

A considérer les choses de façon lucide et dans un esprit critique, il nous faut reconnaître que, de nos jours, il n'est pas du tout facile de circonscrire d'une manière précise le domaine de la philosophie, et cela, pour la littérature postmoderne. Reconstruction et diffusion des nouvelles valeurs: ce qu'on propose aujourd'hui, c'est l'abandon des grandes totalités signifiantes, l'abandon d'une histoire qui totaliserait tous les événements de notre vie et notre passé humain, le renoncement à l'égoïsme, mais aussi, plus radicalement, le renoncement à l'idée même de centre. Et, positivement, le repli sur l'individuel, sur le particulier, sur le provincial, sur le décentré. Il n'y a plus de centre, donc il n'y a plus que des réalités décentrées, multiples, toutes équivalentes. Tout cela est la conséquence de l'abandon de l'être; mais Eco vient et nous démontre qu'on peut retrouver le labyrinthe de l'être dans le monde postmoderne du roman. L'auteur, professeur universitaire Luiza Marinescu, un excellent critique littéraire et spécialiste de la littérature roumaine, nous dévoile la métaphysique future, la théorie de l'être postmoderne, une sorte de dialectique nouvelle-platonicienne, aristotélicienne, hégélienne, derridienne, un dépassement de toute finitude, de toute particularité, de toute clôture. Les solutions que l'auteur de *Kant et l'ornithorynque* présente sont d'une postmodernité spirituelle: pour l'avenir d'un monde dans lequel la violence provoque tous les jours la destruction de tant de vies et de tant d'âmes, et qui est menacé par la dissolution totale.

Cosmin Comarnescu

VIORICA S. CONSTANTINESCU, *Evreul stereotip*, București, Editura Eminescu, 1996, 256 p.

Taking into consideration the fact that nobody is indifferent to what is generally called the "Jewish problem", Viorica S. Constantinescu proposes an interesting parallelism between the real Jew and the imaginary Jew, focusing more on the mental prototype, trying to see how this figure appears in literary texts during time, and also in art, attempting to define his place and his intricate relationships with history, the way in which the communication between the Jew and the Non-Jew is configured from a sociological point of view.

The book is divided into two main sections, "The Stereotypes of Thought" and "The Stereotypes of Art", making in this way a clear delimitation between what happens at the social level and what we can find reflected inside the literary text. Attempting, as a first step, to discuss the Jewish issue as it appears in the pages of the *Old Testament*, the author notices that, in fact, "homo antisemiticus" was created, from a historical perspective, by the Jews themselves, describing this model all along *The Holy Book's* narrative construction and transmitting it in this way also to the non-Jews. Following all the time a historical perspective, the author tackles also the Judaic problem which appears after the moment in which the Jews cease to have their own state, in the sixth century B.C., showing the way in which they are viewed and considered in Babylon, and then in Rome; follows, in an interesting manner, the study of the way in which the figure of Jesus is seen by both Jews and Christians, the distinction which appears between *ecclesia* and the synagogue on the background of a theological confusion and the atmosphere of rivalry which begins to be established.

The appearance of antisemitism is also discussed in a separate chapter of this first part of the book, choosing a crucial moment as point of departure: Jews' expulsion from Spain in 1492 when antisemitism as a form of collective hate begins to develop into a "fashionable way of life". The author notices very attentively the manner in which the antisemite atmosphere begins to be more and more present in the everyday life of this period through the obsessive condemnation of the synagogue, the burning of the *Talmud* in public places, the humiliation of the rabbis during the so-called "public discussions", accusations of witchcraft and ritual murder. She also brings into the attention of the

reader the moment of Reformation, considering that Luther represents the point of departure from which antisemitism has been transferred from the level of theological confrontation, having social and political consequences more or less visible, to the philosophical, anthropological and, eventually, political level. Passing throughout the period of Enlightenment, studying the characteristics of Voltaire's antisemitism, the author reaches Kant, Fichte and Schopenhauer's severe criticism of Judaism, and then the "Wagner case", more largely analyzed, the conclusion being the fact that the Holocaust has been a phenomenon prepared in more than a thousand years, fulfilling an expectation consolidated by art inside the collective subconscious.

Following with the study of the "art's stereotypes", in the second part of the book, the author will choose again a historically-oriented type of presentation. The first chapter, "The Image of the Word Inside Medieval Art" tries to demonstrate that the antisemitic impact which art has upon the collective mentality was, in fact, much stronger even than the disputes on religious problems. Analyzing attentively the image of the Jew in the Byzantine Christian art, where for the first time we are able to encounter the identification of the Jew as such and not burdened with the negative meanings with which he will appear later. The reader reaches in this way the discussion of the opposition between the Byzantine art which, as the author explains, uses the Judaic identification sign with a religious connotation, and the medieval art from Western Europe where this identifying sign will have a blaming or caricatural character. Studying the images which appear in the Middle Ages, Viorica Constantinescu highlights the fact that, during this period, the antithesis between the "eternal beautiful figure" of Jesus and "the eternal ugly figure" of Judas is established, starting in fact, at another level, the construction of the well-known opposition between the allegory of the Church and the allegory of the Synagogue. Passing from the discussion of the miniatures of various Medieval chronicles in which we can find representations of the figure of the Jew to the rudimentary theatre of the biblical Passions, the author will demonstrate the way in which these popular shows have contributed to the consolidation of the European antisemitism – Viorica S. Constantinescu studies in detail the "Oberammergau phenomenon", a place in which The Passions are very seriously presented even nowadays as a show of great success.

