those values within his own life. Eventually the fragile balance between Klein's personal artistic role and his public responsibilities became skewed in the face of his unrealistically high standards of purity.

Montreal's two school boards, the Protestant and French Catholic were the dominant school boards at the time Klein began his formal education. The Catholic sector was generally hostile to an un-Catholic population, especially an immigrant group who spoke neither French nor English. Therefore, it was mainly the Protestant School system whose task it was to educate

¹⁰ See Encyclopaedia Judaica, Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972), Vol. 12, pp. 840, 488-492; Vol. 13, p. 1441; Vol. 14, p. 1559, Vol. 15, p. 800.

non-Protestants and non-Catholics alike.¹¹ Klein was automatically enrolled into the Protestant School Board and, at five years of age (1915), he entered Mount Royal Elementary School which was located close to his home.¹²

At the time of Klein's early schooling, there were no Jewish day schools. His parochial education began at home with his father before school age, supplemented by various rabbinical scholars who privately tutored him, as was the custom of the shtetl. Klein attended one of the Talmud Torah Hebrew schools simultaneously with his secular education. (C. Th. 11) He went to Hebrew classes after his regular day at school, four times a week and on Sunday mornings. Here he received instruction in the Hebrew language, with emphasis upon Jewish religious observances and the study of the Bible. The curriculum also consisted of current events relevant to the state of affairs in Palestine at the time, as well as post-biblical Jewish history.¹³ Thus Klein received a strong foundation in the political and social aspects of Jewish history. Caplan reports that there is little knowledge of Klein's school years at Mount Royal, except that he was a bright student. More is known of his early Jewish education. Among his private tutors and

¹¹ See Rome, The English of Quebec, p. 166.

¹² See Caplan, Like One That Dreamed, p. 30.

¹³ See Louis Rosenberg, Canada's Jews, A Social and Economic Study of the Jews in Canada (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1939), p. 275.

teachers, Rabbi Simcha Garber stands out as being influential in the young Klein's development. The poem "Sophist", one of ten short poems under the heading "Portrait of a Minyan", elegizes Klein's cherished teacher:

When will there be another such brain?
 Never; unless he rise again,
 Unless Reb Simcha rise once more
 To juggle syllogistic lore

One placed a pin upon a page
 Of Talmud print, whereat the sage
 Declared what holy word was writ
 Two hundred pages under it!

That skull replete with pilpul tricks
 Has long returned to its matrix,
 Where worms split hair, where Death confutes
 The hope the all-too-hopeful moots.

But I think that in Paradise
 Reb Simchas, with his twinkling eyes,
 Interprets, in some song-spared nook,
 To God the meaning of his book. (CP 121)

In the first chapter of an unfinished story, "Hapaxlegomenon", which Klein had begun in the late forties or early fifties, his Talmud Torah experiences are recalled in fiction that is clearly autobiographical. As Caplan observes, the writing not only offers a vivid picture of the young Klein's Jewish education, it also demonstrates Klein's self-recollection as a precocious student with an early attraction to language and the field of etymology. (C. Th. 16) In the following excerpt, Wolf Pimontel, the main character, fondly recalls his childhood Sunday-morning Bible Class in which he and his classmates were being grilled by

the teacher in front of a group of rabbis and prominent Montreal Jewish leaders:

Mr. Herscovitch finds the presence of the honoured company extremely disturbing; he keeps moving his skullcap back and forth over his head; he smiles, ingratiating; he is apologetic; and, finally, he proceeds with the text in Genesis. The word tzohorayim is reached.

"Is there any boy here who can tell us why tzohorayim means noon?"

It is Rabbi Glazer himself who puts the question ... There is a silence. Some of the boys demonstratively knit their brows in concentration. Suddenly the boy recently arrived from Europe -- he enjoys in Holy Writ, therefore, an unfair advantage -- is waving his hand frantically ...

"From tzoroh -- trouble? Because at noon it is very hot?"

From the expression on the faces of the elders it is clear that the answer is wrong. The immigrant boy falls back crestfallen ...

And he -- Pimontel, remembered this distinctly -- he had rejoiced at his rival's discomfiture; so early had displayed itself his avidity for intellectual pre-eminence, his corrupting, cursed pride of mind ... He remembered too how then, as for many years later, the very name of his mother had been an affront to his sense of dignity -- Yenta, the name of a chattering argumentative virago of a shrew -- and he, the son of! It had been -- such was his obsession with words, names, descriptions, and the aura which hovered about them -- intolerable; intolerable until he had discovered that the name came ultimately from Ianche, a classical personage!

His mind reverted back to philology in the Kerem Israel where Mr. Gordon was asserting that this last had been a good try, but that in tzoroh the hai followed the resh while in tzohorayim it was the other way around. This, then, was the clue; one must look for a word in which the hai was before the resh. Tza'r? No, that was with an ayin. Tzir? That was a yud. Ah tzohar! He was a young boy again, raising his hand in triumph.

"From tzohar -- a window. Because at noon it is very bright."

... Rabbi Glazer advances and strokes affectionately the prodigy's cheek ... The boy's mind wanders off in a rumination of possible English parallels -- window, noon-do, moon-dawn ...¹⁴

Klein wrote the above passage towards the end of his career. Although he good naturedly and humourously ponders the origin of his mother's name Yenta, he illustrates here his life-long obsession with words, language and the precision of meaning. David Lewis remembers: "Klein's erudition staggered me when I first got to know him. He constantly produced gems from Greek, Roman and Hebrew mythology. He delighted in quoting from the Talmud, a compilation of Jewish law and custom, with intriguing interpretations by learned rabbis, written mostly in Aramaic. He sat for hours reading a dictionary with the same pleasure that I read a novel".¹⁵ It is also clear from the above work that Klein's predilection towards intellectual superiority was very much nurtured by teachers who foresaw his creative genius. Apparently Klein's parochial school education ended in his early teens. But his fervent interest in Talmud Torah continued well into his adult years, with additional knowledge gleaned from English secondary sources. (C. Th. 13)¹⁶

¹⁴A.M. Klein, "Hapaxlegomenon", unfinished story, Klein Collection, Public Archives of Ottawa, microfilm 4459-4461.

¹⁵David Lewis, The Good Fight, Political Memoirs, 1909-1958 (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1982), p. 20.

¹⁶Klein renewed his interest in the original Hebrew and Aramaic languages of the Bible in the middle fifties. In a conversation I had with Colman Klein on January 12, 1981, he related that his father continued studies of the Torah and, upon his death, many texts of the Bible with additional commentaries, were found in Klein's library.

Klein won a Commissioner's Scholarship in 1922, which allowed him to continue his secondary education at Baron Byng. Located in the heart of the Jewish immigrant area (very near Klein's home on Clarke), its student population was almost entirely Jewish. However, the school projected a British atmosphere, especially during Klein's tenure, when a great many of its teachers and administrative staff were from Britain. It was here, in Klein's tenth and eleventh grades, that a particular Canadian teacher who taught him Latin and English, began encouraging his creative talents. John Astbury taught him to love the English poets, while instilling a distaste for Wordsworth.¹⁷ In one of his later poems, Klein wrote: "Let Wordsworth clutch his sensitive bosom, leaping/When he beholds a rainbow he can sell". (CP 106)

It was also at Baron Byng High School where Klein met David Lewis. Their eventual close and influential friendship lasted throughout Klein's productive career. The Lewis household was free-thinking and non-religious, with strong emphasis on Bundist-anti-Zionist ideology, the complete antithesis to Klein's home. The two young men became fast friends despite their vehement difference of opinion with respect to Zionism. As Lewis warmly recalls: "I believe that the books about socialist philosophy which we read together and endless discussions about socialism in my home made an impression on him as they did on me".¹⁸

¹⁷ See Caplan, Like One That Dreamed, pp. 34-35.

¹⁸ Lewis, The Good Fight, p. 21.

The friendship was significant in another way: while still in high school, in 1925, Sophie Carson (Lewis's future wife) introduced Klein to the girl whom he was to marry ten years later.¹⁹

The people and teachers whom Klein encountered during his high school years encouraged his growing secularism, lessening his orthodox beliefs. Although Klein never really returned to the strict orthodoxy of his early childhood, he nevertheless kept faithful to Judaic tradition and ideals. He remained emotionally attached to orthodox religious observance, while recognizing its limitation. Klein probably regarded Judaism less as an institutional religion and more as a way of life, one that was deeply spiritual. Lewis observed that Klein "... began to think about the world in general a little more deeply, and to question, not so much the existence of God and the background in Jewish religion, as the observance, the habits, the rituals ...".²⁰

For a more vivid illustration of Klein's changing attitudes towards orthodoxy, one must turn to his autobiographical fiction "Hapaxlegomenon" in which the narrator describes the protagonist's growing disillusionment with Jewish Orthodox life.

— it was not long before he realized that the Rabbi's office was not for him. He did not have a vocation.

The rabbinic discipline appealed to his mind, but his spirit revolted at it; they were too many and too onerous the prohibitions and behests heaped upon the man who would be

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Lewis, as quoted by Caplan in Like One That Dreamed, p. 36.

religious mentor to his people. The fact was that he was not good enough, not godly enough, not godly at all. Worldly doctrine, moreover, had come to seduce him away from the arbitrary rigors of tradition ... He had begun to desist from the putting on of phylacteries; to fail in attendance at synagogue, both on weekdays and on the Sabbath; ...

His religion, he had realized, was no longer his mother's religion, with its taboos and superstitions; ... but still it was something which to him was valid, important. He wanted even now, to justify -- perhaps in a secular way? -- the high hopes that Rabbi Glazer had entertained for him; to fulfill through a variant thereof the prophecy with which he had blessed him.²¹

Obviously, Klein is articulating his own modifying view of orthodoxy. However, the above passage is significant in revealing Klein's inner struggle between the validity of following either a religious or secular life. The dichotomy is one with which he continually struggled. In the poem "The Cripples", he expresses his envy at those who enjoy unswerving religious faith: "And I who in my own faith once had faith like this, / but have not now, am crippled more than they". (CP 299)

Critics, reflecting this conflict, generally have been divided in placing Klein's work within a secular or religious context. Miriam Waddington maintains that "although the poems ... are not religious, they are Jewish in the secular sense, and mythologize the traditional customs of Eastern European Chassidic life".²² Marya Fiamengo disagrees, saying

²¹ A.M. Klein, "Hapaxlegomenon", unfinished story, microfilm 4459-4461.

²² Miriam Waddington, A.M. Klein (Montreal: McGill - Queen's University Press, 1980), p. 19.

"that in my opinion Klein was a deeply religious man. The poet speaks as prophet or priest ..."²³ G.K. Fischer perhaps comes closest to the crux of Klein's angst when she states that Klein is trying "to rejuvenate in his writings the faith into which he was born, to adapt it, to fuse it with the experience of twentieth-century man".²⁴ In one of his essays Klein wrote:

The fact remains that without a solid basis in the teachings which have so glorified our past, contemporary Judaism is a make-believe sham, a hollow mockery, a voice and nothing more. Judaism does not exist in a vacuum; it grows; it has sources; not one can expect to see the tree, splendid with foliage, and at the same time cut out the roots.²⁵

Klein chose, as did his fictional counterpart Wolf Pimontel, a path which he would try to fulfill through a variant of the prophecy: he would try to celebrate the spirit and essence of Jewish orthodoxy without becoming a rabbi. He thus embarked upon the next phase of his educational development with a strong sense of his Jewish self. Klein's university years saw the blossoming of not only his poetic talents but,

²³Marya Fiamengo, "Catholic Resonances in the Poetry of A.M. Klein", The A.M. Klein Symposium, ed. Seymour Mayne (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1975), p. 66.

²⁴G.K. Fischer, "Religious Philosophy in the Writings of Klein", The A.M. Klein Symposium, p. 37.

²⁵A.M. Klein, "The Appeal of the Yeshivoth", Beyond Sambation, Selected Essays and Editorials, 1928-1955, eds. M.W. Steinberg and Usher Caplan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 147. All further references to this work appear in the text as BS.

his growing awareness of his role in the Jewish community.

Even though Klein remained rooted in a traditional background, his activist nature required other avenues in which to express his strong Jewish identity. His poetry and prose continued to explore his spiritual attachment to an orthodox background, while his involvement in Zionism satisfied his more urgent need to articulate the idea of Jewish survival within a hostile world.

Chapter 3 will deal with Klein's years at McGill and the University of Montreal where he studied law. The McGill period is notable for Klein's involvement with the Montreal group of poets. The chapter will, however, focus on his non-fictional prose with respect to his emergence as journalist, essayist and literary critic. Klein's journalism constitutes a large and important segment of his writing and one which has not yet received the critical attention it deserves. A discussion of the history and function of journalism in the Jewish community is necessary to fully comprehend the nature of Klein's journalism. As he was writing during the turbulent 30s and 40s, when he was able to observe events leading up to the Second World War as well as during the post-war years and the establishment of the State of Israel, Klein's journalism is an important documentation of almost a quarter of a century of Canadian and world history.

CHAPTER 3

JOURNALISM

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When Klein entered McGill University in 1926, he was both on the brink of a publishing career and at a point in his life where he was trying to define more clearly his religious direction. Although he had abandoned much of the orthodox ways of his childhood, Klein still adhered to his traditional background. As he stepped further away from his East-European roots, especially within the assimilated university milieu, he recognized that his developing secularism would always be measured by a traditional Jewish outlook.

At McGill, he encountered a vibrant student literary environment which greatly influenced his poetry. He was introduced to the founding group of The McGill Fortnightly Review: A.J.M. Smith, F.R. Scott, Leon Edel, Louis Schwartz and Leo Kennedy. It was a periodical dedicated to publishing poetry which vehemently rejected the Romantic tradition in Canadian verse. The McGill Group of poets, commonly referred to as "The McGill Movement", derived much of their inspiration from the Imagists, French Symbolists, seventeenth and nineteenth century English and French Metaphysicals, Yeats, and The Golden Bough. Mythology gleaned from Sir James George Frazer's study of myths was an important influence in Kennedy's work

Klein and Leo Kennedy were great friends, according to personal testimony and to their correspondence. Kennedy describes the relationship as "very close -- we fell in love with each other, in a proper way of course".¹ They continued to correspond with each other after Kennedy left Montreal. Their letters abound with warm personal exchanges as well as positive criticism of their respective work.

The group's contribution to the Canadian modern movement in poetry was deeply influenced by an understanding of the importance of myth, symbolism and irony, in the modern idiom. In addition, they were responsible for creating a vigorous form of criticism addressing the "new poetry" of modernists emerging in the United States and Britain, and the social unrest of the times. It was from the work of poets such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound that they received much of their impulse to create their own brand of poetry reflecting contemporary issues in a contemporary language which experimented with new techniques. These experiments took the form of poetry in free verse with unconventional metre. It addressed relevant issues, and a modern audience. In their view, many of their predecessors dealt with irrelevant, outmoded themes. Klein illustrates the prevailing attitude towards the Romantic poets in one of his poems where he taunts: "P.S./If you desire English text, then go/To Rupert Brooke whose bugles always Blow;/Or to Tennyson/who will tell any son/of Battle's benison!" (CP 98) Miriam Waddington.

¹Conversation with Colman Klein, January 12, 1981, and with Leo Kennedy, April 6, 1983.

suggests that Klein, in this admonishment of the older poets, is perhaps angrily addressing something in himself that cannot easily be relinquished.² It is a valid point for, given Klein's nature, it was perhaps difficult for him to surrender completely to modernism at the expense of an older and valued poetic tradition. His poems are often clothed in rich Chaucerean and Shakespearean allusions, along with echoes of the Bible and Jewish legends.

Some of Klein's early poetry was criticized for being too derivative of the traditional poets. Klein's fusing of Jewish themes and classical imagery were cited as too obscure and archaic. Leon Edel claims that Klein's "... use of language is wholly Jewish in his search for high sounding, pontifical words which cunningly employed ... is exciting and exotic, but runs the risk of surfeiting the reader".³ Louis Dudek writes: "The archaic rhetoric of Shakespeare which Klein adopted is intended to suggest the Jewishness of his themes; and in fact it is possible to think of Elizabethan English as more like Jewish or Latin than sober Christian speech; but this language experiment of Klein's -- really private language -- cannot be called a success".⁴ However, in a letter to Yiddish critic S. Nizer, Klein makes his important point that language is one of the most important considerations in writing

²Waddington, A.M. Klein, p. 43.

³Leon Edel, "Poetry and Jewish Tradition", A.M. Klein Critical Views on Canadian Writers, pp. 15-16.