The way in which the Jew is seen through popular thinking, the rumors and the legends are the subject of research of the following chapter of this volume. Apart from the domain of art, in this new area everything is against the Jew: the poisoning of the wells by Jews, the killing of children for perpetuating in a ritualic manner the killing of Jesus, the relationships with the devil, the profanation of the Eucharistic bread, the fact that they drink Christian blood during Pesah, the fact that the Jews are permanently plotting against the whole world – all these ideas, having no real basis in the daily life of the Jew during history, but proliferating during centuries, are discussed over these pages, being illustrated with a lot of examples historically localized: real trials of the Jews based on this kind of rumors, convictions and persecutions persisting till the twentieth century.

In order to study more deeply the way in which the image of the Jew is mirrored by art, literature and social life, a passage is made to the detailation of some emblematic figures: Judas, Shylock, the Wandering Jew, the prototype of the Jew as "the master of the world" – an analysis which can be considered interesting. A volume rich in examples of all these major directions representing the Jew and the appearance of the stereotypes linked with his symbolism, containing also a discussion concerning the "Judeophobic language", focusing towards the end upon more details that label this emblematic figure of the Jew: for example, the more and more clear distinction between the denomination of "Jew" and "kike", the way in which the latter is covered with negative meanings appearing in expressions or names of plants.

What the author of this volume tries to demonstrate, discussing the stereotypes appearing in the artistic representation of the Jew, especially throughout the mirroring which comes from the social environment, is the fact that the myths and the superstitions are two elements impossible to dissociate from real life, no matter the historical moment with which we deal, influencing the social behavior, the relations

between individuals, being able to give birth to real tragedies: many times the real Jew is the one who is hurt, being permanently burdened by this imaginary Jew, a mere product of the collective mentality.

Cristina Deutsch

CATALINA VELCULESCU, V. GURUIANU (eds.), *Povestea țărilor Asiei. Cosmografie românească veche (Histoire des pays de l'Asie. Cosmographie roumaine ancienne)*, Bucarest, Vestala, 1997, 142 p.

Un aspect essentiel des débats récemment portés sur le statut et l'avenir de la philologie a été représenté par la considération, en contexte nouveau, de la méthodologie traditionnelle caractéristique à l'étude des sources documentaires, censées maintenant intéresser tant le domaine littéraire que la vaste étendue pluridisciplinaire, globalement appelée *sciences humaines*. Il est à souhaiter qu'après ces réévaluations, les problèmes soulevés dans l'espace culturel de l'Europe Occidentale que dans celui des pays de l'Est (édition des œuvres fondamentales, des manuscrits et des textes inédits ou peu connus; défense de l'enseignement des langues classiques, outils indispensables à ce type d'approches; récupération des documents oubliés à cause du désintérêt accru pour tout ce qui échappe au pragmatisme de l'effet immédiat ou de l'insoucieuse et incompréhensible négligence, dans «la politique» des bibliothèques) réussissent à attirer l'attention pour ce qui est de la spécificité et de l'effort qu'une véritable incursion philologique suppose.

Parfois décourageante, en tenant compte de la patience qu'une telle entreprise requiert, de la minutie des détails, de la durée et du volume de travail, l'initiative d'une édition qui rende connus les textes des manuscrits anciens donne la preuve d'une direction d'excellence dans la philologie, malheureusement marginale de nos jours.

Le livre sujet de ce compte rendu constitue une mise en valeur des miscellanées du manuscrit 1436, redécouvert dans les fonds de la Bibliothèque de l'Académie Roumaine (Bucarest), par Cătălina Velculescu et V. Guruianu, universitaires et chercheurs spécialisés en littérature «ancienne» (du Moyen Âge jusqu'au début du XIX^e siècle, pour l'espace culturel roumain).

Une précision s'impose et elle aide à éclaircir les particularités du texte, tout en préparant le lecteur pour ce qui s'ensuit. Dans une «note sur l'édition», méticuleusement organisée, on le décrit comme la copie réalisée à plusieurs mains – pendant les années 1693–1703 – d'une traduction d'après un original étranger, encore difficile à identifier. Ayant une valeur surtout locale, par rapport aux documents similaires, authentiques, des fonds occidentaux, le manuscrit roumain conserve à côté d'un florilège de livres populaires, les plus anciennes cosmographies en langue roumaine, copiées par le chantre Costea, de l'église Saint Nicolas des Șchei de Brașov : *Poveastea țărilor și a împărățiilor câte-s în pământul Asiei (Histoire des pays et des empires qui sont sur la terre de l'Asie)* – f. 49^r – 68^r, et *Împărțeala dîntâi. Cozmogرافية, ce să zice împărțeala Pământului pre hotară și pre alte seamne ce sânt în cercurile ceriului (Les parties originaires de la Terre. Cosmographie ou les parties de la Terre, selon leurs limites et d'autres signes qui sont dans les cercles célestes)* – f. 68^r – 75^r.

Il ne faut aucunement oublier le rôle assigné, dans la littérature médiévale, à ce genre dit «didactique», celui d'expliquer et d'interpréter le sens des allégories et des passages obscurs des livres (premièrement de ceux à caractère religieux). Dans le cas des «géographies légendaires et mythologiques», définies comme telles par les éditeurs roumains, leur disposition parmi des livres populaires (avant *Sindipa le Filosofe* et *l'Esopie*; après *la Fleur de la Vertu* et *le Physiologus*) fait preuve d'une intention au moyen de laquelle on offre la possibilité au lecteur d'avoir une image approximative des pays mentionnés.