⁴Louis Dudek, "A.M. Klein", ibid., p. 70.

poetry: "One of the chief factors in the creation of poetry is language; my mind is full of linguistic echoes from Chaucer and Shakespeare, even as it is of the thought-forms of the prophets; and if these creep into the text it is further to fulfill the definition of poetry, which suggests but does not say". (C. Th. 88) Caplan is perhaps more correct in regarding Klein as assimilating traditional forms for his own purpose in creating poetry:

In his traditionalism, Klein went against some of the tendencies of the modernist movement. It is true for a short period in the early thirties he tried copying the imagists, and in several long poems he mimicked Eliot. But these were digressions; his primary aim was to assimilate classical forms, making them his own, and to arrive at the point where imitation ends and virtuosity begins. It is in this sense that one can speak of Klein's experimentation in verse -- he was not an originator or inventor of techniques, but a talented craftsman patiently learning to perform the ancient art. (C. Th. 61)

An important outgrowth of this new vitality in Canadian poetry was the formation of an organized Montreal group of poets who encouraged one another and introduced modernist theory and practice to Canada. They published several periodicals including The McGill Fortnightly Review (November 1928 - June 1929). The McGill group's collaboration also resulted in an important anthology of poetry called New Provinces, Poems of Several Authors (1936). Klein was included in this volume which was hailed as a significant step in the direction of modernism.

Peter Stevens, in his introduction to The McGill Movement, states that Klein's writing is too thematically Jewish to be treated

together with the McGill group of poets. His rationale is that Klein's work be considered "as a separate entity".⁵ But in Stevens' decision to exclude Klein from his study, he is ignoring the very fact that Klein produced vital poetry precisely at the time of the McGill Movement. Klein and the group, as M.W. Steinberg observes, definitely influenced each other; Klein was indeed very much a part of the group of Montreal writers who reshaped Canadian poetry. Steinberg speaks of Klein's "role in the community of writers": of his association with Kennedy, Smith, Scott, et al, and of the influence of this group on Canadian poetry in the 1940s and 50s.⁶

Klein was never published in the pages of The McGill Fortnightly Review because he was a freshman in 1926. He had submitted a poem for the final issue; it was accepted on condition he alter a word in the last line. He refused, and thus his work never appeared in The Fortnightly. (C. Th. 26-27) Klein succeeded in publishing, however, in the shortlived Canadian Mercury, and (soon after) in the prestigious Canadian Forum. He enjoyed the latter as a magazine which shared his own broadened vision with respect to the arts as well as politics. It is interesting to note that hardly any of Klein's Jewish prose or poetry ever appeared in the Canadian Forum.

⁵Peter Stevens, The McGill Movement: A.J.M. Smith, F.R. Scott and Leo Kennedy (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1969), Introduction.

⁶M.W. Steinberg, "The Achievement of A.M. Klein", The A.M. Klein Symposium, p. 79.

Eventually Klein's readers were generally distinguished by two groups -- a mixed readership in Canada, and a distinctly Jewish one in the United States, where he was read in a number of Jewish cultural periodicals.⁷

The fact that Klein continually encountered two audiences during his writing career must have caused him some frustration. He was often refused by editors for the Jewishness of his themes. Klein once complained that criticism of his work in some English journals (as opposed to the Jewish ones) focussed on what Klein called "a narrow chauvinism, a retrogressive nostalgia for outmoded traditions, a too-zealous remembrance of things past". (C. Th. 86) Such criticism ignored, he insisted, the "volume", the larger concerns of his work as a whole. The bitter remark suggests that Klein's typical themes, in his view, were definitely universal ones. In a letter to A.J.M. Smith, Klein complained of negative criticism by E.K. Brown: "With most of the strictures which he finds in my poetry I may agree; but Lord, O Lord, why must ... he ... go flaunting my circumcision. I am not a poet because I'm a Jew; ... it's an adolescent trick -- this whimsical opening of another man's fly".⁸

Since the McGill Fortnightly Review ceased publication while Klein was still a freshman, he began to edit and write a weekly literary

⁷See Caplan, Like One That Dreamed, p. 55.

⁸A.M. Klein, letter from Klein to Smith, 30 November, 1943, "Some Letters of A.M. Klein to A.J.M. Smith, 1941-1951", The A.M. Klein Symposium, p. 9.

column which was published in the McGill Daily. The column, titled "The McGilliad", should not be confused with a magazine he later edited. The column came out every Saturday for eight consecutive weeks starting on October 29, 1927. After a brief interval, it was replaced (March 1930) by a literary magazine of the same name. (C. Th. 27-29) Klein had graduated from McGill after the first two issues. David Lewis replaced Klein as editor; the magazine continued until April 1931. In his first editorial, Klein states the policy of the publication which was directed towards the entire literary community. It is noteworthy as an illustration of Klein's early approach to the art of writing:

The editorial policy is simply that there is no policy. It is a desire of the Editorial Board to make this magazine a representative University publication. There are in our midst conservative, liberals and labourites, idolaters and iconoclasts, traditionalists and ultra modernists, religious adherents and religious skeptics, idealists and materialists, patriots and cosmopolites. Every opinion and class is represented in our University publication and every opinion of class will attain equal and unprejudiced consideration from the editors. All that the Editorial Board requires of a contribution is that it have literary excellence and be devoid of any willful offensiveness.⁹

Years later, in a response to A.J.M. Smith's queries regarding his creative motivations, Klein replied:

... You know that such questions elicit only the sheerest of arrogant balderdash. What shall I say in reply: I sing because I must! — How phoney! Or that I wish to improve the world with my rhyme! ... How ridiculous! Or that I seek to

⁹A.M. Klein, "Editorial", The McGilliad, Vol. I, No. 1 (March 1930), p. 2.

express the standards of my age, etc. Me. I will have none of that cant. Simply expressed, I write poetry only to reveal my civilization, my sensitivities, my craftsmanship. This however, is not to be quoted.¹⁰

Klein graduated from McGill University in 1930 with a strong background in the classics, political science and economics. He proceeded to study law at the University of Montreal. In 1934, a year after his graduation, he opened a law office with his friend Max Garmaise. (C. Th. 29, 34)

By the time Klein emerged as a lawyer in the early 30s, his strong sense of cultural identity sensitized him to other ethnic minorities. Klein deplored racial discrimination of any kind and was continually pleading for a world in which "all things and all people stand equal in the great and universal design" (BS 224). In reply to a Time Magazine article in which French Canadians of Quebec were all tarred as anti-semites, Klein responded:

This simply is not the truth; and one has a right to question the motive of such wholesale prosecution ... Anti-semitism is a danger to the public welfare not because it stems from Quebec or Ontario; it is reprehensible wherever it lifts its ugly head; and the geography of its manifestations, unfortunately, is not restricted ... To use the defense of one minority, solely as a means of attack against another, is still to participate in the dissemination of race hatreds. The struggle for democratic principles is not a struggle between areas; it is a struggle between the forces of light, everywhere, against the forces of darkness, everywhere. (BS 230-231)

¹⁰A.M. Klein, letter from Klein to Smith, 21 January, 1943, "Some Letters of A.M. Klein to A.J.M. Smith, 1941-1951", The A.M. Klein Symposium, p. 3.

It is significant to note that Klein probably studied law at a French university in order to better understand the French milieu. He identified with the problems of trying to preserve French traditions amidst an encroaching English society, and was indeed one of the first anglophones to articulate the real concerns of the French Canadians.

Steinberg comments:

Klein's treatment of French-Canadian society is perhaps almost as important as his more parochial concern with matters Jewish; indeed some may argue even more important. His achievement here is significant not merely in literary terms -- although some of his best poems are those dealing with aspects of French Canadian life -- but noteworthy also because his poems express a sympathetic understanding of this life and an appreciation of its values at a time when it was largely ignored by the non-French speaking majority, or misunderstood, or treated with condescension.¹¹

Indeed, his last published collection, The Rocking Chair and Other Poems (July 1948), embodies Klein's astute observations of French-Canadian life and the value he places on its cultural survival. He celebrates a people within an indigenous landscape enveloped by unique customs. This collection, which won the Governor General's award for poetry, is significant in Klein's creative development. For the first time he turned away from Jewish themes and concentrated on the more contemporary issues of his immediate environment. He remarks:

... for an interval I have abdicated the Hebrew theme which is my prime mover to look upon the French-Canadian in this province; we have many things in common; a minority position; ancient memories; and a desire for group survival. Moreover, the French-Canadian enjoys much -- a continuing and distinctive culture,

¹¹M.W. Steinberg, "The Achievement of A.M. Klein", The A.M. Klein Symposium, p. 77.

solidarity, land -- which I would wish for my own people.
(C. Th. 143)

The poem "The Rocking Chair" personifies the rocking chair as a unique member of a French-Canadian family, the mainstay of culture and tradition, marking the variance of life with its comforting beat, the very symbol of life's repetitious rhythms: "O, like some Anjou ballad, all refrain,/which turns about its longing, and seems to move/to make a pleasure out of repeated pain,/its music moves, as if always back to a first love". (CP 296)

In this group of poems, Klein sees his own ancient tradition transcending racial boundaries and becoming part of the Canadian mosaic, engulfed within a powerful and challenging landscape. Tom Marshall writes: "In this he expresses what must become the collective Canadian consciousness, a tapestry of minority groups, each is its own cultural garrison or ghetto and surrounded by a fast and forbidding landscape".¹² Rather than abdicating Hebrew themes, as Klein suggests, one sees that he is quite consistent with the ideas expressed in his more Jewish poems. His non-Jewish poems retain a Jewish spirit as he articulates concerns common to both cultures.

Central to all of Klein's activities and writing was his passionate commitment to Zionism. He saw it as an outgrowth of Jewish tradition with its cherished values and ideals. He perceived Zionism as a catalyst to Jewish life, a unifying force, strengthening its fragile existence within

¹²Tom Marshall, "The Nth Adam", Harsh and Lovely Land, The Major Canadian Poets and the Making of a Canadian Tradition (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1979), p. 57.

an increasingly hostile world. For Klein, however, Zionism was more than a political entity; it embodied the evolution of Judaism as a relevant religion within modern civilization. Zionism became part of Klein's faith, a development of his inherited orthodoxy. He fervently declared: "... Zionism to us is not only a political plan, an economic solution, or a cultural way of life. It is also a faith. We are positively convinced and we firmly do believe that we can no longer continue without a country to call our own". (BS 26, italics added)

Klein's official Zionist affiliation began with Young Judea, an international youth movement dedicated to educating Jewish youth in the ideals of Zionism. Klein wrote for its monthly magazine, The Judean, and became its editor from 1928 -1932. He was soon made Young Judea's educational director. This enabled him to travel to various other groups within the organization across Canada, lecturing on Zionism and other related topics. He organised programs for group leaders dealing with the history of Judaism, Zionism and Hebrew literature. (C. Th. 30) He constantly stressed the unifying and cultural principles of Zionism. In the Yearbook for 1931 he wrote: "For when Zionists achieve their objective in Palenstine, their efforts do not stop between the Jordan and the Mediterranean; the influence of the Homeland must then radiate back again to every abandoned and far-flung corner of the exile, and produce the solidarity of Jewry, and the effluorescence of our culture".¹³ In that same essay, Klein zealously proclaimed the purpose of Zionism, and the

¹³A.M. Klein, "Aims and Ideals of Young Judea", Yearbook of Young Judea (1931), p. 9.

necessity for active involvement by young Canadian Jews in the cause of a Jewish Homeland in Palestine:

The time has come for Canadian Jewish youth to take its destiny in its own hands, and in a manner fitting the tradition of its past, to mould its national future. We cannot wait for miracles to intervene; we cannot wait for the Messiah to come riding upon a donkey that has grown lean shanked waiting for him; we cannot wait to hear his blast from a shofer swathed sevenfold in cobwebs; nor can we depend, as recent occurrences have so painfully illustrated, upon the benevolence of nations whose goodwill is tempered with political exigency. We must be the masters of our own fate. Jewish life as at present constituted, with barrenness, and emptiness, its utter meaninglessness, its haphazard activity, stands as an imperious challenge to Canadian Jewish Youth.¹⁴

Over the years, these sentiments recur throughout Klein's many essays and speeches on Zionism. But the remarks in that 1931 article had an urgency which almost predicted the impending Holocaust and the post-war utterances of "never again". Furthermore, Klein is implying his own Jewish direction. And, acknowledging the importance of Judaic tradition, he implies that orthodox ritual is obsolete in face of imminent catastrophe. Klein felt traditional Judaism was meaningless if it could not address the contemporary needs of the Jewish people as a whole.

Although Klein was not attached to a specific tenet of Zionism he was attracted to various factions. "Cultural Zionism" was one with which Klein identified for its inclusion of culture and religion within the dogmas, as opposed to Zionists who focussed solely on economic and political structures. He also understood the more militant Revisionists. However, Klein was basically loyal to Theodore Hertzl and Max Nordau, the

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 11.

founders of Zionism, literary men whom he admired for embodying the highest ideals in Jewish life. Klein responded to what he called their "close association between moral standards and political activity". (BS 119) They epitomized, in Caplan's phrase, Klein's "idealized image of the poet-statesman". (C. Th. 32-33)

A decade of freelance non-fictional writing led, in 1937, to Klein's becoming the editor of the Canadian Jewish Chronicle (CJC), a position he held until the mid-1950s. Requiring extra income as a married man during the Depression, Klein had found employment with the Zionist Organization of Canada, eventually editing The Canadian Zionist, in 1936. With this, and his earlier experience with The Judean, Klein was ready for an important editorial position.

The journalistic side of Klein helped satisfy both his creative and community consciousness. Through journalism, Klein sought to spread the word of Zionism; to educate and influence his fellow Jews, as did some of the Jewish leaders he greatly respected. He also felt it was his duty to inform the Christian world of the real plight of the Jewish people, news which daily newspapers often neglected to record. He cited two main purposes of the CJC: "The first was the fact that it served, and serves as a means of bringing to our English-speaking population a knowledge of the past and an awareness of Jewish problems in the present. The second was as a means of communicating with our non-Jewish fellow citizens who first learned of the reaction of our community to current events only from its columns".¹⁵

¹⁵A.M. Klein, "Thirty Years of the Canadian Jewish Chronicle", CJC, May 12, 1944, p. 4.

Thus, it was only natural for Klein to combine his law and writing careers with journalism. By entering the field of journalism, Klein was following in the footsteps of a prominent Hebrew and Yiddish social critic Reuven Brainin, who edited the Yiddish daily Der keneder adler between 1912-1915. In an illuminating article, Ben Lappin writes of Klein repeating what Reuven Brainin had done before the first World War in establishing Montreal as an important cultural centre:

Only this time the writing was in English instead of Yiddish. Klein was more than a pioneer among his younger contemporaries. What marked him off from others was his devotion to the idea of rendering his heritage into English, retaining in the process its idiomatic flavour. He sought to gain universal acceptance as a poet in the Canadian world of literature by working undeviatingly within and through his community. His scholarship in Hebrew and Yiddish equipped him for the challenge, and he felt as naturally Canadian being preoccupied with his Jewish world as the English and French writers were with theirs.¹⁶

Moreover, Klein's journalistic writing was very much in keeping with the tradition of modern Jewish writing. The early Yiddish press, both in Europe and North America, particularly at the turn of the century, was most influential in alerting Jews to social changes, urging them to join various political and radical factions. In North America, Yiddish newspapers were a major forum for Yiddish literature, publishing many of the leading European writers. In Canada they not only carried local news, but focussed on relevant Canadian issues, establishing important links between

¹⁶Ben Lappin, "The Receding World of Abraham Klein", unpublished essay, 1981, p. 5, Canadian Jewish Congress Archives; a shorter version of this was published in Viewpoints, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Spring 1981), pp. 16-29.

the Jewish and Canadian communities.¹⁷ A discussion of the socio-political background of the Jewish community between the two wars which follows provides a context for understanding Klein's journalism.

David Rome writes that the forms for modern Jewish writing both in Hebrew and Yiddish are very deeply rooted in journalism. So-called creative writing usually placed second in importance as an influence on the Jewish community. It is thus significant to realize that the main body of literary expression was represented by Jewish newspapers, magazines and periodicals of the day. Rome continues:

Of that periodical press, we may say in retrospect that it carried the first publication of world Jewish classics; that its discussion on current and abstract issues rivalled any academic press, and that the reader who lived on it was as highly educated and as continuously elevated as any denizen of the world's ivory institutions of learning.¹⁸

By the late nineteenth century, there occurred in Europe a vigorous revival in uses of the Yiddish language, resulting in a cultural renaissance which laid the foundation of a more secular outlook.¹⁹ No longer was the Jewish imagination concerned only with religious commentaries and

¹⁷See Eugene Orenstein, "Yiddish Culture in Canada Yesterday and Today", The Canadian Jewish Mosaic, p. 301.

¹⁸David Rome, "An Essay on Modern Jewish Times", Bernard Figler and David Rome, Hannaniah Meir Caiserman, A Biography (Montreal: Northern Printing and Lithographing, 1962), p. 452.

¹⁹See Mark Shechner, "Jewish Writers", Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing, ed. Daniel Hoffman (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1979), p. 196.

biblical allusions. It began to focus on the universal condition of modern man.²⁰ As the nineteenth century was ending, Jewish culture flowered both in Europe and America, finding expression in the Yiddish press, fiction, drama and scholarship. Jewish nationalism and the existing socialist movements further defined cultural activities. Yiddish, hitherto an unrespected garbled dialect, was elevated into a rich artistic language reflecting the many nuances of the Jewish people.

Developed over a thousand years ago by Ashkenazi Jews, Yiddish was a fusion of different languages. It borrowed heavily from Mediaeval German, biblical Hebrew and Aramaic as well as from Slavic tongues to form a rich language. Yiddish served the basic communicative needs of the Jews who lived in areas from Holland to the Ukraine. Along with Hebrew, it also functioned as a literary medium. However, Jews in Western Europe who desired assimilation soon found it politic to use less Yiddish. In Eastern Europe, where Jews functioned in more segregated shtetlach, Yiddish continued as the main language of communication. With the increased pace of social change at the turn of the century, it became the epitome of Jewish expression.²¹

With the beginning of mass immigration to North America, many Jews struggled to keep Yiddish culture alive in face of the reality of assimilation. In the melting-pot environment of the United States, English became the dominant language and it was only a matter of time

²⁰ Ibid., p. 195.

²¹ See Eugene Orenstein, "Yiddish Culture in Canada Yesterday and Today", The Canadian Jewish Mosaic, p. 293 and "Yiddish Language", The Encyclopaedia Judaica, Vol. 16, p. 790.

before the daily use of Yiddish was abandoned. Its form became limited to artistic expression in literature, theatre and the press.²² However, the tragic destruction of East-European Jews in the Holocaust really destroyed the use of Yiddish as a viable language. Yiddish and all it stood for virtually died in the ovens with a people whose language reflected tradition and history as well as the suffering and humour of daily life. A sprinkling of Jewish writers still use Yiddish for artistic expression, evoking Jewish experience that is now lost in the vapours of time.

Jewish literary life of Montreal in the years leading up to the first World War reflected the cultural renewal occurring in Europe and the United States. Because in Canada the pace of assimilation was somewhat different and slower, Yiddish culture was not only established in literature but in the educational system. Eugene Orenstein writes: "Believing that modernized Jewish education was essential to the continuity of Jewish identity and national creativity, [Jewish nationalists] created the secular Jewish school with Yiddish as a language of instruction".²³ It was also easier for Jewish national identity to assume greater influence in Canada because of the Yiddishist nature of the prevailing socialist movements. In Montreal, the labour-Zionists were particularly enriched by the membership of two leading intellectuals of the time, Dr. Judah Kaufman, noted scholar and educator, and Reuven Brainin who wrote in Hebrew and

²²See Orenstein, ibid., p. 294.

²³Ibid., p. 299.

Yiddish.²⁴ In the midst of Montreal's developing Yiddish culture, the Jewish Public Library was founded by Reuven Brainin in 1915 to accommodate Jewish intellectual life. It was and still remains the cornerstone of Montreal Jewish culture. Klein described it as "answering the need of the local Jewish community — mainly workers and ordinary folk who, though confined to factory and shop, still hungered for a glimpse of the winged word that would lift them above their pedestrian day, still sought the cultural wherewithal for self-improvement".²⁵

In 1907, Herschel Wolofsky started Der keneder adler (Jewish Daily Eagle), a Yiddish newspaper specifically founded (in Klein's translation) to "... serve as an instrument towards building up that hometown feeling and communal solidarity which goes with a local paper ... and at the same time answer a crying intellectual need of the community".²⁶

Der keneder adler represented the growing population of Yiddish-speaking immigrants, many of whom vehemently attacked the prevailing social conditions of their new home and were attuned to a more leftist approach for solving problems. The paper generally attracted young intellectuals who were fervently opposed to being assimilated into an Anglo-Saxon environment. They were hostile to the ideas expressed by the anglophone Jewish Times, the only other Jewish newspaper in Montreal, one which

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 296, 299.

²⁵ A.M. Klein, "The Jewish People's Library", (A Radio Address delivered through Station CFCF) CJC, September 24, 1943, p. 8.

²⁶ H. Wolofsky, Journey of My Life, translated by A.M. Klein (Montreal: Eagle Publishing, 1945), p. 51.

represented the community's more assimilated wealthy and influential Jews. Wolofsky's keneder adler published a contingent of bright, intense writers whose essays and articles expounded upon ideals and philosophies, with much emotional theatrics.²⁷

Klein was quite familiar with many of the Yiddish writers and after he became editor of The Chronicle, his weekly visits to the Eagle offices helped consolidate friendships with both Wolofsky and the paper's Yiddish editor, Israel Rabinovitch. (C. Th. 80-81)

H.M. Caiserman, a prominent leader in the Jewish community and a regular contributor to the adler, described the paper as "... the spokesman of the community, the school for its writers and the builder of Canadian Jewry ...".²⁸ Stuart Rosenberg, noting the important influence of the early Yiddish press both with regard to Jews and Canadian journalism, writes:

It is a paradoxical truth of Canadian Jewish life: the earliest, pioneering Jewish periodicals were more virile, creative and reflective of the Jewish scene than those which survive today ... They had editorial content and ideological challenge. Indeed, they were partly responsible for shaping the Jewish milieu ... It is in the Yiddish press that Jews have left their most important mark on Canadian journalism ... it had succeeded in producing a special kind of journalism ... it printed many columns of interpretation and "background to the news", as well as in depth historical analysis. Moreover, it had provided an

²⁷ See Erna Paris, Jews/An Account of Their Experience in Canada, p. 31.

²⁸ As quoted by Bernard Figler and David Rome, Hannaniah Meir Caiserman, A Biography, pp. 187-188.

important stimulus to literary effort and served as a haven for modern Jewish literature. The works of Sholom Aleichem, and many other first-rank writers, first saw light in the columns of the Yiddish newspaper.²⁹

In addition to addressing a mainly Yiddish audience, Wolofsky eventually foresaw the need for an English-Jewish periodical which would speak to a more anglicized audience. CJC was therefore founded in 1914 as the English counterpart of Der keneder adler and became a forum for Anglo-Jewish literary and political expression. It was published by Wolofsky's Eagle Publishing Company and was widely read in the Jewish communities throughout the country. Unlike its predecessor, The Jewish Times, CJC discouraged assimilation, stressing strong identification with Jewish tradition and culture. Figler and Rome explain:

This press was not only the chronicle but also the pulpit of the community. It wielded the sense of conscience, loyalty and responsibility in tens of thousands of Jewish hearts [It] helped to create a vital and vigorous society which had its own group interest, developed the means for [its] attainment and related Canadian Jewish life to the wider totality of Judaism and of Canada.³⁰

The years between the two World Wars in Quebec additionally marked the Jewish community socially and politically. From within, the growing community cemented its existing small cultural and social groups by forming larger important organizations headed by The Canadian Jewish Congress and The Federation of Jewish Philanthropies. The groups

²⁹Stuart E. Rosenberg, The Jewish Community in Canada, In the Midst of Freedom (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1981), pp. 162-163.

³⁰Figler and Rome, Hannaniah Meir Caiseman, A Biography, p. 187.

advanced the overall causes of Zionism, health and welfare. In 1938, Samuel Bronfman, one of Montreal's wealthy businessmen and philanthropists, was elected Congress president, a position he held for twenty years. Klein was hired by Bronfman as his press aid and speech writer in connection with this organization. In the following years, Klein also became Bronfman's personal and general business consultant. (C. Th. 84)

These were the years of rising anti-semitism prefaced by the Plamondon trials of 1910. Joseph Edouard Plamondon, a Quebec City journalist and notary cited evidence from the Talmud proclaiming the Jews to be "Jesus killers". Of course, these bizarre accusations were squashed by Rabbi H. Abramowitz, an illustrious Talmud scholar, and in 1914 Plamondon was found guilty of falsely incriminating the Jewish race. However, elements of a rising French nationalism in Quebec found a use for Plamondon's ideas. Anti-semitic feelings finally erupted into the neo-fascism of the thirties.³¹

In the 1920s, the Jewish community was involved in a conflict over the "school question". Although various Jewish private schools had been established since the late 1800s, those Jewish children wishing to attend public schools in Quebec were generally pushed into the Protestant school systems. Jews were basically prohibited from expressing their own identity and cultural status within that system. Jewish immigrants protested this situation. They disliked the idea of being merely tolerated and desired a Jewish school system under the umbrella of the provincial

³¹ See Erna Paris, Jews, An Account of Their Experience in Canada, pp. 33, 34.

government. They stressed cultural rights within a pluralistic society.³² Their point, as David Rome explains, was that "Jews should have the distinct educational and political structure which is available under Canada's multi-cultural constitution".³³ However, the more affluent and assimilated Jewish sector opposed this idea, urging the immigrants to integrate themselves within the existing school board, where hopefully they would be rapidly acculturated. The immigrant population naturally resented being forced into an assimilated mode of education and the conflict raged on unresolved. A separate Jewish public school system was never really attained, while Jewish representation to the Protestant School Board did not occur until about 1968.

The problems over the school question not only polarized the Jewish community, but it fuelled the flames of anti-semitism. Rome writes:

In 1930, just as the school problem was finding a solution — with common approval of Jews, Protestants, the legislature and the courts — the highest levels of the Quebec Catholic Church spoke up: Under no condition would they tolerate Jews being recognized on any level as the equals of Catholics. With a heavy handedness probably not matched in Quebec history, they forced the abrogation of a new contract and a new law ... Their attitude launched an anti-semitic movement by Adrien Arcand which, upon retrospect with the passage of years, is most clearly unprecedented on the continent, and with few if any parallels west of Poland. Quebec Jews were isolated and under attack.³⁴

³² Ibid.

³³ David Rome, "Jews in Anglophone Quebec", The English of Quebec, p. 169.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 171.

The chaotic years leading up to the Second World War were undoubtedly a time of universal social unrest and rising fascism.

Quebec's unhealthy French nationalism began mirroring German Nazi propaganda. Adrien Arcand, an editor of three French weeklies, wrote (on May 1, 1931): "We have never hidden the fact that all our sympathies belong to the Hitler Movement".³⁵ Thus in 1932, as Hitler gained more power by winning control over a large number of seats in the German Reichstag, anti-semitism was increasing in the province of Quebec.

Mordecai Richler, in his memoir The Street, writes:

In the years leading up to the war neo-fascist groups were extremely active in Canada. In the United States there was Father Coughlin, Lindberg, and others. We had Adrien Arcand. The upshot was almost the same. So I can recall seeing swastikas and "A bas les Juifs" painted on the Laurentian highway. There were suburbs and hotels in the mountains and country clubs where we were not wanted, beaches and signs that read GENTILES ONLY, quotas at the universities and occasional racial altercations on Park Avenue. The democracy we were being invited to defend was flawed and hostile to us. Without a question it was better for us in Canada than in Europe, but this was still their country, not ours.³⁶

Klein, in one of his early articles, vividly illustrates the lurid anti-semitic journalism which surfaced in Quebec. He describes the editors of these newspapers as vicious men who were persistent in preserving the bigotry of mediaeval times:

³⁵ As quoted by Lita-Rose Betcherman, The Swastika and the Maple Leaf, Fascist Movements in Canada in the Thirties (Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1975), p. 20.

³⁶ Mordecai Richler, The Street (Toronto/Montreal: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), p. 60.

Accordingly, out of the museum they dragged the entire panoply of mediaevalism, and out of the archives all the Judaeophobic lampoons of the Dark Ages. Reviving the bigotry of seven centuries of barbarism, they accused the Jew of every crime in the criminal code; and when these gave out, invented new ones ... The Jew sprouts horns. The Jew poisons the environment. The Jew plots the overthrow of the world, and so on ad nauseum ...

To give it the touch of modernity, however, the editors ... filled their papers with slander as headline, garbled quotation as footnote, and forgery as space-filler. The contents of their pages, moreover, when analyzed, proved that what its publishers could not invent or copy, was supplied to them by a syndicate of anti-Semitic propaganda, trafficking in synthetic venom and co-operative hate. Its headquarters seemed to be Germany: when Hitler sneezed, they caught cold. Thus, the pest of Jew-hatred, like the bubonic plague, was being brought from continent to continent, through the medium of rats. (BS 27)

Klein's depiction of a somewhat malevolent Quebec reflected the deteriorating economic situation which, along with the prospect of war, further fostered anti-semitism. Ultra-nationalists Armand Lavergne and Abbé Groulx, spurred on by Adrien Arcand and publisher Joseph Ménard, fed the fires of facism, incurring deep unrest within the Jewish community. Premier Duplessis' government harboured the fascist movement in Quebec, citing Communism and Judaism as evil forces to be stamped out. Lita-Rose Betcherman writes:

On March 16, 1936, The Montreal Gazette reported on a meeting at Maisonneuve Market-hall where Salluste Lavery, the fascist mayoralty candidate of 1934, addressed a huge crowd on the evils of the Popular Front charging that Russia and Jews were behind it. Speaker after speaker followed him (including a former Conservative MLA) with various denunciations of the Jews, not least of which was a statement that "Hitler is ejecting Jews from Germany. That's what we need here".³⁷

³⁷ Betcherman, The Swastika and the Maple Leaf, Fascist Movements in the Thirties, p. 85.

Klein very swiftly responded to these anti-semitic attacks in his usual erudite manner, citing mediaeval history and Christian theology in order to repudiate ridiculous charges. One described the Jews as a blood-thirsty murdering race: "In vain would we say to Lavergne what Tertullian said to those who accused the early Christians of using human blood in the Eucharist: 'If you believe it, prove it; if you cannot prove it, cease to believe'".³⁸ In another biting piece titled "Duplessis, The Postman Who Rings Twice", Klein accuses the Quebec Premier, founder of the Union National Party, of slandering the Jewish race. Duplessis implied that there was an existing conspiracy against the government between the Liberal Party and the Zionist Movement. There was no evidence to this effect, resulting in the whole case being dropped, but not before an enormous amount of antagonism was stirred up between the Jewish and French communities. Klein consistently warned that by continuing these slanderous tactics, irreversible damage would be incurred: "For certainly the famous words of Dr. John Donne are here applicable, not only to the Jewish population which has already been touched, but also to the French and English populations: Send not to know for whom the bell tolls, -- it tolls for thee!".³⁹

Klein saw the abusive attacks on Jews as a potential danger to the Jewish community and warned against silence: "If there was a necessity for action, it is now. This evil growth which was not nipped in the bud,

³⁸ A.M. Klein, "The Holy See Versus Armand Lavergne", CJC, August 12, 1932, p. 17.

³⁹ A.M. Klein, "Duplessis, The Postman Who Rings Twice", CJC, February 25, 1944, p. 4 (italics Klein's).

must be lopped off before it becomes a veritable apple of Sodom ...
 These attacks are preludes to we know not what". (BS 28) But with his typically humanist slant, Klein viewed Quebec's anti-semitism as harmful for not only Jews but also for all residents of the province: "An irreparable wrong has been done to the reputation of the Jews of this province. An indelible blot has been cast upon the name of Quebec. Measures must be taken; and redress must be done". (BS 29) Thus, by the time Klein took up his post as editor of the CJC, the tenuous socio-political climate of Montréal, along with world-wide unrest, provided him with a densely layered backdrop against which he produced his editorials and essays.