En prenant un modèle d'agencement assez répandu dans la culture russe du XVIII^e siècle, supposant – pour ce qui était des informations sur les pays du Proche-Orient (et par scrupule de

BETWEEN THE OLD WORLD AND THE NEW WORLD: THE IMAGE OF THE JEW

CRISTINA DEUTSCH

*"Tell us what happens in America. Is it true
that the people there are walking with
the head down and the feet up?"*

*"Whoever wants to do this is free to do it.
It's a free country."*

(From a discussion between two characters
of Isaac Bashevis Singer).

Being two elements which are, in fact, a part of people's everyday life, the myths and superstitions are, even more than this, part of the inner structure of a person, living permanently in his mind and soul, influencing his behaviour inside the society, his relation with *the Other*. Some of them have "local applicability" (we can consider from this point of view the myths and superstitions of the African tribes, of the Asian peoples whose type of culture, being "closed", is far less permeable to the contacts with the outside world), being often incomprehensible for the Europeans or for the Americans. Others are quasiuniversal, having a large circulation in Europe and America and, besides this, it is possible to find similar myths also in other areas of culture; an example could be the myth of the Graal or, in a more general context, the various superstitions based on the perception of all kind of bad omens which are supposed to forecast important future events, a.s.o.

The myth of the Jew can be considered to be part of the second category: we find it spread almost in all the European civilizations, in the cultural environment of the United States, in the Arabian countries, being included in the larger category of the Myth of the Stranger. Obviously, the English area wasn't at all an exception: the image of the Jew appears in the social, political and economic life quite early and, in this way, the first legends focusing on this mysterious intruder appear, being mainly bloody stories which will proliferate even in the twentieth century. It is very interesting the way in which these myths, legends and superstitions will "immigrate" into the New World, both on the real and fictional levels because, as Leslie Fiedler has said – "in the beginning, the Jewish author and the Jewish character, whether invented

by Gentile or Jew, played only a slight and peripheral role in the literature of the United States and in the deep mind of the American people which that literature at once reflects and makes. It is, at least partially, the result of a simple sociological fact that the Jews were, in the earliest years of our nation, few and insignificant and that, therefore, the mythology of the Jew, which we inherited along with the English language and the corpus of English literature, moved the popular American mind scarcely at all. What could the figures of the Wandering Jew, of Shylock and Jessica, Isaac of York and Rebecca, Riah and Fagin mean to a people whose own guilts and fears and baffled aspirations were projected on quite different ethnic groups?"¹

So, if for the Americans the Jew will be only a variant of the Stranger – and we shouldn't ignore the fact that we are talking right now only about a transitory stage –, often the changing of his condition, the assimilation, being desired from both sides, at least in the beginning period, both historical and literary, will turn him into something different from the manner in which he was perceived in the European area. Being always in contact with prototypes representing another minority American groups, and especially the one represented by the W.A.S.P.² (forming a majority therefore being stronger), the Jew will be also capable of imposing "the way in which things must be viewed", having "the right" of imagining the others, in his turn, as *strangers*.

Although the social relations in the U.S.A. between the Jews and other ethnical communities are much more complex than what was going on in England, for example (also because the time period covered in here is considerably bigger), these cannot be considered more than a compression and a "refining" of the latter – a phenomenon which happens more in the literary than in the social field. What happens at the historical level in England, where we can talk about the birth of these myths about the Jew beginning even with the twelfth century, won't be mirrored with the same variety in the English literature where we can talk more about stereotypes; a few types which are recurrent, except some variations till the literature of the twentieth century (of course, as far as a character like Leopold Bloom from Joyce's novel is concerned, we can't talk any longer about a stereotype). Following this attempt which tries to transform the Jew into a well-defined character in English literature between the limits of certain patterns, we can easily notice that the elements of which his characterization will be composed aren't very varied, both in their affirmation or negation in the real social life, as well as in the fictional one. Important differences of structure can't be noticed, not even when the "transplantation" from the Old World to the New World takes place – the change will happen mainly in the manner in which this sort of information will be taken and revalued, in the point of view which will become more diversified

¹ Leslie A. Fiedler, *Waiting For the End. The American Literary Scene From Hemingway to Baldwin*, U.S.A., 1967, p. 78.

² White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant.

from one author to another, this happening especially in the absence of the tendency of seeing the Jew, generally speaking, as an exotic character.

If, in England, the Jew was mainly a negative hero coming from the legends and the medieval tales, mysterious and gloomy at the same time, or a literary device for putting into practice some liberal generous and utopian ideas, when reaching the American territory the Jew wouldn't be an image of the Stranger anymore: the stereotypes wouldn't have the same power of conviction, they would become much more colorless, the non-Jewish American writers wouldn't use so often this character so deeply "loved" by their English colleagues. From a character, the Jew will become very fast also *an author* describing himself and describing *the Other*. In this way, it won't be only a simple relation from subject to object, but also a "road" which could be covered in both ways.

If the English Jew – real or being only a product of the imagination – seems to be a pliant material, easy to be shaped, easily framed into pre-established patterns, an almost phantomatic individual whose yells of protest are barely perceptible, the American Jew – either a victim or a civilizing hero of his own community – will make all these stereotypes pass into the background; his voice, it's true, feeble in the beginning, then stronger and stronger, will make itself heard more and more often, more and more intense, more and more powerful until *the Others* are forced to admit that their own *Character* has come to life beginning to contradict and even to cancel their own *Author*.