Klein's journalism, like his poetry and fiction, was always rooted in his deep traditional and historical awareness. This gave an urgency to his writing as he commented on the prevailing turbulent times. Klein, very much a product of Montreal's unique Yiddish literary circle and the cultural institutions described above, tried to infuse English journalism with the essence of this milieu. He transferred, as Lappin states, "the close rapport between Yiddish writer and community into the English-speaking world he addressed from French-Canada".⁴⁰ The kind of journalism which Klein admired embodied the "sensitive conscience" which he praised in the work of Pierre van Passen. (BS 206)

In evaluating the enormous body of prose Klein produced, especially during the years he was associated with the Chronicle, one

⁴⁰ Ben Lappin, "The Receding World of Abraham Klein", Viewpoints, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Spring 1981), p. 19.

cannot help but admire the sheer diversity of subject matter and the scholarly knowledge with which he approached discussion on the Talmud, Jewish history and international politics. More than any other publication, the Chronicle published Klein's poetry, short fiction, book reviews and literary criticism. The writings which Klein published in this journal constitute, as Steinberg says "... an intellectual and to some extent literary autobiography of A.M. Klein".⁴¹ Furthermore, his weekly contributions to the Chronicle afford a valuable source for tracing Klein's own artistic development, illustrating his reading tastes as well as seeds of ideas which ultimately grew into poems and stories. Klein's erudite style of writing, however, was appreciated by very few, as it was often much above the level of his general readership. Even after complaints by some of his staff, Klein refused to bow to the pressure of using an easier vocabulary: "Let them go to a dictionary and rise to my level, I'm not going down to theirs".⁴² M.W. Steinberg elaborates:

His unusual diction and abundant learned allusions, which clearly reflect his mastery of language and his knowledge of Jewish and non-Jewish culture, also suggest at times an unawareness of the limitations of his readers, or of the fact that they might be distracted or bored by his frequent use of foreign expressions or English words that are archaic or pedantically rare. Perhaps it would be more correct to speak of his unconcern -- for he must have been aware -- an unconcern that reflects a degree of indifference to the level of his readership, an occasional readiness to subordinate his journalistic responsibility to his literary impulses. While on the one hand it is to his credit that he never

⁴¹M.W. Steinberg, "A.M. Klein as Journalist", Canadian Literature, No. 82 (Autumn 1979), p. 21.

⁴²As quoted by Caplan, Like One That Dreamed, p. 80.

wrote down to his public and that he tried to be himself in his writing saying what he had to say in the manner that best suited and pleased himself, these characteristics of his style suggested a measure of intellectual ostentation, and his indifference, insofar as it existed, perhaps indicates an aspect of cultural snobbishness, or at least conscious distancing, that seems to have been an element in Klein's complex make-up. (BS xx)

Steinberg is quite right, for Klein's superior manner (which displayed his profound grasp of language and meaning) was ultimately lost on his general readership. Moreover, it renders a paradoxical picture of Klein's public persona. On the one hand he sees himself as a passionate spokesman for his people while, at the same time, his impatience with mediocracy lends an air of superiority and isolation to the man and his writing.

If, at times, his editorials seemed to be hastily composed, the more profound essays constitute an impressive sense of strong values with respect to his overall view of life. His weekly editorials and articles compose a wide range of views and opinions, reflecting different moods; somber, didactic or humorous. But it is his humanistic approach to the events that marks his journalism, for his poignant responses to existing evils continually upheld his ideals of human dignity and the goal of universal brotherhood. Klein's philosophy was one that espoused love of man, "not the olympian love of the mighty man ... but the love of man which exists as between equals, and which manifests itself in the thousand kindnesses to which human relationship gives scope". (BS 162)

Steinberg writes that Klein stressed the necessity for art to surpass the inhibiting boundaries of chauvinism, maintaining that there

was a recognizable symbiotic relationship between art and culture; that one's traditional roots must never be sacrificed for sake of universality.⁴³

In an article entitled "Talents That Should Have Been Ours", Klein admonishes those Jewish American artists who in their writing have chosen to ignore their inherited roots and have thereby compromised their "creative powers". He determines that "it is not the function of the creative artist to be a public relations counsel for his people, although it is no disgrace if he is".⁴⁴ However, referring to the assimilationist policies projected by these writers, Klein poignantly asks:

Will the plight of their race, recovering now from an ordeal which has cruelly lopped it to two-thirds its size, evoke in Jews, in artists whose trade is sensitivity, a feeling of one-ness with the persecuted, or tragedy shared with kith and kin? Will the inspiration of Palestine banish their sense of inferiority. Will the supercilious glaze fall from their eyes, as in the light of current history they survey again the treasures of their heritage — a heritage which consists not of a vague mystique, but of a culture recorded and a weltanschauung discernible? Will these talents at last come to realize the alternative that faces them: that they are ours — or nobody's?⁴⁵

Klein was angered by assimilated Jews. Essentially, he believed that assimilation was the result of a kind of Jewish self-hatred based on ignorance: "When one considers the great gifts which our Rabbis

⁴³M.W. Steinberg, "The Conscience of Art: A.M. Klein on Poets and Poetry", A Political Art, Essays and Images in Honour of George Woodcock, ed. William H. New (Vancouver B.C.: University of British Columbia Press, 1978), p. 82.

⁴⁴A.M. Klein, "Talents That Should Have Been Ours", CJC, May 10, 1946, p. 15.

⁴⁵Ibid.

and philosophers have bestowed upon humanity, then to deny one's relationship with the nation to which they belong appears to be not only a sign of self-imposed disgrace, but also of ignorance". (BS 23)

Klein's attachment to Judaic traditional values carried into his deep appreciation of English culture and literature. In his review of E.J. Pratt's "Dunkirk", he praised the poet for his passionate rendering of human suffering, articulating the strong traditional background of the British people, their fighting spirit in face of adversity, and the poet's responsibility to articulate truth:

No aristocratic poet, sitting in an ivory tower, can hope to understand the emotion which agitates a subterranean bombshelter. Only one who has caught the spirit of an indomitable people, one between whom and his nation runs the electric current of mutual understanding and common endeavour, can hope to express those folk-sentiments which are of the essence of poetry. It is also true -- and this supplies an additional reason for the inarticulateness of the contemporary poet -- that events have moved with such speed that many of the poets -- who alas, are not political animals -- have been unable to keep pace with them. The third decade of this century was one which was characterized in its literature, by a too often indiscriminate worshipping of letters "of social significance". Too often, indeed, the poets have been what Mr. Archibald MacLeish has so aptly called "the camp-followers" with the cut-and-dried intellectual compartments of the red robin piping social significance.⁴⁶

Artists whose work manifested an "ivory tower" attitude and whose writing conformed to fashionable trends were both repugnant to Klein's sense of artistic ideals. It was a feeling he upheld with regard to his view of universal responsibility for suffering and evil. He once wrote: "... the great cosmic tragedies ... flow from the faulty

⁴⁶ A.M. Klein, "The Decencies Had Perished With Stukas", CJC, December 19, 1941, p. 6.

relationship between men [sic]⁴... For the statistics of centuries show that the greatest burden of unhappiness has come from one principle source: that the arm of every man is lifted up against his brother".

(BS 198)

Klein's journalism represents a comprehensive mirror of the times, resulting in an historical commentary of the remarkable decades in which he witnessed the depression, rising fascism, World War II, and the establishment of the State of Israel. Klein's position at the Chronicle coincided with one of the most eventful periods in modern Jewish history. His accounts of world-wide anti-semitism, the horrible annihilation of six million Jews and the final birth of the State of Israel make for incisive and fascinating reading. He was one of the few voices to warn of the impending doom of Hitlerism: "There is a lunatic abroad in Europe; and the world had better give heed". (BS 36) If nothing else, his journalism is one of the first records of Nazi brutality. He remains one of the first North American writers to address the tragedy of the Holocaust both in his essays and fiction. Linda Perley reiterates: "In his journalism Klein kindled the first burning indignation over the European catastrophe and in his poetry made the first literary approaches in North America to the Holocaust as it was happening".⁴⁷ In an article written in 1939, he voiced his deep concern over the plight of European Jewry, detailing acts of barbarity suffered by Polish Jews:

⁴⁷Linda Perley, "The Impact of the Holocaust on Canadian Jewish Writing" (University of Montreal, Ph.D. Thesis, 1980), p. 10.

Over a million and a half Jews in German Poland are undergoing slow but sure starvation. While rations are being distributed to the rest of the conquered population, entire towns and cities of Jews are being left without any sustenance whatsoever. Whatever possessions were left to them after the army of Huns passed through, have already been confiscated. Those who are not perishing of starvation, are succumbing to disease, and those who perchance escape both these fates, usually find themselves among the summarily shot. Executions take place without trial or accusation; it is an orgy of murder, in all its forms. Even women are not safe from the Nazi sadism. Jewish women are taken away from their children and compelled to work at hard labour for periods of forty-eight hours, without cessation. Death releases them more frequently than do their tormentors. (BS 65)

For the first seven years at the Chronicle, Klein's journalism was marked by his distress and frustration over the war and the events occurring in Europe. His many editorials passionately urged Canadians to be more vociferous about Jewish suffering in Nazi Europe: "... it is our duty in this hour of sorrow, to manifest to the world at large, by organized meetings of Jew and Gentile and by responsible utterances, that our brethren in Germany are not utterly forsaken, and that not in silence and submissiveness do we accept the cruel fate that barbarians have visited upon them". (BS 37) Yet by the end of the war, Klein is more struck by the profound Jewish historical significance of the Holocaust than the fact of Hitler's final demise. He remarks: "I wondered what place Hitler and his doings would now occupy in our folk-lore. I thought about the past years and the words blitzkrieg, lebensraum, festung Europa — portentous terms! — and how henceforth they would sound in the vocabulary of civilized man. But of one thing I was certain — these words and their kindred would never form part of our humour". (BS 238)

Klein's point is one that has preoccupied North American Jewish writing since the war. But it was not until the 1970s, with the important studies of Lawrence L. Langer and George Steiner, that the impact of the Holocaust on the artistic sensibility could be fully discussed.⁴⁸ Klein was probably the first North American writer to articulate the idea of a post-Holocaust consciousness. He clearly understood the tragedy of the Holocaust and its effect on Jewish civilization: "Truly the calamity which has befallen the Jewries of Europe is without parallel in our history; not the persecutions ... of the Crusades, not the pogroms of Chemnitzki, nor those, at a later date ... have taken so great a toll of Jewish life as have the camps, the 'medical institutes', the crematoria of the Third Reich".⁴⁹

In an illuminating recent study, Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi acknowledges that responses to the Holocaust in literature have generally emerged from a more Western or secular perspective, focussing on the individual's struggle with surviving in the post-Holocaust world. She explains, however, that there are Yiddish and Hebrew literary forms which perceive "... the Holocaust as a confluence of personal and collective destiny; [writers who] ... place the Holocaust within the spectrum of Jewish suffering and ... commemorate the cultural universe that was destroyed along with the

⁴⁸ Lawrence L. Langer, The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975); George Steiner, Language and Silence, Essays on Language, Literature and the Inhuman (New York: Atheneum, 1970).

⁴⁹ A.M. Klein, "The Jews of Europe", CJC, August 3, 1945, p. 3.

people".⁵⁰ Ezrahi's analysis views these particular writers (most of whom were victims of the Holocaust) as responding to the Holocaust within the context of on-going Jewish experience. For them the horrors of the Holocaust can only be understood with respect to a post-Holocaust future, one that recognizes the values of Jewish faith and historical tradition. Ezrahi writes:

It is in this context that the questions of theodicy and cultural continuity are raised ... not only the belief in divine justice but the entire fabric of society and culture which upheld that faith. Many of these writers draw upon the history and the social values embodied in the community, and they struggle not only with the past -- the destruction -- of the Jewish people, but with its future.⁵¹

Ezrahi's response to the Holocaust is similar to Klein's, forty years earlier. He perceived that the survival of Judaism was dependent upon the communal responsibility to Holocaust survivors and its historical significance for future generations. He wrote:

But there is yet another aspect under which the million who survive ought to be regarded -- that is, as a totality, as the means for the maintenance and continuation of our people. Succour brought to these, therefore, is not an act of charity; it is an act of national reconstruction. It is under this aspect, too, that the value of the survivors, as a national asset, is accentuated by the very fact that they constitute so minimal a remnant of so large an entity.⁵²

⁵⁰ Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, By Words Alone, The Holocaust in Literature (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 95, 97.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 109.

⁵² A.M. Klein, "The Jews of Europe", p. 3.

In a moving article called "The City of Chelm", Klein traces the mythical topsy-turvy world of Chelm, traditionally rooted in Jewish folktales and stories, a city permanently inhabited in the innocent childhood world of make-believe. He juxtaposes it to the real Polish city of Chelm, where the Nazis established their concentration camps. Historian Philip Friedman writes of the extermination camp of Sobibór (near Chelm, in the Lublin district), established 1942, where hundreds of thousands of Jews perished: "In addition to Polish Jews, numerous Jews from France, Holland, the USSR, and Czechoslovakia died there. On October 14, 1943; a revolt broke out at Sobibór. After killing a number of SS men, a group of several hundred inmates escaped; the majority lost their lives under fire from the camp guards or on the minefields surrounding the camp".⁵³

Klein with much bitter irony observes the bizarre appropriateness of Chelm as a centre for barbarous acts concocted in the minds of men who dwelt in the world of grotesque imagination:

Yet is there a certain appropriateness in the choice of Chelm as slaughter-house and asphyxiation centre. Chelm is a topsy-turvy town. What indeed would be more topsy-turvy, more contradictory of the eternal verities by which civilized men live, than the Sodom wickedness and Gomorrah iniquity of the Nazi regime. Here kindness is a crime and pity a misdemeanor. Here the cultured city is misplaced, and only the jungle reigns supreme. Here the accents of humanity are foreign, native only to the savage gutterals of the Black Forest. What is righteous throughout the world is in German Chelm unrighteous and wrong; what is recognized as law and

⁵³ Philip Friedman, Roads to Extinction, Essays on the Holocaust, ed. Ada June Friedman (New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1980), p. 234.

justice in other parts, in Nazi Chelm is scorned and despised. The world stands on its head. Chelm is for once literally upside-down, for man, divine man, is lowered into the cold earth while the beast stalks above, king and master of the devastated city.⁵⁴

The journalism Klein produced during his twenty year sojourn at the Chronicle can be roughly grouped under six headings: Zionism, the war, politics, Judaism, the Bible and literature. He was, however, never limited to a given subject, for he invariably sought to illustrate his points by a host of other topics.

The burning cause of Zionism was Klein's prime subject during the years leading up to the war, intensifying until Israel's independence in 1948. This was reflected by rhetorical articles criticizing policies which he felt at once misunderstood the desperate need for a Jewish independent State and the downright opposition of such by the British Government. The Balfour Declaration (1917) expressed British agreement with the idea of establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine, provided that the religious and political status of non-Jews be respected. During the years leading up to World War II, there was a rapid growth of Jewish settlements in Palestine under British Government. Jewish organizations were formed, including the Haganah, an underground army.⁵⁵ The Arabs were

⁵⁴A.M. Klein, "The City of Chelm", CJC, March 5, 1943, p. 4.

⁵⁵Klein's position on Israel's clandestine defence system is significant in that he morally approved of the Haganah, an organization which "... has never once committed an act of aggression..." (BS 272), but was vehemently opposed to the Irgun or the Stern Gang, groups who sometimes employed terrorism as a means of defence. He wrote: "Such acts run counter to the entire tradition of our people: they are wicked as they are stupid. they demonstrate an unspeakable callousness ... towards the fate of innocent persons ...". (BS 271)

openly hostile to Jewish presence in Palestine and their opposition to Zionism threatened the fragile peace imposed by the Balfour Declaration. Jewish immigration into Palestine unleashed Arab hostility, forcing Britain to re-evaluate the original Balfour Declaration. Thus, in 1937, the Peel Commission passed a bill sharply partitioning Palestine "into sovereign Arab and Jewish States", a situation which drastically curtailed Jewish immigration into Palestine. The Zionists saw this as a breach of faith and a surrender to Arab terrorism.⁵⁶ Jews felt deserted at a time of need. But although the White Paper produced by the Peel Commission was certainly unfair, some Jewish leaders were prepared to accept its decisions, ignorant of the turbulence of Nazi Germany and its genocidal policies.

Klein was outraged by this seemingly defeatist attitude and railed editorially against the Jews "to whom sufferance is the badge of all their tribe, who adopt a pose of practicability, shrug their shoulders and say; we accept. Such an attitude is impossible. It cannot be sincere".⁵⁷ In the following excerpt from the editorial, Klein virulently criticizes the British and their Peel Commission for a lack of insight and compassion:

It thus appears that the Balfour Declaration, once a headline across the pages of Jewish history has been reduced to less than a footnote.

⁵⁶ See Bernard Wasserman, Britain and Jews of Europe 1939-1945 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 2-20.

⁵⁷ A.M. Klein, "Balfour! Thou Shouldst be Living at this Hour", CJC, July 9, 1937, p. 2.

For in 1917, the promise -- how ironic that word sounds -- envisaged an area on both sides of the Jordan of 45,000 square miles ... the final area of the Jewish State will be about 7% of the original promise. Such may well be the settlement of a bankrupt; but certainly not that of the British Empire ... The issuance of the report is timed with a sense of the macabre. Particularly at a time when in Poland, in Germany, and in other countries where legislation and statistics have rendered our people a surplus population, thousands of Jews are clamoring for entry into their Homeland, particularly at such a time is it cruel and callous to constrict that Homeland to the dimensions of a strait-jacket. For the Royal Commissioners have, in fact, not recommended a Jewish State; it is a Jewish suburb that they are setting up, a ghetto on the Mediterranean.⁵⁸

Klein's strong editorial comments on this issue caused the publisher of the Chronicle to issue a disclaimer: "While the publisher of this journal agrees with most of the arguments of the editorial, still, because of its conclusions, it cannot be taken as the editorial policy of this paper, but as purely the personal opinions of the undersigned".⁵⁹ This was the only time the newspaper took this stance during Klein's entire affiliation with it.

The editorial's further significance is in its illustration of Klein's attitude towards the subservient image of the Jewish people. He strongly identified with the Zionist sense of self-defence, and deplored any hint of Jewish obsequiousness. He maintained that the history of Judaism was always one of heroism, but as a result of persecution over the centuries this was transformed into passive endurance. Klein believed, then, that the hope of Jewish survival was dependent on a return of active

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

resistance on the part of world Jewry. In an article entitled "The Modern Maccabee", he wrote:

The tradition of heroism extends from the conquest of the Kings of Canaan up to the expulsion of the Jews from Palestine, despite the revolutions of Bar Cochba, by the Roman legions. With the diaspora, however, courage was not squeezed out of the Hebrew heart — it merely transformed itself from active heroism which it had been hitherto, into a passive one, a heroism of endurance.

Throughout the Middle Ages, wandering over every unwelcoming corner of the world, we have been a people of mute bravery. It has been the heroism of endurance, of long suffering, of martyrdom ... no epic written in stone eroded by tears, can do justice to this heroism, not of the triumphant erectness but of the bent back, this heroism, not of the victor, but of the vanquished. The courage of submission which scoffed at the faggots of the priest and scorned the knouts of the Cossack is once more with the emancipation of our people and with their return to Palestine being transformed from passive endurance to active resistance, from martyrdom to Defence — Haganah.
(BS 10-11)

Klein was equally critical of other Jews who were completely unsympathetic to the Zionist cause. In a 1934 article, "Within Zionism", Klein assaults a certain William Zuckerman who had written an essay which was published in the periodical Opinion. Mr. Zuckerman contended that Zionism was "too much concerned with petty Palestinian projects, the whole to the detriment of the interest of World Jewry".⁶⁰ Klein with much factual precision reduces Zuckerman's pronouncements into shambles, condemning him in the process as a cowardly "diaspora nationalist". Similarly Klein's vitriolic attack upon Arthur Hays Sulzberger, the then

⁶⁰ A.M. Klein, "Within Zionism", The Canadian Zionist (May 1934), p. 4.

publisher of the prestigious New York Times, reveals his undying concern for Zionism. In "The Jew Behind the Times", Klein passionately criticizes Mr. Sulzberger for his anti-Zionist speech delivered in England:

It is indeed so easy for Mr. Sulzberger to be altruistic about his people's aspirations. It costs him nothing. He is so nicely ensconced in his position that Palestine seems to him to be but the fad of a bunch of ghetto-Jews. But Mr. Sulzberger — the ghetto-Jews are many and the Sulzbergers are few. In the concentration camps of occupied Europe, in the ghettos of Lublin and of Warsaw, it is the hope of Zion, and not the word of Sulzberger which brings strength and endurance in the hours of suffering. To them a passport to Eretz Israel is conceived of, not in terms of narrow nationalism, not in terms of anti-Arab feeling, but as simple unadulterated national and personal salvation ... To Palestine we come as of right, and not by tolerance or quota. These are facts which cannot be altered, by arguments even of one who describes himself, as Sulzberger does, as an American, albeit of the Jewish faith.⁶¹

The concluding lines of the above article epitomized Klein's impassioned dedication to Zionism and the plight of his fellow man, causes which he pursued throughout his active life. Another of Klein's responses has come to be known as the definitive reply to the anti-Zionist attack of Dr. Israel M. Rabinowitch in 1946.⁶² Klein repudiated Rabinowitch's remarks by reiterating his views of Zionism as a cultural and historical proponent of Jewish life and by linking North American Jewry to its roots

⁶¹ A.M. Klein, "The Jew Behind The Times", CJC, November 20, 1942, p. 6.

⁶² Dr. Rabinowitch, prominent Montreal Physician, Scientist and McGill University Professor, had addressed The Canadian Club of Montreal, calling for all Jews to "dissociate themselves from the 'terrorist Zionist conspiracy'". (See Stuart E. Rosenberg, The Jewish Community in Canada in the Midst of Freedom, pp. 35, 281.)

in Eastern Europe. Again, he emphasizes collective responsibility to the remnant victims of the Holocaust: "There did not seem to be, in the speech of the doctor, an awareness of the fact that had it not been for the accident of his father's transatlantic crossing, he, too, like almost anybody on this continent, might have been a European 'displaced person'". (BS 281)

Klein conceived of Zionism as a means of strengthening the already dispersed Jewish nation and culturally uniting it within its own land. He envisaged a cultural and spiritual renaissance shared by those of an earlier generation, contributing specific characteristics of a Jewish nature to the human condition.⁶³ At an early age Klein perceived:

It is to arouse the just recognition of the Jew to his own abilities, and to prompt him to use it for the creation of his own culture, that this Zionism exerts all its efforts. A culture not of one language (for in the diaspora that is an impossibility), but of one thought, a literature not one style, but of one spirit, a product singularly Jewish and yet remarkably cosmopolitan -- that was the dream of Achad Ha'am, that is the goal of cultural Zionism. (BS 5)⁶⁴

Another area which consumed Klein's intense interest over the years and was regularly published in the Chronicle was literary criticism.

⁶³ See M.W. Steinberg, "A.M. Klein as Journalist", pp. 23-24.

⁶⁴ Achad Ha'am (1856-1927) was a pseudonym for Asher Ginsburg, a prominent East-European intellectual whose name means "one of the people". He originated the idea of Cultural Zionism, believing that Judaism was a continual historical process and that Jewish culture, values and education were important proponents of Zionism.

As Ira Bruce Nadel notes, Klein is more respected for his poetry than his analytical writing.⁶⁵ One reason for this may be that his critical work concerning Yiddish and English literatures and related subjects remains uncollected. It is dispersed throughout the many editions of the CJC and in various literary magazines of the 30s and 40s. But Klein accomplished an impressive amount of critical writing throughout his career.

His erudite observations centre on poetry techniques, Canadian literature, Jewish folklore and the Bible. His complex analysis of the first three chapters of James Joyce's Ulysses occupied him from 1949 to 1951.⁶⁶ Nadel significantly observes that "more so than any other Canadian critic of his time, Klein brings a background of European literature supplemented by a thorough history of literary forms to his examination of texts. His criticism is a balance between an acute sense of tradition and a compelling desire to show what is new and unique".⁶⁷

Klein's approach to literary criticism was consistent with his moral standards regarding life and art. (C. Th. 112) His artistic sensibility meshed with an overall view of the human condition. Klein

⁶⁵ See Ira Bruce Nadel, "A.M. Klein on Literature", Jewish Dialogue (Passover, 1973), p. 4.

⁶⁶ "The Oxen of the Sun", Here and Now, January 1949; "The Black Panther", Accent, Spring 1950; "A Shout in the Street", New Directions, Annual of 1951. By the mid-fifties, Klein abandoned his Joyce criticism. Nothing remains of his lengthy notes. (C. Th. 186, 191, 192)

⁶⁷ Ira Bruce Nadel, "A.M. Klein on Literature", p. 4.

thought that T.S. Eliot's Nobel Prize in 1948 was largely undeserved: "... as a poet, Eliot has written extraordinarily little".⁶⁸ His main objection, however, was that Eliot, "despite his constant preaching of the Christian virtues, remains, in his attitudes as revealed in his work, a prig and a snob".⁶⁹ He viewed Eliot's anti-semitism and fascist leaning during the war as inappropriate in a Nobel Prize winner. Similarly, Klein condemned the awarding of the Bollingen Prize to Ezra Pound: "If, then, Ezra Pound deserved the Bollingen Prize, Goebbels posthumously should be awarded the Pulitzer".⁷⁰

Klein's criticism of the American poet Robinson Jeffers is quite illustrative of his theories on morality and aestheticism. His appreciation of the poet's obvious talents was very much tempered by Jeffers' pro-Nazi ideology:

We must admit by way of final word, that we regret having to judge a poet's work for the opinions which it expresses. The fact remains that Robinson Jeffers still remains master of a peerless utterance, still, from a technical viewpoint, an incomparable poet. Our remarks are prompted only by a recollection of something we had read somewhere to the effect that a poet must possess a sense of common humanity; this we sought in the writing of Mr. Jeffers; and failed to find. We are angry, therefore, not at Apollo, but at Mrs. Jeffers' son.⁷¹

⁶⁸A.M. Klein, "T.S. Eliot and the Nobel Prize", CJC, November 12, 1948, p. 8.

⁶⁹Ibid., November 26, 1948, p. 3, 8.

⁷⁰A.M. Klein, "Old Ez and His Blankets", CJC, March 4, 1979, p. 4.

⁷¹A.M. Klein, "Robinson Jeffers -- Poet-Fascist?", CJC, February 6, 1942, p. 4.

It is perhaps interesting to note that, forty years later, Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz reflects Klein's ideals of the poet's relationship to humanity. Milosz cites the democratic and humanistic quality of poetry, stressing the necessity for closing the "chasm between the poet and the 'human family'".⁷² Milosz speaks of the apocalyptic tone of twentieth century poetry which expresses man's alienation, suggesting that poetry should articulate the hope for mankind. Klein's idea of the artist's function in society is reflected in his strong distaste for what he described as poesy. This is defined as "the essence of effete aestheticism ... It implies that the poet is above and beyond the battle, a sort of inspired chronicler who records but does not participate in the deeds of his fellow men".⁷³ Milosz concludes:

The hope of the poet, a hope that I defend, that I advance, is not enclosed by any date. If disintegration is a function of development, and development a function of disintegration, the race between them may very well end in the victory of disintegration. For a long time, but not forever — and here is where hope enters. It is neither chimerical or foolish. On the contrary, every day one can see signs indicating that now, at the present moment, something new, and on a scale never witnessed before, is being born; humanity as an elemental force conscious of transcending Nature, for it lives by memory of itself, that is, in History.⁷⁴

⁷²Czeslaw Milosz, The Witness of Poetry (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 88.

⁷³A.M. Klein, "Bialik Thou Shouldst Be Living at this Hour", CJC, July 10, 1942, p. 4.

⁷⁴Czeslaw Milosz, The Witness of Poetry, p. 116.

Both poets, then, saw poetry functioning within an historical consciousness that linked the poet to humanity: Milosz's "family", Klein's "fellow man".

Among other topics, Klein's literary criticism covered folk songs, Jewish humour, biblical typology, Canadian writing and "the Joseph story". Klein's affection for the Jewish folk song stems from his deep attachment to inherited traditions. The songs speak of the shtetl's poverty and hardship in addition to describing the joys of a life which revolved around religion, "kith and kin". He sees the lullabies as expressions of an intrinsic Jewish philosophy: "No other people ... has ever expressed sentiments like these in its lullabies. The German suckling listens to songs of soldiers on the Rhine; the British infant is lulled, to sleep with shanties about mariners braving the foam; but Israel's child, combining piety with pity, dreams of sage Talmudists and lugubrious goats".⁷⁵ Klein writes that these lullabies capture the essence of the eighteenth and nineteenth century ghettos, when life was lived with a mixture of quiet resignation and dreams of better times. In the opening paragraph, Klein describes the folk song as an important historical document mirroring the life of a people at the threshold of irrevocable change. It also epitomized an art form which bridged reality and imagination, the very core of Klein's own artistic sensibility:

Were all tomes and treatises on Jewish life in Eastern Europe to go up in incendiary or censorial smoke, there still would

⁷⁵A.M. Klein, "Jewish Folk Songs", CJC, April 7, 1944, p. 9.

remain in the numerous folk songs which haunt the epic memory of the Jew, sufficient material wherewith to conjure up, as by incantation, the phantom of that picturesque past. For there is hardly a phase of Jewish life which is not echoed or mimicked in the ubiquitous folk song ... From the mind of a multitude they sprang; they found refuge in the heart of a people. A song was sung, and as by a miracle, an entire ghetto, from rabbi to sexton, throbbed in harmony. In a world of private property, our folk songs were the first assets to be nationalized.⁷⁶

In an essay on Hebrew humour, Klein brilliantly traces the sociological impact of humour from Biblical times, encapsulating in the process the development of the Jewish anecdote. Humour, writes Klein: "... spared not the might nor did it have compassion on the mean. In fine, it held up, as the phrase has it, the mirror to life".⁷⁷ For Klein, the archetypal city of humour is Chelm, "A city whose census is taken under tabulations headed dolt addlepate, numskull, blockhead, and all the other varying degrees of nitwittery".⁷⁸

In "Thirty Plots and Holy Writ", Klein humorously illustrates how the forms of modern literature are rooted in the Bible. He states that "although of the making of books there is no end, of the number of plots there are only about thirty ... these fundamental plots, were to be found in the Bible".⁷⁹ Klein continues his discussion by describing

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ A.M. Klein, "Of Hebrew Humour", Opinion, VI. 1 (November 1935), p. 19.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ A.M. Klein, "Thirty Plots and Holy Writ", CJC, April 15, 1938, p. 36. See The Bible as Literature, mimeographed pamphlet issued by Hadassah Organization of Canada, no date, pp. 1, 2, 9, passim. Originally published in CJC, April 11, 1941, pp. 8-9. (C. Th. 321)

all thirty plots, categorizing them under specific headings, alluding to their biblical counterparts and relating its influences to modern literature. He concludes:

... the descriptions, the juxtaposition of facts, the sequence of events, the depiction of characters are, in the average story, but incidental ornamentation. The tricks in the novelist's bag are numbered.

Nor are they original, yesterday's invention, recent discovery. All of them have, in the dark backward and abysm of time, found their place in the first of books. In the beginning was the word; yea, and the thirty plots.⁸⁰

More than merely a satirical treatise on the writing of novels, the essay accomplishes a valid critical analysis of the Bible as an important technical influence on literature. In this respect Klein anticipates, in 1938 and 1941, certain observations of Northrop Frye's The Great Code (1982) and The Art of Biblical Narrative (1981) by Robert Alter.

Although Frye and Alter are writing from different religious perspectives, nevertheless, they support Klein's view of the Bible as an important literary influence on Western literature. Frye writes of the Bible's technical influence:

There is ... a body of concrete images: city, mountain, river, garden, tree, oil, fountain, bread, wine, bride,

⁸⁰ A.M. Klein, "Thirty Plots and Holy Writ", p. 36.

sheep, and many others, which recur so often that they clearly indicate some kind of unifying principle. The unifying principle, for a critic, would have to be one of shape rather than meaning; or, more accurately, no book can have a coherent meaning unless there is some coherence in its shape.⁸¹

Robert Alter concurs, but laments the fact that there has not been of date much literary criticism of the Bible:

It is a little astonishing that at this late date literary analysis of the Bible ... is only in its infancy. By literary analysis I mean the manifold varieties of minutely discriminating attention to the artful use of language, to the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tone, sound, imagery, syntax, narrative viewpoint, compositional units, and much else; the kind of disciplined attention, in other words, which through a whole spectrum of critical approaches has illuminated, for example, the poetry of Dante, the plays of Shakespeare, the novels of Tolstoy. The general absence of such critical discourse on the Hebrew Bible is all the more perplexing when one recalls that the masterworks of Greek and Latin antiquity have in recent decades enjoyed an abundance of astute literary analysis, so that we have learned to perceive subtleties of lyric form in Theocritus as in Marvell, complexities of narrative strategy in Homer or Virgil as in Flaubert.⁸²

Ira Bruce Nadel further notes that Klein's attraction to the short story, as opposed to the novel, is because of its suitability to the limitation of plot construction. "Thirty Plots and Holy Writ", writes Nadel, "reveals Klein's comprehensive Biblical knowledge and indicates

⁸¹Northrop Frye, The Great Code (Toronto: Academic Press, Canada, 1982), p. xiii.