The continuity of the representation of the Jew in the American literature pictures a constant relationship of this myth with the European tradition. At least until the beginning of the twentieth century, this "migration" at the literary level of the Jew from the Old World to the New World won't lead to a spectacular change in the way in which things are seen. Together with this fact, we can also notice a "weakening" of the importance of this character inside the American imagination in the beginning, unlike the important place occupied in England: the points of view will begin to differentiate as far as the Jew as a character is concerned (first, an autobiographical character, taken from real life, but also redefined and reinterpreted, becoming eventually a true fictional hero).

If in the English literature there was only what we can call a "one-way relation" from the author to the character, in the American literature this situation will begin gradually to change. As we can see, the discrepancies, as far as this problem is concerned, are big enough in the passage from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century when the dominant tradition begins to be weakened under the pressure of the class concept and especially of the race concept, when the antithesis between the W.A.S.P. literature and the literature of the other ethnical groups composing the large American cultural puzzle become keener.

It's interesting to notice the fact that the Jew won't represent an image of the Stranger not even in the beginning of the American literature: even from the

seventeenth century, when the first sephardim, coming from Brasil, landed in New Amsterdam, he'll start to integrate into the American society without too much trouble. This will be a totally new situation only if we think of the English literature in which the Jew as a literary character is practically only a mental construct, this situation covering a very widespread temporal period (from the Renaissance till the middle of the seventeenth century). Although the manner of dealing of some authors who come either directly from the Puritan tradition (like Nathaniel Hawthorne, for example) or whose link with the English space is extremely complex (the most well-known situation is, of course, that of Henry James), won't be too much separated from the old stereotypes so well-grounded in the English literature, it's obvious that they won't bring any noticeable innovation in the "construction" of the Jew as a literary character, being quite a difficult task to make a differentiation between the manner of dealing with this problem in the Old World and the new manner, the American one. But, considering the American literature as a whole, we can easily see that there is almost impossible to find any writer (no matter if we deal with prose – where, obviously, we can talk about the existence of a character in itself – or with poetry) who doesn't make at least a slight allusion to the Jew. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, Frank Norris or Ernest Hemingway are just the most well-known examples. But the image of the Jew (and this almost without exception) will appear also in the works of Francis Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Wolfe, John Dos Passos, T.S. Eliot or Ezra Pound. But, even if his figure is so widely spread, his importance is extremely reduced – the Jew isn't, almost without exception, a main character in any of the works of these authors: at his best he can be "the antihero", as happens in Hemingway's "The Sun Also Rises", for example, but nothing more. Also, the stereotypes taken over from the English literature are kept, but this doesn't mean that the American literature will give birth, by any means, to a new Shylock.

The first elements preserved and used again and again by the American literature will be the stereotypes concerning the physical appearance of the Jew and the image of the stingy usurer. In relation with the latter, a myth implying directly the American space will be also linked, in the twentieth century with that whole theory of an international Jewish conspiracy meant to control the whole world's economical system. The old ways of thinking will be assumed and the utilisation of the Jew as a literary symbol will vary in the beginning, depending more on the literary imagination of the prose writers than on the basis of a direct mirroring of everyday life. Also, the "construction" of the myth of the Jew into the New World will be shaped taking into consideration the ideologies and the practice which define the relationships between the W.A.S.P. majority and the Jewish minority group, but all these at a certain superficial level, without a real communication between the two cultural areas (and, almost till the middle of the twentieth century, without existing practically any attempt of dialogue between the "W.A.S.P. writers" and the "American Jewish writers").

"In the United States the Jewish identity is definitely American. Most part of the Jews arrange their ancient customs for fitting into the tradition and values of the United States. The American Jews not only overran a cultural barrier to become part of the main current, but they almost weren't aware of the existence of such a barrier", asserted Donna Robinson Divine³ during a symposium organized by The Ethics and Public Policy Center in 1993, having as the main subject the American Judaism and the role of religion in the public life.

Obviously, what defines mainly the Jewish immigration into the United States – an idea which verifies itself especially for the beginning of the XXth century – will be the individual attempt of adapting to the American culture through a process of modernization and assimilation considered as having a "purifying" character. We must take into consideration the fact that the situation of the Jewish minority group inside the American society is a special one. We deal here with immigrants often related not only on a religious basis, a primordial element which, in this particular case, is not always enough: there are individuals coming from all parts of the world, bringing with them not only a racial and religious heritage which will constitute that minimal basis (that defines them, in fact, as "Jews"), but also a lot of traditions and customs of the people among whom they had lived before immigrating. So, the United States Jews form not only one composite group, but more an agglomeration made of various groups, which construct both a specific and a general image at the same time.⁴

Besides this, there is also in the United States that problem which appears not exactly between the ethnic groups, but between the religious ones (shaping, in this way, a double detachment between *the Jew and the Others*) which – in spite of all the efforts of rapprochement – will always assert the existence of certain gaps of isolation and reciprocal distrust: "moreover, the ignorance of Americans about the religious faiths of our neighbours is boundless – and potentially dangerous."⁵

Both as far as the American social reality and the literary fiction are concerned, the impossibility of seeing them as a homogeneous whole resulting from the interaction of the fragments which form it becomes more and more clear – an attempt beginning with Crèvecoeur's "Letters from an American Farmer" who, introducing the "melting pot" concept intended to lay the theoretical basis of this issue; adopting the shaping of the American culture like a "global" type, the advocates of this idea relied from the beginning on the fact that this homogenization (which, of course,

³ Donna Robinson Divine is a professor at the Smith College and one of the organizers of the Hebrew Studies here. She's the author of a study focusing on the Arab-Palestinian society in the last century of Turkish domination.