⁸²Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 13.

his fictional biases at a state in his career when his interest in prose lies almost entirely in non-fiction".⁸³

By far the most significant pieces of literary criticism Klein accomplished were his two essays on Canadian writing, written in the mid-forties at a time when he was a prominent figure in Canadian letters. "Writing in Canada" is an essay which answers poet Raymond Souster's questionnaire concerning the state of writing in Canada. In an historical context, this essay remains one of the most comprehensive analyses on the literary milieu in Canada at that time. Souster's questions, addressed to Canadian writers, asked whether audience appreciation of Canadian writing had increased, and whether English or American influence was predominant. He queried the idea of nationalism, the standard of Canadian reviewing, the expression of Canadian consciousness and problem of writers being neglected. Klein's responses focus astutely on the various cultural and geographical changes which have occurred since World War II: "Geopolitics has converted our country from a flanking colony to a central state".⁸⁴

Klein compared the state of literature to the uneven growth of the human body. "All has changed; our sinews, our muscles, our thinking; only the voice, as yet is not commensurate with the body."⁸⁵ Klein dismissed specific literary influences, pointing to all writing as

⁸³ Nadel, "A.M. Klein on Literature", p. 4.

⁸⁴ A.M. Klein, "Writing in Canada, A Reply to a Questionnaire", CJC, February 22, 1946, p. 8.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

originating from a single entity: "They all stem from the same tradition though each is subjected of course to local modification".⁸⁶

The most interesting comment, however, is his attitude towards nationalism, for it reiterates Klein's strong feelings with respect to his idea of the artist's function within society and his responsibility to inherited traditions and culture.

The writer who is concerned with his writing, and not with his passport neither stresses nor ignores that background; inevitably, if he is honest and sensitive, it will emerge in the totality of his work. This business of indicating longitudes and postal addresses is a procedure so superficial that far from stressing the Canadian background, it merely caresses it. Not in this way does one give a literature a national identity ... But it is what he writes which will interest us in him as a writer, and not the emergent fact of his Canadian citizenship. No need to be any the less Canadian because his short story has failed to mention Yonge Street or his poem the Laurentians ... The proper study of mankind is Man — not paysage. Paysage is important only insofar as it affects the man upon it; but Man, he is the measure ...⁸⁷

Souster's last question dealing with the unappreciated writer "neglected through public apathy" touched sensitive nerves in both Klein's emotional and creative consciousness. It was a subject of great concern for him, especially during the years prior to his breakdown, as he increasingly related to the neglected and alienated artist within society. Usher Caplan concurs that "Klein's reply was to become his constant refrain in the years just before his breakdown — the lament of the artist who is harassed by sheer neglect". (C. Th. 81) Compare Klein:

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

As for the neglected -- you wring an agony out of my heart -- Aren't we all? Is there one writer upon whom the Canadian public dotes, whom it delights to honour, whom it laureates and subsidizes, while all the others look on, envious and unappeased? There is none. The apathy of our public is general and impartial; when it abandons that impartiality, it does so only to neglect one more than the other. You will forgive me if I resist the temptation to draw up an hierarchic list of the rejected. These "pitches of littleness", as the Anglo-Saxon purist could call them, are not to my taste.⁸⁸

In "A Definition of Poetry", the other essay on Canadian writing, Klein is responding to a question posed by John Sutherland, editor of Northern Review. Klein addresses the subject by flatly stating his distaste for literary definitions:

... definitions of poetry -- that is a pegasus of a different colour. I'll not mount him! ... Definitions of poetry, you know, have been heard of before; indeed they were no mean persons who invented them. And it is when I consider these definitions, and note how all of them do either from lack of logic or stint of sensibility, crumble to power, that I must recoil from your arachnoid invitation.⁸⁹

Klein then proceeds, analytically, to rebut various famous poetry definitions. He begins by quoting Wordsworth's "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", comparing it to similar utterances by other poets, including Emily Dickinson, Coleridge, Shelley, Arnold, Untermeyer and Sandburg, taking them to task for what he perceives as superfluous efforts. The essay abounds in Klein's usual wit and vitality and ends with his characteristic agreement with Dr. Johnson's remark that poetry can only be defined by what it is not: "Should it be granted me some fine day,

⁸⁸A.M. Klein, "Writing in Canada", CJC, March 1, 1946, p. 8.

⁸⁹A.M. Klein, "A Definition of Poetry", CJC, April 19, 1946, p. 8.

to reduce poetry to a formula, to make the subject as precise, as let us say, atomic physics, you shall hear from me. For the time being, however, my atomic prosody has discovered only the perfect onomatopoeia -- boom! I'll let you know when I develop the rest".⁹⁰

In one of his last major essays, "The Bible's Archetypical Poet", Klein returns to the Bible as a source of literary excellence, citing in particular the Joseph story as a paradigm for the function of the poet and his relationship to society. The betrayal of Joseph's brothers Klein sees as a betrayal of ancestral heritage, something for which the artist (Joseph) is responsible. Joseph is the supreme poet who not only dreams and interprets dreams but also "lives and labours within a tradition", never losing touch with reality.⁹¹ Joseph, humbled and all forgiving, returns to a reunited family. Having suffered, Joseph "has learned humility not only with regard to his brothers, but also with regard to himself ... He has, despite antipathy, come to a closer understanding of his brothers".⁹² For Klein, the measure of creativity rests on the artist's flexibility to exist within society in a reciprocal action between art and life. He perceives Jacob's benediction -- that Joseph is like a fruitful bough by a well -- to mean that the poet is not isolated, not alone, nor self-sustained:

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 12.

⁹¹ A.M. Klein, "The Bible's Archetypical Poet", CJC, March 20, 1953, p. 4.

⁹² Ibid.

He lives by a refreshing and ever renewed source of water; he lives and labours within a tradition ... The true poet is he who, nourished upon the ancestral heritage, yet -- if only in the slightest deviated therefrom. He is indeed, a fruitful bough; he springs from earth fed secretly by a well; but his branches run over the well. Thus are the ideas of convention and revolt, of tradition and innovation.⁹³

The tragic irony of Klein's life is that by the time he wrote these lines he was increasingly withdrawing from society and his own creativity. Ben Lappin suggests that by the early fifties Montreal was changing, as was the Jewish community. There was a migration to the suburbs and Yiddish culture ceased to be the mainstay of Jewish life. The war was over and Israel was a reality. The burning issues of yesterday seemed to be resolved. Klein was perhaps beginning to feel like an outcast in his own cherished milieu. "Rather than follow his community into the suburbs as an after-voice from the ghetto, he retreated into himself becoming a bizarre expatriate by the irony of being one of the few left behind who remained rooted to his familiar surroundings."⁹⁴

In his essay "In Praise of the Diaspora", Klein writes movingly about what he considered the impending "death" of the diaspora after the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Israel. He believed that with the birth of Israel, the Jewish diaspora could no longer remain as relevant to Jewish culture as it once had been. He metaphorically refers to the diaspora as a wandering uncle (cf. Uncle Melech from The Second Scroll)

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ben Lappin, "The Receding World of Abraham Klein", unpublished essay, p. 10.

who travelled to the corners of the world, learns and experiences much, and finally dies. At the funeral, he is eulogized for his great contribution to the world as a result of his varied experiences. It is suggested that the spirit of this great man will live on in succeeding generations of Jews:

It is, then, as of some favourite uncle that one cherishes the recollection of the diaspora, an uncle one surely never thought of as sad Wandering Jew -- unhappy and alone; an uncle whom one saw rather as the family's most colourful son, eager and adventuresome -- a kinsman widely travelled, easy of manner, his luggage rich with mysterious souvenir, the very world's map lined and frontier'd on the palm of his hand; and himself, himself full of anecdote, reminiscence, fancy, the sorcery of far-off places brought on his lips to make strange and exotic a long winter's evening. How wonderful the trophies he had garnered, the personages he had known, the events, the scenes that he had burst upon! Always would one treasure his memory as that of some daring explorer, an informal raconteur, retailer and embellisher of high autobiography, the philosopher peripatetic, twirling the geographic globe, darting a finger hither and yon: Here were lions ... Here anthropophagi most ravenous ... Here desert where we ate mirage, and were sustained ... Sambation here ... [Sic] (BS 469-470)

Klein acknowledges the terrible sufferings of Jews within the diaspora through the ages, but at the same time passionately recounts the important influences of a diaspora which produced many creative and illustrious Jews. Klein feared that Israel with its nationalistic philosophy would negate the validity of Jews remaining in the diaspora. He tried to stress to the Jewish community that "the greatest of the talents of the diaspora was its talent for survival". (BS 476)

As much as Klein believed in Israel and its crucial establishment as a home for the beleaguered Jewish people, he also recognized his own status as a diaspora Jew, a status he appreciated and enjoyed. But "In

"Praise of the Diaspora" (1953), written at the end of Klein's career, Klein also expresses ambivalence with regard to his own relationship to Israel. Although at one time he considered emigrating to Israel, he chose in the end to live in Montreal where his roots were. Perhaps, as Caplan suggests, Klein required the more cosmopolitan environment of Montreal. (C. Th. 225) M.W. Steinberg takes Klein's darker interpretation of the diaspora as a "... sad foreshadowing of his own not too distant withdrawal from life".⁹⁵

As we have seen, Klein's non-fictional writing emerged from traditional Yiddish journalism which occupied a prestigious place within the Jewish community. His themes reflect its typically humanistic and universal concerns. He provided a shrewd commentary on contemporary times, especially with regard to the treatment of European Jews in the 1930s. He was one of the first to warn of the dangers of Communism, and of the evils of anti-semitism in Quebec. He predates Hugh MacLennan (Two Solitudes, 1945) as an anglophone observer of Quebec culture; and Northrop Frye on biblical typology. In a post-Holocaust world, his pragmatic and humanitarian focus was on the needs of survivors. Klein's short fiction, as we will see in Chapter 4, comes out of the same issues and concerns that he addressed in this impressive body of journalistic prose.

The fiction, however, is more somber in tone than the journalism, often portraying man as a victim in a hostile world. This pattern perhaps

⁹⁵ M.W. Steinberg, "A.M. Klein as Journalist", p. 25.

emerges from Klein's own increasing feelings of alienation. The following chapter, then, will attempt to explore this idea of victimization in Klein's short fiction, in light of his own growing paranoia during his last productive years.

CHAPTER 4

SHORT FICTION

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Concurrent with his other literary activities, Klein produced an impressive body of short fiction. Until recently, the stories have been largely unknown and virtually ignored. However, Klein's short stories form an extremely valuable part in the canon of his work, linking the themes and values expressed in his other writing. As in the journalism, Klein's short fiction is defined by a specific Jewish experience, but nevertheless embodies his usual scope, including a wide variety of non-Jewish topics. M.S. Steinberg, editor of the second volume in a series devoted to the collected works of A.M. Klein, writes:

Klein's range of themes and styles in his short fiction, as in his poetry and in his journalistic writing, is broad. He draws on his Jewish experience, focusing on legends, festivals, and ceremonies, well-known character types, and familiar aspects of Jewish life — in the synagogue, in the home, and on the streets. Klein was not limited, however, by his Jewish concerns. He also wrote social and political satire ...¹

While some of the stories capture Jewish life in the Middle Ages, the East-European shtetl, and the Jewish Montreal ghetto, others describe

¹M.W. Steinberg, ed. A.M. Klein, Short Stories (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), foreword, subsequent reference to this edition will be SS.

a darker vision of a chaotic world in the throes of the Depression, war, and post-war threats of Communism and the bomb. Klein's basic humanistic concerns, however, gradually darken in fiction that begins to portray the artist as victim, perhaps reflecting Klein's disillusionment regarding what he considered a lack of his own artistic recognition.

During the middle to late thirties, Klein focussed more on writing prose than on poetry. From the years 1934-49, he began to attempt the short story form, drama and translation. His earliest stories were published in The McGilliad (1930), various Jewish periodicals, and the Canadian Jewish Chronicle (1929-1937). For the most part the stories are thematically Jewish, paralleling the subjects he addressed in his poetry and journalism of the same period.

(C. Th. 42, 69)² By the latter part of the thirties, the stories broaden to reflect the increasingly chaotic world.

The forties marked the most active years in Klein's career, both politically and artistically. He entered an intense period of poetic creativity in the early to mid-forties, when he accomplished his best writing. His relationship with a vibrant group of poets who founded two important literary magazines of the time (Preview, 1942-45, and First Statement, 1940-45) undoubtedly heightened his creative powers. The results culminated

² Klein's early fictions were often signed by various pseudonyms. One was Aben Kandel, others were Ben Kalonymus and Arthur Haktani. Ben Kalonymus, meaning "son of Kalman", (also the name of Klein's father) is the name of a prominent Jewish family who lived during the Middle Ages. They counted amongst their members many poets and scholars. (C. Th. 69) Haktani is a play on Klein's name which is Yiddish for small. Haktani is the same word in Hebrew.

in his last published collection of poetry, The Rocking Chair and Other Poems (1948). He also became quite prolific in writing fiction in the early forties, concentrating on longer works in addition to short stories.

In 1944, Klein was persuaded to run as a candidate for the OCF party in the predominantly Jewish riding of Cartier, but withdrew his name at the last moment. Between 1945-48 he lectured at McGill University, teaching a course in modern poetry as well as seventeenth and nineteenth century prose and poetry. Klein returned to politics in 1949 running once more in the Cartier riding, but was badly defeated. Humiliated by this experience, Klein felt bitterly rejected by the Jewish community. (C. Th. 120-39) It deeply affected him and probably contributed to his growing feelings of paranoia.

In 1949 Klein travelled to Israel, Europe and North Africa. He kept a journal of his trip which was eventually published as "Notebook of a Journey" in the Chronicle (1949). The many speeches Klein delivered about his experiences upon his return were based on bits and pieces from his journal; it became the raw material for his only published novel, The Second Scroll (1951). Although discussion of The Second Scroll is outside the scope of this thesis, it should be mentioned that it is unique in the body of Klein's work. Major themes and ideals which Klein expressed over the years came to fruition in The Second Scroll, a minor masterpiece in the body of Canadian literature.

The fiction Klein wrote in the early forties (much of it still unpublished) is comprised of short stories, fragments of stories, outlines

for novels, unfinished manuscripts and a first complete novel, "That Walks Like a Man" (1945). The archives reveal a few uncompleted manuscripts from the late forties which were probably written prior to The Second Scroll (1951). A portion of nondescript short stories which Klein also wrote in the late forties was published in the Chronicle as space fillers. (C. Th. 149, 154) Between 1952-55, Klein produced a novella, "The Bells of Sobor Spasitula", and an unfinished novel "The Golem". (C. Th. 242) My focus in this chapter will be on Klein's short stories, most of which are collected in the 1983 edition of Short Stories. Included in the work to be examined will be the important long story or novella, "The Bells of Sobor Spasitula", apparently Klein's last fictional work. Brief reference will be made to the spy novel, "That Walks Like a Man", to show links between this work and the short fiction:

Two writers Klein frequently translated into English were the Yiddish poet J.I. Segal and the Hebrew writer Chaim Nachman Bialik. It is no wonder Klein was drawn to their works for both these men, like Klein himself, embodied high ideals with respect to art and society. Segal already enjoyed a prominent reputation in Europe by the time he arrived in Montreal in the twenties. He was an integral part of the flourishing Yiddish life of that time. In his prose and poetry he tried to articulate the reality of Jewish assimilation, world-wide anti-semitism, and the role of the artist in society.³ Segal's work is suffused with images of the

³Figler and Rome, Hannaniah Meir Caiserman, A Biography, p. 190.

shtetl, the nostalgic realm of childhood and age-old Chassidic traditions. He identified with the unfortunates of the world and was fluent in many languages. (C. Th. 78) In an elegiac tribute Klein once described Segal as one who "... enriched the literature of his people; he preserved, shaped and renewed its language; in his poetry, he fashioned works of an enduring worth; in his prose he enunciated principles and established criteria that will long hold sway; and in all these endeavours he stood the unfee'd custodian of a culture".⁴

Bialik, too, was endowed with those qualities Klein greatly admired, and manifested, in his view, the epitome of the creative artist within society. Klein, however, related fictionally to Yiddish writers. He was more familiar with Yiddish newspapers and periodicals, keeping abreast of the Yiddish artistic mainstream. (C. Th. 169) Steinberg notes that his work is very much in the tradition of I.L. Peretz and Sholom Aleichem. (SS viii) Thus, almost all of Klein's early stories, like his poems are thematically Jewish, portraying traditional or biblical characters.

Many of Klein's early short stories from the thirties take the form of character sketch or fable. (C. Th. 69) They tend to be structurally weak. Their significance lies in highlighting Klein's Yiddish literary influences at this time, as well as vividly capturing a traditional and ritualist way of life which centred around the home and synagogue. The stories recount the trials and tribulations of a people

⁴A.M. Klein, "In Memoriam: J.I. Segal", CJC, March 12, 1954, p. 3.

wrapped in dense layers of orthodoxy and poverty. Whether there is an innocent child, a bumbling shlemiel figure or a village sage, Klein's characters portray the tensions and conflicts of their bitter-sweet world. Although the slighter efforts lack strong character or plot development, they nevertheless are rich in description, imparting a colourful view of the characters within their environment. Klein's thumbnail sketch of the half-wit Simeon, in "Prophet in Our Midst", is a humorous and empathetic rendering of the relationship between a derelict and society:

Simeon, for one thing, was obsessed by a mortal fear of blueberries. If you ever wanted to get rid of him, all you had to do was to show him a blueberry. Had he looked at the face of the Angel of Death himself, he would not have been more terrified. He also had the habit of tying his sleeves to his wrist — he feared that devils would creep into his clothes, and seek shelter in his hairy bosom. And he liked a little drink on any and all occasions. Practical jokers, possessed by a cruel ingenuity, would sometimes treat him to a glass of schnapps but would throw into the red liquid a blueberry. "Poison! Poison of death," Simeon would shout, and spit mightily, leaving his benefactors a reward of choice curses.

But he was not dangerous. He was merely a half-wit; doctors said, however, that a great shock at any moment might deprive him even of the last vestiges of sanity. They spoke about chronic alcoholism, and prophesied that his brain would weaken. But he was not dangerous; so, while on a hot summer day, wrapped in a mass of rags; his beard falling over a collarless neck and his mouth open for the exit and entrance of flies, Simeon slumbered away his mad life, Jews passed him by with a shake of the head and a recollection of blueberries. (SS 16)

Perennially nostalgic, Klein savoured the innocent realm of childhood. Some of his early fiction recalls the whimsical fairy-tale world of giants, dwarfs, elves, and talking animals — all rendered within

a Jewish context. "The Lost Twins" resembles the familiar Hansel and Grettel tale. It chronicles the adventure of "Obstreperous" twins, Velvel and Esterkah, who become lost in the woods, stumble upon a synagogue, and are nearly thrown into a raging furnace by a wicked giant.

"The Parliament of Fowles" was originally published in The McGilliad, 11 (November 1, 1930). Set in biblical times, it is a satirical attack on the preoccupation of the intellectual pursuit of meaning. King Solomon, bored and disillusioned with the vanity of life, seeks to recapture the essence of beauty and meaningful existence. Since King Solomon can understand the language of birds, he eavesdrops on a group of chirping birds to discover what they hold to be the secret of life. Through much erudite discussion, the birds impart the knowledge that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. As King Solomon excitedly tries to take note of this on a piece of parchment for further reference, some bird dropping obliterates what he has written. "Vanity ... that isn't the word for it! Perfect beauty, indeed!" (SS 42). Both stories emphasize Klein's penchant for the imaginative world of the fairy tale, which is echoed in much of his early poetry. (C. Th. 76)

"By Profit of a Beard" (1930) is one of the first stories to portray Klein's darkening vision of humanity. In this story of Reb Zalman, a simple man whose only pleasure in life was the pride of his luxurious beard "the like of which Judah hath never known" (SS 20), Klein focuses on man's lack of compassion towards his fellowman. When Reb Zalman is duped into shearing off his wonderful beard, and subsequently ridiculed for his shameful appearance, it is more than vanity that is lost: "His consolation

had been snatched from him. The strings connecting him with vivid life had been snuffed. (SS 23) Klein is perhaps alluding to the neglected artist in society, unappreciated and banned into obscurity: "... he raised the collar of his coat and concealed his maimed beard behind large lapels ... His back was bent, an unknown burden heavy upon it. After that he was not seen in public for weeks. He sat forlorn, as one who mourns the bereavement of his kin". (SS 23)

Reb Zalman is one of a group of Klein protagonists who are victims. A similar story ("Shmelka") chronicles the degradation of a pitiful man who is left to board with a family. In due course he falls prey to a cruel joke of theirs and is left in a helpless state of misery. But the story ends on a more hopeful note as the family is partially redeemed by acknowledging their shameful act: "A red ugliness which was shame suffused the faces of the Finkelstein family. The fountain of laughter went lower and lower. Silently they looked at one another". (SS 96)

In "Master of the Horn", the protagonist is alienated by old age from himself and from the community. He no longer possesses the strength to blow his beloved Ram's horn during the High Holidays. Thus, he becomes a helpless victim of his own body. The sensitive community identifies with his ordeal in the intensified praying with which the story ends: "Towards the conclusion of the service, when the cantor lifting his eyes towards the Ark of the Covenant, and spreading his tallis-draped arms in appeal, sang out in sobbing voice -- And cast us not aside in the days of our age, at the ebb of our strength leave us not -- the weeping

in the synagogue was bitter and long". (SS 67)

Two of Klein's more ambitious stories of the early thirties are "The Meed of the Minnesinger: A Vivid Short Story Based on the Life of a Great Thirteenth-Century Poet" and "The Seventh Scroll". The first is a fictional account of the real Suskind of Trimberg, who during the Middle Ages entertained the courts of nobility. Klein's story is of a naive Jewish troubadour who forsakes his family to sing his ballads for Christians. His bereaved and pious father begs him to return home, but Susskind shuns his father until he realizes his mistake. One day after a performance he becomes shockingly aware of overt anti-semitism; and of his own aberration among the gentiles. He burns his manuscript of songs and returns home. The story is a vivid reflection of Klein's own intense feelings towards assimilated Jews in the arts and public life who shun their heritage and traditions for wider recognition.⁵

Although anti-semitism does not seem to have been a personal issue in Klein's life he was, however, bothered by consistently being labelled a "Jewish" poet and tended to link this labelling with the fact that his work was not widely read. Steinberg notes: "His aim was to create a worthy literature out of the amalgam within himself of the two cultures, Jewish and English". Steinberg believes that he had succeeded, but acknowledges that Klein was not widely read. (SS xii)

⁵cf. "Sonnets Semitic", No. 5, CP 154 where Klein's fictional couple attempt in vain to escape their heritage.

"The Seventh Scroll" is a more skilfully written story of Yekuthiel Geller, a Scribe who is trying to complete his seventh and final Torah scroll, which he plans to dedicate to the loving memory of his wife. Yekuthiel and his deceased wife were childless and this last scroll was to be their legacy to the world. However, in his loneliness, he is persuaded to remarry. His new wife is a shrew, jealous of his work; she forces him to labour in her cold and draughty grocery. He becomes ill with pneumonia but manages, before he dies, to complete the Holy scroll. The ironic tragedy is that in his delirious state, he had made an error in one of the passages. He is too ill to correct his error, thus rendering the entire scroll invalid. The scroll is buried in the ground with its creator. "The Seventh Scroll" imparts a lovely flavour of traditional Jewish life, capturing the customs and rituals of existence in an East-European ghetto.

Usher Caplan makes two important points about this story. Firstly, there is a strong image of the Torah both as loving wife and offspring. Secondly, he notes that Klein sometimes regarded the Scribe as the closest analogue in Jewish ritual to the poet. (C. Th. 70) This story, along with Caplan's observations, suggests that the fiction symbolizes Klein's increasing preoccupation with the neglected artist's plight. The image of buried creativity is obvious from the following excerpt:

When the Rabbi came, he marvelled at the neatness and the accuracy of the work. Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus had been done with the pen of a master. But Numbers and Deuteronomy—

he sighed and was silent. He pointed to a Yud, Hai, Vav, Hai in Deuteronomy. An error in the name of God. The scroll was —. The Rabbi shut his lips firmly; nullifying adjectives were not to be applied to a work once intended for sacred purposes.

On the next day the body of Reb Yekuthiel was led to its last resting-place. A scroll was buried in an earthen vessel in his coffin. (SS 110)

Yekuthiel had laboured for nothing. The images of burial and alienation in "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" (CP 335) show that Klein identified strongly with the neglected artist's fate.

The fiction Klein wrote from the mid-to-late-thirties generally mirrored the despairing condition of the world in the midst of the Depression and at the brink of war. Where the earlier stories were thematically Jewish, Klein's work now reflected a wider world. "Blood and Iron" parodies a society repressed by fascist rule. Two other stories of the same period characterize the bleak Depression years. In "Friends, Romans, Hungrymen" (first published in New Frontier, April 1, 1936), the image of an uncaring God signifies the hopelessness of the times as well as Klein's own ambivalent feelings towards orthodoxy: "As I turned a street corner, I met God. I asked Him for a dime for a cup of coffee. He told me he had no small change, but recommended to me a swell flophouse on the Milky Way". (SS 117) "Beggars I have Known" (first published in the Canadian Forum in 1936)⁶ is a wry commentary on the art of begging.

⁶"Beggars I have Known", Canadian Forum, XVI (June 1936), has been also reprinted in a recent edition of short stories entitled Voices of Discord: Canadian Short Stories from the 1930s, ed. Donna Phillips (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1979), pp. 182-186.

The narrator ironically notes that a lack of self-pity is an important asset to blind and crippled beggars, allowing them to exploit a society that sympathizes with their plight. The poor, on the other hand, are ignored because they do not suffer from any identifiable disability except an excess of self-pity: "... I am poor; and that's like being blind and crippled. Worse, because you feel helpless without any excuse. But I can't become a beggar; I can't learn to stop pitying myself". (SS 114) Beggars and the poor are, however, linked in their common misery of poverty in a society that inevitably rejects both of their conditions.

The stories reflect a surreal world in which man's alienation is seen in terms of a disenfranchized society: "I went back to the park. I threw my soul into a thimble which a nursemaid had lost under a bench. I planted the thing in the earth. I spat upon it; I said: "Let it grow. And now, now I want to die". (SS 119) In "No Traveller Returns", the surreal quality of the two latter stories intensifies in a macabre tale where a man becomes the victim of a relentless ghost.

"Portrait of an Executioner" is an interesting story in which Klein's sense of the artist as victim is juxtaposed with a portrait of a man who is a professional executioner. The story is based on a real hangman, Arthur Ellis, whose line of work intrigued Klein. Caplan reports: "Ellis was a perfect example of the strange type of person to whom Klein was attracted — a lonely, alienated and depressed man, actually good-natured, but feared and despised because of his profession". (C. Th. 74) This is fiction based upon fact. Klein describes the

life of Arthur Ellis in light of the hangman's self-imposed alienation. Ellis chose not to have children so that they would not suffer ostracism and alienation, as he had. (SS 196) Klein seemed to empathize with a man whose estrangement from society was perhaps not unlike that of Klein's own: the unappreciated solitary artist.

One of the longest and most complex stories that Klein wrote in the mid-thirties is "A Myriad-Minded Man". Set in pre-war Montreal, it describes the adventures of Isaiah Ellenbogen, an eccentric Jew who hovers between genius and madness: "Was he knave or fool? Sane or mad? Was he sincere in his idiosyncrasies or only an exhibitionist flaunting lunacies in the hope that true genius is to madness close allied?"

(SS 125) The characterization is of a chameleon-like figure, who one moment is an intellectual, the next a circus barker, or a writer of anti-semitic slogans, "... a Jew maliciously slandering his own ...".

(SS 150) Finally, he joins a Buddhist sect.

On one level, the story represents a world which also hovers between sanity and madness; on another it brilliantly zeroes in on the flourishing milieu of Montreal's Jewish immigrant ghetto, and how it is observed by the non-Jewish sector. In the following segment, the Jewish narrator leads his gentile friend Godfrey Somers through the bustling shopping area of the "Main" (St. Lawrence Street):

There were many, and much of them. Here and there an old and bearded Jew, a rabbi (even the enlightened Godfrey Somers, though his best friends were Jews, was still under the impression that all the bearded were rabbis, and that Hebrew piety was

measured by hirsuteness) shuffled from the synagogue, his prayer-shawl wrapped in a Yiddish newspaper, held beneath his arm. Bulky sausage-armed Jewesses pushed carriages holding at least two sons of the Covenant, while their husbands, in most cases diminutive and cadavrous-looking homunculi, walked by their sides. The delicatessen stalls sent out appetizing and spicy odours from their ever-open doors; the butcher shops were loud with the sound of bone-chopping, and bargaining. From a gramophone store, shrill spangles of song fluttered over the air, as a falsetto-voiced singer pronounced to a listening world, oi, the virtues of her border ...

When these women walked on the sidewalk Godfrey had to get off the road to advance ahead of them. Jewesses were terribly fat, he remarked, rolls of fat; unctuous double chins; exuberant bosoms. He recalled the couplet that he had heard in the smoking-room of the University:

Sadistic Saxons have a pedal use
for pendulous buttocks of the Jews ...

"Strange," he continued, "how sloppy Jewish women become after their nuit de noce. Just fall apart, droop and drip ... Melting pot, indeed -- everyone a melting pot, organic grease thawing with the heat of motion. See them! Vertical barrels! And the puny pizzicato the fathers of these mice beget mountains. There," he pointed his little finger ... "a dwarf pushing the perambulator, a dwarf underfed and overworked, and his wife at his side, gigantic, circular, flesh-padded ...

"And the gibbering! How your Jews can talk! ... Their gesticulations -- a new geometry of conversation. Flip their words off their fingers, hurl their phrases, slap down their dicta, index-finger their innuendos. The discobuli of words! ... Your people are the true masters of the pantomime, only they overdo it. They add verbal speech. To them the arm is as important as the larynx in conversation."

By this time we had reached Ontario Street. We stopped before the electric sign which announced in intermittent gasps "Kupchik's Restaurant", and looked in through the windows. For a while Godfrey hesitated ... We sat down in a corner, away from the general crowd where his Anglo-Saxon features would not be stared at by Semites curious to know how this goy had wandered into a Jewish restaurant. (SS 126-128)

The scene is dense with details which illustrate Klein's first-hand knowledge of the immigrant community. Godfrey's Anglo-Saxon view of the encroaching immigrant society is wry, almost Jamesian.

Klein's vision of a malevolent world deepens in his stories of the mid-to-late forties. "Synopsis", an unpublished short work from this period illustrates Klein's vision of life's utter futility in face of hostility and alienation. It is one of Klein's poorer efforts, detailing the bleak life of Picelle, a hopelessly deformed man who suffers terrible cruelty as the result of his condition. He finally undergoes plastic surgery and is able to lead a more normal life, only to be plunged once again into an oppressed existence, because of a murder he commits. The story is too melodramatic and cliché-ridden to have much literary merit, but it does serve to underline Klein's growing gallery of victimized protagonists disconnected from an uncaring society.⁷ The idea of despair and alienation in many of these stories also reflects Klein's sense of a chaotic world: the Holocaust and the plight of his fellow-Jews. Although Klein's journalism during the war years was generally a hopeful expression of overcoming the evils of mankind, in what he called "the great and universal design" (BS 244), his fiction embodies a more pessimistic outlook. The journalism enabled Klein to inform and encourage the Jewish community at a time of great need. The fiction, however, allowed Klein to vent his real anxieties of victimization with respect to himself and his fellowman. Within this pattern, his particular

⁷A.M. Klein, "Synopsis", Klein Collection, Public Archives of Ottawa, microfilm 3762.

emphasis is on victimization of the artist-figure variously interpreted as scribe, composer, executioner, et al.

"We Who Are About to be Born: A Parable" (1944) is about a cherub in heaven who is well versed in the evils of the world and pleads with the "Commissioner" of Heaven to allow him to remain unborn and not become human: "'How can you be so cruel,' he had asked, 'so cruel as to send me ... into that dark valley of the shadow? For I have seen them, my predecessors, seen them returning ... full of scars and wrinkles, broken, the marks of a terrible experience upon them ...'". (SS 214)

But his pleas are ignored and the cherub is sent to "dark" earth to be born. "One More Utopia" (1945) is a surrealist fiction with echoes of Aldous Huxley's Brave New World (1932). An anti-totalitarian story, pointing to man's futile search for Utopia, its theme also anticipates George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-four (1948). The nameless protagonist finds himself in a hospital where a plastic surgeon has operated on his patients' faces in the image of himself. Everyone is supposedly created equal, including the fusion of each personality into one. The imposed equality is, however, presided over by their creator, the doctor, who never loses sight of his individuality:

Everybody with the same face, all in my own image, and all kept together. I thus operated not only on their bodies, I operated on their world. Even the doctor was not an intruder, but one of them ... The ego which looked at its own face and saw that it was the face of its fellows, lost its personal insistence. Citizen No. 1 merged his personality with Citizen No. 2. He looked at his neighbour and it was as if he was looking at a mirror. All about him he saw Self; his own face met him everywhere. Naturally, all the egos were soon fused, and

naturally egotism soon became altruism, altruism egotism.
I had achieved the first premise for utopia!

"Neat, but how, if I may make so bold to ask, how is it that you, doctor, remain unaffected? Your ego, if you'll pardon my saying so, has managed somehow to escape fusion."