⁴ *Literary History of the United States. History*, London, 1969, ed. Robert E. Spiller, Willard Thorp, Thomas H. Johnson, Henry Seidel Canby, Richard M. Ludwig, p. 690.

⁵ *A Tale of Ten Cities. The Triple Ghetto in American Religious Life*, New York, 1962, ed. Eugene J. Lipman, Albert Vorspan, p. 4.

existed as a "finite product" only in a theoretical way, practically being obtained only either partially or just for short periods of time) is a result of the blending of a "multitude of cultures". That is exactly what the American Jewish writers of the '20s and '30s (quite a vague temporal approximation, the period of time covered by this kind of writers having in fact its limits between the last decade of the nineteenth century and the middle of the '40s in the twentieth century, the '20s and the '30s representing only the "boiling points" of the way in which they viewed the issue) will try to put into practice.

It is possible that the Jews may have found a comfortable shelter inside the American society, but this fact doesn't really mean that the adaptation has led necessarily to something good: it's very likely that the American values may have rather a weakening effect than a strengthening one upon the traditional Jewish identity.

The image of the Jew, as seen by the American writers, whether or not of Jewish origin, and also the view of the prose writers of the United States upon the American space, were often converted only into a mental construct, meaning that the parallelism society-literature is a mechanism functioning with big deficiencies. This isn't at all a unique fact, if we think, for example, of another pattern, much more popular within the American boundaries – that of the native American, should we consider the westerns or the novels involving this kind of plot. Of course, we can't demand from the literature – no matter the genre or the literary current – to reflect the society "as it is" – we'll always be forced to relate ourselves with it, with the exception of some boundary genres like, for example, the reportage, as to a subjective way of visualising this issue.

Exactly because of this fact some American Jewish prose writers, today almost forgotten, as Anzia Yeziarska, Abraham Cahan, Mary Antin or the ones from the '30s, more popular, like Michael Gold, Daniel Fuchs or Henry Roth, become an interesting material for a study concerning especially the relation between the literary text and the sociological aspect – it isn't the literary value that impresses us, but exactly this attempt at a rapprochement between literature and society. The clumsy goodwill with which these authors from the beginning of the twentieth century will try to promote the assimilationist tendencies conflicting with the Jewish traditions "brought from home", the internationalist-demolishing socialism spread among the writers of the '30s, will allow us to see the real situation of this minority group inside the American space.

At the social level, the issue will be as complicated as the one in the literary field (let us remember here only the dissociation existent between the writers who use Yiddish for expressing themselves,⁶ continuing to follow the traditional

⁶ See Dagobert D. Runes, *Dictionar de iudaism*, București, 1997, pp. 142–143: A language talked and written by a large number of Jews, having as a source medieval German, with elements from Hebrew and from the local languages with certain special values. The verbs of Hebrew origin appear germanized while the nouns are hebrewized. The main center of the Yiddish development was Russia.

direction, more or less modified by their own ideas and artistic concepts, and the Jewish writers who use English which, step by step, will separate them from the ghetto, making them become "real Americans" – the discrepancies between the generations of the Jewish immigrants being enormous.

The American Jews will be therefore forced to generate their own means of analysis in order to understand the new world where they are living and their role in it. They will try both to define their own traditions in the clearest possible way, and to observe attentively the ways in which they are seen and schematized by others. While the generations of Jewish immigrants come more and more towards contemporary times, being raised in America and educated in American schools, the majority of the Jews, although being initially strangers to what we generally intend to understand by the concept of "American values", will enter slowly into an alteration of their own Jewishness because of this "detachment" which, in time, becomes more and more keen, from the Jewish history, from the Jewish customs and, eventually, from their own characteristics which made them to be a totally diverse community.

As we have said before, the enmities won't be stabilized only at the level of the relation between *the Jew* and *the Other*, but also among the members of the same ethnic and religious community. One of the reasons of this "separation" is of a linguistical nature, being noticed, from this point of view, the consolidation of two "groups": on the one side the Jews of German, French, Greek, Syrian origin which were often used the languages of their countries from which they came and, on the other side, Jews coming from Russia and Poland who were talking especially Yiddish (many of them didn't even know at all or almost at all the languages of the countries where they had been born). In this way not only the problem of the assimilation⁷ in the larger space of the United States was involved, but also the problem of accomodation inside the new ghetto's area.

Another element of conflict was the fact that the old Jewish community, composed especially of immigrants coming from the Iberian Peninsula and from Central Europe, was afraid of the more and more massive "invasion", occurring at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, of those Orthodox Jews coming from Eastern Europe, so strangely dressed and so old-fashioned in everything. The American Jews were wondering if this arrival of their coreligionaries from Russia, Poland and Romania would not arouse the latent antisemitism existing in the United States.

⁷ See: Jean-Christophe Attias, Esther Benbassa, *Dicționar de civilizație iudaică*, București, 1997, p. 3: The comportamental assimilation (or acculturation), which can reach a large diversity of social and cultural practices, allows an absorption of the outside forces without the group losing because of this the main characteristics of its identity which, although continuously evolving, remains preserved for the next generations. The acculturation and the social integration occur, of course, together.