"True," he said, "but my face, please note, is really my own. No plastic surgeon gave it to me. When I look at myself I recognize somebody I know from the first dawning of consciousness, but my citizens, my citizens with their brand-new faces, they were just born, their old selves have died, and their new self now appears for the first time and in duplicate, in triplicate, in centuplicate. An important difference." (SS 221)

Klein concludes on a note of anguish as the patients rebel against their antiseptic and dogmatic life: "'You thought you'd make us all one,' a voice was shouting, 'well, here we are, all one!' 'After all,' cried another, 'if we kill the doctor, it's only suicide!'" (SS 223)

Klein reveals a world bent on destruction. It is also interesting to note that Klein's image of plastic surgery in "Synopsis" and "One More Utopia" is perhaps one that is rooted in the Jewish legend of the Golem — a soulless human-like creature created out of clay. Both these stories feature reshaped humans whose demise is signalled by their empty existence in an alienated world. The Golem legend appealed to Klein (cf. "Golem", CP 284) and between 1952-55 he accumulated a large amount of notes for a projected historical novel, "The Golem". As Caplan informs us, Klein managed to complete a thirty-two page manuscript of the first few chapters. (C. Th. 248)

Two stories from the forties and early fifties continue Klein's theme of displacement and chaos in the post-war world. "... And It Shall Come to Pass" (1948) depicts a tormented young man who experiences an

apocalyptic dream in which he bombs the world "away". (SS 239)

In the animal story, "A Fable" (1952), Klein borrows from George Orwell's Animal Farm (1945) as he satirizes a hypocritical political system and its quest for peace. The above stories articulate Klein's real concerns of world peace and the threat of the atom bomb. In his post-war journalism, he was forthright in proclaiming that peace has yet to come. Citing man as an impediment to peace, he wrote: "Blame not therefore, the atom, but blame that cosmos which, at war with itself, so arrogantly calls itself Man". (BS 266)

Klein's felt anathema of Communism and its authoritarian government found expression in his journalism and fiction. He considered Russian artists as victims of the repressed Communist Government, particularly as witnessed by the horrendous Soviet Show-Trials of the 1930s and the purges of the early fifties. He also warned, in essays like "Soviet Anti-semitism: The Beginning of the End" (BS 430) of Russia's strong anti-semitic policies.

Klein's unpublished novel "That Walks Like a Man", written between 1946 and 1947, emerges out of his interest in the Communist mentality and the intrigue of spying. The fiction is influenced by the Gouzenko affair of 1945 in which the defection of Igor Gouzenko, a clerk in the Russian Embassy, exposed a complex Russian-Canadian spy ring. (C. Th. 151)

Stylistically, the work is below Klein's usual literary standards, but it goes give us a glimpse into the political climate of the time.⁸ It

⁸A.M. Klein, "That Walks Like a Man", Klein Collection, Public Archives of Ottawa, microfilm 4206-4441.

is another autobiographical source and illustrates Klein's fascination with the Communist world. In one of his last short stories of the forties, "Letter from Afar" (1949), and in his novella from the mid-fifties, "The Bells of Sobor Spasitula", Klein continues to delve into the complexities of Communism and to explore the theme of victimization and the persecuted artist. "Letter from Afar", which shows Klein's interest in the polemics of Communism, is an interesting portrayal of the eighteen revolutionary victims of Stalin's trials and the psychology behind their seemingly voluntary confessions to purported crimes. The protagonist-narrator reveals the government's plot to fake the executions of those on trial in exchange for their unforced confessions. The protagonist, one of the victims who agreed to the plan, realizes the folly of his complicity. He is shunted into exile and forced into a pretended existence. The story clearly alludes to Klein's vision of artistic endeavour in a hostile society. The artist has "bargained" by compromising his ideals in exchange for a measure of acceptance; the result, however is alienation, exile and neglect for the anonymous artist.

The fiction concludes as the protagonist seeks revenge by exposing the lie of his existence and ultimately the lie of Communism:

Only one ambition -- the result of conscience or of indoctrination, I know not which -- now motivates me: to render my last service to History.

It will also unmask the Usurper ...

Thus will the decoys be decoyed; thus in the cold satisfaction which is mine in making these impersonal revelations

there will blow also the warmth of personal revenge. The static breaks its mould. The contradictions come to grips, the enduring struggle begins anew ... Let the world's winds rage. (SS 271)

Taken as a whole, the short stories demonstrate Klein's fictional range and his experimentation with different genres. Some of the fiction is notable for the use of street language, a departure from Klein's usual latinate style, while the stronger efforts employ a more traditional and richer use of language. Although there are a number of humorous and satirical works, a substantial amount focus on a darkening vision of humanity, forming a pattern of persecuted and alienated protagonists, clearly mirroring Klein's real anxieties.

The novella, "The Bells of Sobor Spasitula" (1952-55), presents the story of a Russian composer who is eventually silenced because of his refusal to compromise his artistic ideals. The story is narrated by Russian émigré Arkady Mikailovitch, a Paris resident, reminiscing about his life in Russia before the Bolshevik Revolution, and of his friendship with the country's leading composer, Vladimir Sergeivich Terpetoff.

The tale then focuses on Terpetoff and his ordeal with Russia's totalitarian regime subsequent to the Bolshevik Revolution. It seems that Terpetoff is impelled to submit a new musical composition celebrating Marxian ideals. He offers a work entitled "Overture Proletarian" which is hailed as a tour de force, an illustration of how the technique of Marxian dialectics may be applied to composition itself". (SS 299)

It is revealed that the work is actually a revision of Terpetoff's earlier opus 13, a lush composition he completed before the revolution.

He is then blackmailed into submission and promises to compose new music "expressly for the people". It is then learned that, days later, Terpetoff forced his way through the barred doors of the Cathedral of the Saviour (Sobor Spasitula), proceeded to its bell tower and, in a final contemptuous act, began ringing the forbidden bells until he was gunned down.

It is significant that "Bells of Sobor Spasitula" is Klein's last work before his final withdrawal from literary and public life. In his depiction of the composer Terpetoff and his clash with Marxist doctrines, Klein rehearses lifelong ideals regarding art and the function of the artist in society. Klein related to suppressed creativity within the Soviet Union, and paralleled the plight of the Russian artist to that of the artist in Western society who is sometimes forced into compromising artistic values. In an editorial he proclaimed:

The lot of the artist in contemporary society is not a happy one ... If he caters to what his audiences expect from him, he is thereby deemed to be no artist, but a mere graphologist in public relations; if he sticks to his bent and paints as his own mind conceives and his own eyes see, he is dubbed peculiar, erratic, even surrealistic. When, moreover, the artist labours to please an audience that is itself divided in taste, he is well on the way to developing a case of multiple fragmented schizophrenia.⁹

In Klein's own life, these divisions were mirrored by his editorship of the Chronicle, and his role as Samuel Bronfman's ghostwriter:

⁹A.M. Klein, "Poor Pablo Picasso!", CJC, April 3, 1953, as quoted by Caplan. (C. Th. 262)

"But that I should write it at all. It is humiliation only a philanthropic world makes possible".¹⁰ Although the reference here is apparently only to the ghostwriting, Klein appears to feel this way about all his writings other than his fiction and poetry.

In Klein's novella, Terpetoff considered his music as the epitome of artistic purity: "... it was melody that was his major musical pursuit, melody and cadence, the invisible pattern of sound waves, hieratic and unalloyed ... the wordless calligraphy of the soul inscribed forever on the air ...". (SS 281) Writing music for Terpetoff was "to perform a rite of communion". (SS 281) But Terpetoff equally understands the dialectical polarity of art, comparing it to the contradictory nature of life itself:

Not only does everything have its opposites, but it is their very opposition that endows each of the opposites with force and meaning. Imagine how unbearable life would be if everything about us was always good, always beautiful! Imagine if one woke every morning to the odour of the rose, breakfasted and dined on its petals, went clothed in the fragrance of its leaves, used ... its pollen for snuff, breathed its attar all day long, and at night upon a bed of roses reposed, imagine — what a stink life would be! ... No, stench and perfume, the world must have both. The search is for the ratio. (SS 284)

Thus Terpetoff's art is created out of the harmony of "Stench and Perfume". He believes the essence of man's creativity lies in the synthesis of inherent duality. However, Terpetoff cannot resolve the

¹⁰ A.M. Klein, Journal, Klein Collection, Public Archives of Ottawa, microfilm 3475.

duality of his own artistic sensibility. He is inspired by the folk melodies of the peasantry, songs "full of beauty and anguish". (SS 290) He is enraptured by the simplicity of peasant life and "the virtues of the proletariat" but is unable to relate to the dictates of proletariat art:

Do you think it compatible with civilized notions concerning the dignity of art that the composer should be compelled to recant his staff-notations ... simply because a politician wants to listen to music politically? You are trying to reduce us to less than persons! As for writing music to order, the very humiliation of that circumstance makes it impossible! I can't do it! (SS 305)

Both Mikailovitch and Terpetoff typify Klein's version of the tension of opposing forces in art. While Terpetoff's artistic purity recognized the "exciting" music produced by the peasantry (the mass), Mikailovitch disdained its negation of individuality: "The masses! ... It's the mammoth mob, no more, no less, stampeding over everything that's delicate and different!" (SS 291). Terpetoff's final irony is that in his attempt at resolution he is tragically defeated by the very people his art is trying to address. His ringing the banned bells is at once a courageous act of defiance and a plea for artistic purity: "The ringing persisted. Terpetoff was composing an opus, not a mere exercise in tintinnabulation ... Terpetoff was not to be silenced. Music for the people? He was composing music for the people!" (SS 307). But in the end he is forever silenced, "wilfully unremembered" in the annals of time.

Usher Caplan, like myself, interprets "The Bells of Sobor Spasitula" as thinly veiled autobiography. Like Terpetoff, Klein was unable to resolve the opposing conflicts of his own life. He was deeply attached to his people, but at the same time remained aloof from them. His art evolved out of his intense relationship with the Jewish community and yet he felt betrayed by what he considered to be their lack of attention. In his desire to represent the community, he became a journalist and speech writer for Bronfman, but was frustrated by the impingement it made upon his true vocation as an artist. In the final analysis, he could not unite the warring forces of his own artistic nature. He was attracted to public life, but resented his perceived anonymity. In his journal of 1942 he lamented his fate by writing:

Rejoicing and drinks -- the maestro's -- at the planning of the final banquet of the annual philanthropic campaign. Everybody complimented by everybody, even me, who am only the author of its slogans -- the proxy of the poor -- the compiler of its sob-letters. Particular backslap for an anonymous poem about the grace of charity -- ah, the charm of gilded platitude -- printed on the banquet souvenir-program. Poor me! Poet parsleyate to a mend.¹¹

The final silencing of Terpetoff foreshadows Klein's own eventual retreat into silence.

As we have seen, Klein's prose is extremely autobiographical, emerging out of a strong identification with his cultural heritage. He

¹¹A.M. Klein, Journal, Klein Collection; Public Archives of Ottawa, microfilm 3475.

was very much a product of a flourishing Yiddish ghetto with its cluster of vibrant European writers and cultural institutions. The socio-political background of Montreal, bounded by its English and French milieu, additionally nourished his creativity.

Throughout his productive life, Klein performed many roles. His literary pursuits were invariably sandwiched in between his law practice, politics, editorship of the Chronicle, work for Bronfman and his lecturing position at McGill University. He was an eloquent voice of the Montreal Jewish community, especially during times of crises, as well as a passionate spokesman for the cause of Zionism. His journalistic writings satisfied both his creative and community consciousness allowing him to express deep humanistic concerns. However, his diverse interests resulted in a growing inner conflict with respect to his own artistic ideals.

Klein's erudite use of language was admirable in its scholarly scope, but it also contributed to an ambivalent relationship with the Jewish community. On the one hand, he regarded himself as a poet-statesman in the tradition of Bialik; on the other, his lofty manner alienated and isolated him, leaving him in an artistic void.

In the relatively short span of his writing career, it can be seen that Klein was an innovator of important ideas both in literature and world affairs. He was the first Canadian writer to address Jewish themes in English, paving the way for subsequent writers to express Jewish experience within the Canadian landscape. He was one of the first perceptive observers of French Canadian society, understanding the need

for the French to preserve their own culture and language. He was conscious of the horrendous evils of Hitlerism long before the rest of the world took notice and was the first North American to write of the Holocaust as it was happening. He was a staunch anti-Communist when others were fellow travellers in the 1930s, perceiving its anti-semitic doctrines at a time when this was not altogether common knowledge. His views still remain relevant in light of present-day Russian dissidents and refuseniks. His biblical typology for literary criticism predates Frye and his early comments pertaining to the Canadian literary scene exist as a valuable source of reference for students of Canadian literature.

Klein's last productive years saw him gradually succumb to paranoid behaviour. Caplan's assumptions that "the more one examines the late writings, the more psychological depths one discovers" (C. Th. 228), is especially valid in light of Klein's last works of short fiction. They project a pattern of victimization and alienation mirroring Klein's own vision of the persecuted artist in society. Caplan states: "As he was beginning to lose his hold on reality, Klein's feelings of failure and neglect evolved into a pet theory that all true artists are persecuted and martyred by those closest to them". (C. Th. 260) By the latter, Caplan implies the Jewish community, not Klein's family.

From 1952-54, Klein's health progressively deteriorated until he suffered a complete nervous collapse in 1954, which was precipitated by a suicide attempt. By 1955 he had recovered enough to embark upon a lecture tour. His spurt of good health additionally encouraged him to re-establish communication with his publishers. He began revising his

poetry for inclusion in new anthologies and for a projected book entitled "Selected Poems". His most significant writing of the mid-fifties, however, was the novella, "Bells of Sobor Spasitula", and an unfinished novel, "The Golem". The novella and "Selected Poems" were rejected by Knopf publishers. Besides fiction, Klein continued with his editorial writing, translations and various projects for Samuel Bronfman and the Jewish community. In 1956 Klein abruptly resigned from his law practice. He sporadically returned to his writing, but by the late fifties, he was irrevocably plunged into a deep depression. On August 20, 1972, after some seventeen years of inactivity, Klein peacefully died in his sleep. (C. Th. 227-273)

Almost a half of what should have been the most productive years of Klein's life was spent in self-imposed silence. The reasons surrounding his premature artistic demise still remain mysterious. If Klein's illness could be better understood, it would serve as an invaluable guide to a further understanding of the man and his work. In the absence of medical reports (these are placed with Klein's restricted papers), one seeks other evidence. Steinberg concludes: "Klein's retreat into his long-silence, which began about 1955, when he was just reaching the height of his powers, at least as a fiction writer, may well have been in part his response to a society that he believed did not listen -- or if it paid attention, it did so only to pervert art into propaganda or commercialism". (SS xix)

One can, however, turn to the writing for clues to Klein's growing anxieties. It illustrates his dilemma with respect to the

artist's function in society and his own frustration at having to, at times, produce work which he considered below his true abilities. The themes in his later fiction show that he increasingly related to the alienated and victimized of the world and despaired over the evils of mankind. He felt his work undermined by an apathetic society, and slowly became entrapped by a maze of inner conflicts. His only escape was into a cocoon of silence.

Klein remains one of Canada's foremost poets. His only published novel, The Second Scroll, is a minor masterpiece in Canadian literature. His journalism is a mirror of the times constituting an important segment of his writing. He was, through his journalism and fiction, a social conscience, alerting people to the evils of the world. In the process, he managed to convey both the sublimity and banality of life.

No matter what form of work Klein was doing, his strong sense of history remained at the core of all his endeavours. His contribution to Canadian arts and letters is characterized by his deep Jewish ties; these not only defined his own sensibility but expressed the overall Canadian experience, ultimately transcending ethnic boundaries.

Klein defined himself as the drowned poet, who "shines ... like phosphorous, At the bottom of the Sea". (CP 335) The image foreshadows Klein's descent into depression and solitude. However, it is an ambiguous allusion, for the poet implies both death and life. Klein obviously saw himself drowning in a sea of isolation and neglect, illuminated by his own sense of artistic purity and standards. Although

the poet cannot survive, his art continues to glow as a living tribute to his artistry and humanistic ideals.

Klein's importance in Canadian literature cannot be overestimated. He demonstrated that writing emerges from and reflects cultures. He stressed that art exists in a reciprocal bond with history. Klein's prose is defined by his Judaism, by the Canadian mosaic or human landscape and by the realities of evil and suffering. His art, a blend of truth and imagination, embraces the plight of universal mankind. By celebrating his own Jewish culture, Klein's work encompassed all people in a compassionate relationship between Poet and Society.

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