The way in which the Jewish writers will look at the American territory and the way in which the Jew, as a human and spiritual entity, inserts himself in this space often harmonizes with the social elements and also with the way in which this individual analyzes himself: in prose, through the author's projection obtained using a standardized character, no matter if it is an autobiographical image (or sometimes even a distorted, mocking self-portraying of the author himself), through realistic description or psychological analysis. If, in the case of the writers from the beginning of the twentieth century like Anzia Yeziarska, Mary Antin or Abraham Cahan, we are completely aware of that desire of assimilation, of integration at any costs into the American society, the novels coming after will start to adopt also other points of view. Talking especially about the comportmental assimilation, rather than about the structural one,⁸ a general feeling coming also from mere idealism, out of some kind of sincerity of the belief in the American Dream (an attitude which, of course, didn't always lead to a favourable result), a contemporary Jewish writer born in the United States like Philip Roth, for example – who apparently favours more the "American" label than the "Jewish" one, would see things from a totally different point of view. The way in which that authentic desire of being assimilated from the beginning will be transformed inside the soul of the characters populating a short story like "Eli, the Fanatic" into a monstrous lack of understanding towards their coreligionaries coming from a "dark" world, "ruining their appearance", into a demential fury directed against these intruders who put them in an embarrassing situation in front of their non-Jewish neighbors, destroying the "social harmony" already established and remembering of their own roots – this is one of the patterns followed by the literary themes of the American Jewish writers. Of course, this picture of the conflict between the American assimilated Jews, beneficiaries of *the Others'* tolerance and the old-fashioned Orthodox Jews won't be a subject approached only by the Jewish writers born in the United States, but it will also appear as a recurrent image in the entire American Jewish literature.

The characters of the writers at the beginning of the twentieth century are generally autobiographical projections and less complex fictional constructs – like their authors, they are the Jews of the end of the nineteenth century, leaving the shtetl's world⁹ with their eyes towards America, that "land of all possibilities" where a miraculous new beginning was waiting for them. Being afraid of all kind of persecutions and having all sort of "extravagant dreams", as Ronald Takaki¹⁰ despidingly defines them, there are elements which give these immigrants the

⁸ Attias, Benbassa, *Dicționar de civilizație iudaică*, pp. 37–38: "Through structural assimilation we understand the deletion of the particularities of a certain ethnic group, resulting from its own desire of melting into the surrounding society and from the pressure of the outside forces which alter profoundly or even destroy completely its identity."

⁹ Yidd., masc. N., Jewish little town from Eastern Europe.

¹⁰ Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror. A History of Multicultural America*, U.S.A., 1993, p. 280.

courage of derooting themselves, making them leave their native lands once and forever. Takaki will be also the one who will narrate in a very special way the process through which this "feaver of leaving" becomes more and more intense, describing in detail the shtetl's lanes, where the Jewish women were selling beds, chairs, kitchen tables, all kind of disparate things in order to gather money to pay the ticket to America. But if this shtetl is a place relatively easy to abandon, from the spiritual point of view this thing proves to be a little more complicated. New York becomes for the immigrant Jew some sort of an "oversized" shtetl, Lower East Side being the favourite place to name "home", at least in the beginning; in 1905 Lower East Side was counting no less than half a million Jews. Also, at the beginning of the twentieth century, starts the Jewish "migration" towards Harlem, where they'll form a section known under the name of Little Russia. In the '20s, the favourite areas will be Bronx and Brooklyn. It is very interesting that the reason for this new "exodus" was the desire of living in "American" neighborhoods, a wish based on their aspiration of not being considered strangers in the United States.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Jewish writers are celebrating through their works the integration into the new society and, even if they remind the immigrants' experience and the problems of acculturation, this thing is done not in order to criticize the American society, but in a way that tries to erase at least this obvious external difference from the others. But, in the same way as things happened at the social level, as hard as they will try to be integrated and participate in the "American life", their reputation will become more and more put at doubt. Many works of this period prove not to have an important literary value but, in exchange, they are valuable as a very interesting social study of the epoch. All these authors aren't remembered necessarily in the history of the American literature because of the quality of their writings, but more due to the fact that they established certain models. The literary forms mainly used are the realistic novel and the *fictionalized memoir*; the American Jewish literature of this period doesn't innovate consciently. For example, a writer like Abraham Cahan defines himself as a disciple of William Dean Howells, following the line imposed by the American realistic novel. Both in "Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto" and in "The Rise of David Levinsky", Cahan depicts insistently the effort of the Jewish immigrant to get rid of his external "weird" appearance and his old way of thinking, his strivings for assuming the language and customs of his new adoptive country, an effort which will prove soon to be successful, bringing at the same time along with it also the destruction of the tradition, accelerated by the temptations of the city appearing under degraded aspects also inside the space of the ghetto. Of course, the idea is that all this will lead, for the character, step by step, to a loss of innocence, and even to dehumanization. If in "The Rise of David Levinsky" we are put in front of "his fight for survival in a world which fades away and for the harmonization between the moral of the past and the contradictories tendencies of the present",

noticing "not only unclear images of the immigrant's existence at the beginning of the twentieth century, but also the substance itself of the American reality of that period",¹¹ in Anzia Yezierska and Mary Antin's prose we are able to find a more fictionalized and "veiled" way of seeing things. This type of literature, developed in the same time with Abraham Cahan's realistic novel, so belonging to this first period of the Jewish prose in the United States, will be especially an autobiographical one, appearing mostly under the form of diaries, letters, memoirs. Through autobiographies like "From Plotzk to Boston" (1899) and "The Promised Land" (1912) by Mary Antin or through Anzia Yezierska's novels and short stories, "Hungry Hearts" (1920), "Salome of the Tenements" (1922), "Children of the Loneliness" (1923), the literary forms present along the next decades in the works of the American Jewish immigrants start having a certain shape. We won't find here even the minimal critical attitude towards the American Dream depicted in Cahan's work, but we can encounter, for example, the same typified character (the Jewish immigrant), arriving in America ("The Promised Land") where, after overcoming successfully some obstacles, he fulfills his own variant of the American Dream (generally, material achievement). As we can easily see, it is a very simple plot, which could be paralleled with that of a fairy tale: the idea that, through work and just by being smarter than others, it is very likely that anyone (even the hungry immigrant coming from Russia) can become more than successful in the American capitalist society. Many immigrants were attracted to the United States by this illusion, and of course not everyone was able to "adjust" the American Dream to his own desires and aspirations.

What these prose writers bring as a novelty into the space of the American literature is mainly related to the "experience of immigration" (no matter if it's about trying to follow the patterns without paying too much importance to the ethnic characteristics of these groups of immigrants). Anyway, we have in these novels and short stories an attempt at describing the events of a process registering the passage from "old" (generally the starting point of the characters is Russia) to "new" (America), from a bleak past to a future full of hope (even if sometimes it's only a utopia): it is the naïve attempt, in a way, of a group at copying an existential model considered superlative.

On the other hand, starting with the '30s, writers like Michel Gold, Daniel Fuchs or Henry Roth will deal mainly with a proletarian kind of literature, a genre tending to become theist, in which the Jewish artist, as a model of the marginal hero, incarnates the type of the moralist; this literature is also written by immigrants but, in opposition with the colourless and "peaceful" attitude of the authors of the first two decades of the twentieth century, the change is an extremely violent one (especially at the level of ideas, reflecting in fact what was

¹¹ Dan Grigorescu, *Romanul american al secolului XX*, București, 1999, pp. 51-52.

going on in the American society of the time). For example, a Marxist author like Michael Gold focuses particularly on the rejection of any attempt at the identification to a certain ethnic group: his purposes are no longer "normalization", "Americanization" or ethnical isolation inside their own group. The social reality evoked by writers like Daniel Fuchs in his trilogy¹² or Henry Roth in "Call It Sleep" is presented mainly through the depiction of the ghetto, a world which keeps its own gates still closed, the communication with the outside world, with the "real" American environment, being made practically at random. The everyday fight involving these characters of the '30s doesn't have as the main purpose the acceptance of the immigrant in the American social space, but it's basically a fight for survival. The most common "scene" of the action is strictly that of the Jewish neighborhood, of the ghetto, a world dominated by sad truths, an atmosphere which we can also find in Isaac Bashevis Singer's work.

One can notice, both in what the Jewish writers of the '20s and those of the '30s are concerned, that the way of constructing their novels and short stories and the patterns on which the characters are configured are still undecided, unsure, but, behind this problem, the existential situations which these authors are dealing with (the life of the Jewish immigrant "moved" from the European ghetto into the American one, the problems of acculturation, his attempts, full of optimism or, on the contrary, desperate, of adapting himself to the social, political and cultural environment) become very interesting for the contemporary reader especially because they manage to depict a process of a world in formation and the rebirth of a new individual. We see in this way how the image of the Jew changes in this transition from the Old World to the New World, how those stereotypes imposed on him by the European imagination during centuries inside the mental construction of his images still have the power of burdening him, and also how big the discrepancy between what is going on at the social level and what the American literature usually mirrors is.

During the after-war period, with writers like Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud or Philip Roth, who are no longer immigrants, but basically Americans, all these themes insinuated into the United States Jewish literature at the beginning of the twentieth century will give birth to varied currents: a literature of "alienation", dominated by the ontological search and the metaphysical reflection, an attempt at transforming the Jewish character into a cultural hero of modern America, but also a literature of reaction against the way in which the writers before them were seeing society, an attempt at transposing this cultural hero newly obtained into an antihero characterized through a permanent desire of rebellion, having as target both the exterior and the interior universe.

¹² See: Daniel Fuchs, *Summer in Williamsburg*, New York, 1934; *Homage to Blenholt*, New York, 1936; *Low Company*, New York, 1937.

As far as Bellow is concerned, his vision upon the American space is strongly related to the way in which he constructs his own characters. We are dealing here with a prototype which, regardless the individual variants in which it will appear, "dangles" between two constants through which its definitory characteristics are articulated. First, it's about the space in which this individual develops and also about the very complex relationships between him and the environment which contains him: this is the American City (dealing exclusively with Chicago and New York, the other places in which the characters appear only with a "decorative" role) which, more than an ordinary background, can be considered even an independent theme in Bellow's prose and, why not, even a "character in the mirror", a reply to the real character who lives in it and who is, in his turn, "lived" by the City. The way in which Bellow perceives the City is unique inside the United States literature. A parallelism could be made with Isaac Bashevis Singer, a prose writer who can be considered as "a bridge" between the well-preserved Jewish tradition and the American literature, the relations between the character and "the place where things happen" having the same type of complexity; Singer's hero was an inhabitant of a circular space, no matter if it was the shtetl or the Polish city, dangerous and protective at the same time, or an alienating space when he was talking about New York, but alienating simply because it was "foreign", there weren't any links between him and the character, he was coming from the "outside", not being able to accommodate inside this new territory. With Bellow, the character comes from the "inside" and the alienation is the result of the "tiredness" provoked by the fight with the City. What is important to notice is that *the soul* lacks, and then the character will permanently feel, till obsession, that he must have "something belonging to himself", something which he can be daily robbed of, and which is impossible to define; he needs a soul because only in this way the level of "being a real man" can be reached and, of course, the character can acquire a certain identity.

If we ignore the distinctions real/imaginary and contemporary/atemporal, a typological city similar to that of Bellow's will be Faulkner's Jefferson: the tentacles of the city can be tamed only by a character disposed to make concessions, and especially by one who knows how this sacrifice must be made. But Bellow's "Hydra-City" usually prefers to "swallow" its victims than to negotiate with them: we won't meet any Flem Snopes in Bellow's novels because there isn't simply any Bellowian character capable to reach such a degree of "craftmanship" in "arranging" his relations with the City. Joseph, Asa Leventhal, Augie March, Tommy Wilhelm, Herzog will be content also with a simulacrum of identities (or with a "half identity") or only with the fact (although very important too) of being aware of "what" they are searching and "with what purpose".

The second level of Bellow's literature is also correlated with the space where the character lives and with the theme of alienation, everlasting in his work:

it's about the two hypostases which the bellowian hero can assume for himself – that of the Jew as a victim of the surrounding society and of history or that of the Jew who tries to get rid of an ethnic identity, to let himself being “assimilated” in order to achieve a new inner identity. So, on the one side, we deal with a battle of the character with his inner ego, so that “in Bellow’s work the world and the conscience of the individual are split, but the characters are pushed by uncountable impulses of emotion and intellect to make again a pact with other people, with the human condition itself, with the whole universe, whose meaning and finality are to be revealed again.”¹³

In Bellow’s novel, this relation between the individual and the society in which he lives is strongly related with “the real historical time” during which the action takes place. Of course we can’t consider these fictional works simply historical “chronicles” but, more likely an example of the very subtle way in which the novelist is capable to “filter” the historical event through his own fictional world. From this point of view, we can easily notice that Bellow’s novels are arranged along a temporal axis which establishes the time when the story of the novel takes place, at the same point when the process of writing “happens”: “the contemporary”, “the present” are the main interests of this character.

The way in which the Jewish writers in the United States see the American space will be much more complicated with novelists like Bernard Malamud or Philip Roth because here we deal, on the one side, with a more profound fusion between the character and the environment from which he comes, and, on the other side, the environment in which he develops. For example, in Malamud's case, we have all the time in front of our eyes an initiatic journey of the hero, an intricate way through the labyrinth in search of a chimera: in the way in which the Jew becomes in his novel an Individual Being, also the American space will become something very vague because the malamudian character, even when he thinks that he has found what he is searching for, this *Something* escapes through his fingers, making him often a *Nobody* (through a minus-identity or through a pluralism of identities which, superposing on one another, deteriorate themselves in some sort of “no man’s land”). It is, in fact, about the rejection of that compartmental type of assimilation in favour of an attempt at structural assimilation, only the purposes are now changed. The search of their own identity, of the ego (especially of the ethnical one) is what determines Malamud’s hero to interact with the environment: the way becomes often regressive, of going back to the roots (the New World is sometimes replaced by the Old World), it’s an attempt at redeeming something that seems to be forever lost.

If with Malamud “the escape from America”, the refusal of the “real” space, the succession, and often the superposing of these intricate ways of the characters

¹³ Grigorescu, *ibidem*, p. 227.

are the most important elements, with Philip Roth the attempt at fitting into the environment will become a fight to the end, an irresoluble opposition between the "world of the family" and "the outside world". The Jew won't be the figure of the Stranger arriving in the Promised Land, but a psychopath – or, at his best, a neuropath, rejecting and attracting everything at the same time. America becomes here a burlesque, chaotic space, a world of black humour. There is no escape for finding again that marvellous space, full of promises, but just a "prohibited world", often seen as a sexual paradise; the desire of entering this territory, also including the loss of the ethnic identity, will lead to the development of a "sick" hero, not exactly alienated in the usual meaning of the term, but more aggressive (with the family world and the surrounding environment, the American one always in conflict, and the character fighting desperately with both, in an action of simultaneous attraction and rejection), with a shaken, ruined psychism, an individual who knows very well who he is, who is aware of his ethnic identity but this, instead of helping him to find himself again, suffocates him, giving some feeling of oppression which will permanently determine him to try to escape from these worlds, to abolish reality, and, finally, to recreate his own distorted realities. Is America a bigger and more hospitable shtetl for the Jewish writer and for his characters? Is this a tricking territory where his identity can be stolen? Is there any possibility for this character to adapt himself, to become an American or will he fail before reaching the end of the journey? Is this a positive or a negative fact for the ethnic identity; for the religious identity and, finally, for the inner identity of the Jew? – these are the questions, often insistently repeated, leading to multiple answers which the Jewish writer, even from the moment when he is in the "childhood" of his literary creation, will put to himself all the time, without reaching a concrete and final result.

Together with the writer's reading maturity, his character will also follow the same way and questions, instead of becoming less, will become more and more complex, the answers coming with more and more difficulty, more veiled in ambiguity and mystery.

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