

MARGINALITY AND DETACHMENT IN THE POETRY OF

A. M. KLEIN




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ABSTRACT

The following study deals with the published poetry of A. M. Klein. While on the surface, the poetry reflects a man who seems comfortable with his Jewish past and his present life as a Canadian living in Montreal, closer examination reveals that this poet is, in fact, marginal to much of his life. This study examines only this aspect of marginality as it is shown in Klein's poetry, and the Preface outlines both the argument and its conclusion.

The first chapter of this study focuses on marginality, which is defined as the state of being aware of an environment, but feeling apart from it. I show that Klein is marginal to the religious traditions of his ancestors, to many aspects of his life in Montreal, to Palestine, and to many of the expressions of contemporary Judaism.

The second chapter concentrates on the poetic devices which Klein utilizes to enable him to write about those areas of life to which his poetry shows that Klein felt marginal or that he found particularly painful. In the main, I note that Klein distances or detaches himself or his audience, using a variety of distancing techniques.

Chapter III, the conclusion, discusses Klein's perception of his role as a poet and how this is reflected in his poetry.

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PREFACE

For to praise

the world--he, solitary man--is breath
to him. Until it has been praised, that part
has not been.¹

These words from "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape", although written rather late in Klein's career, seem somehow to capture Klein's view of life and his function in it. Throughout his writing, one sees his struggle not only to approve a thing, but to glorify it, to see within it something of the divine. There were many areas of life which Klein could readily extol: aspects of his own history, the details of which he learned from his beloved father; his wife, whom he cherished; some details from his French Canadian environment; nature. Other aspects of life were not so easily found praiseworthy.

Klein's family and early schooling taught him a great deal about the religious and social heritage of Eastern European Jewry. He grew up in an Orthodox Jewish family, whose religious convictions were sufficiently strong that when the father was unable to find a job that would allow him the Sabbath as a "day off", he was unemployed for well over a year and the family suffered considerable financial hardship as a result. In later years, Klein felt uncomfortable with the traditional rituals and in many of his poems expresses both a yearning for the comfort of the faith of his father and a recognition that he lacks his father's faith. He is on the edge, close enough to describe it in detail, but he is not a member participant. This state of being aware of an environment, but feeling apart from

it, I refer, in this paper, to being marginal. My reading of Klein's poetry suggests that he is marginal to many areas of his life.

It has been discovered by more than one child of immigrant parents that it is impossible to continue Old Country traditions while at the same time finding one's place in the new land. Each person struggles to redefine himself according to whatever criteria are important to him. In Klein's life, these included the need to become a Jew who integrated the heritage of Eastern European Jewry with his membership in a French and English Canadian environment. The result seems to have been an uneasy tension between a religious heritage which he does not continue and a new surrounding in which he never feels quite "at home". While he was able to incorporate many of the habits and values of both the East European *shtetl*² and the French and English Canadian urban dweller, he didn't completely fit in either culture. In other words, as he sought to discover a position that felt authentic to him, Klein found that he was marginal to both the old and the new.

In that he linked himself with the collective and individual experience of earlier Jews, Klein had no difficulty in identifying himself as a Jew. But being a Jew in an affirmative sense involves more than being born one: that Klein continually sought a new way of declaring what he was is as much apparent from his many descriptions of his lack of membership in the historic Jewish community defined by tradition and ritual as it is by any declaration of new self-definition. Like many other twentieth century North American Jews, Klein found much of his hope and his identity through his Zionist activity. And yet, as will be seen

in this paper, there are ways in which he is marginal here, as well.

There is little in the poetry that describes other efforts at defining the contemporary Jew. However, he is familiar with the questions that create the problems of identity and there are many poems that involve the need to discover new, more acceptable responses to age-old questions about existence, suffering, war, justice, the divine. In addition, there were events in his life that Klein seemed to find almost unbearably painful. These include both such personal circumstances as Klein's concern about madness (especially his fear that he was going mad) and such socio-historical events as the holocaust of World War II.

Klein attempts to write about all aspects of life. However, this thesis will focus on those areas of life to which his poetry shows that Klein felt marginal or that he found particularly painful. I will concentrate on the poetic devices which Klein utilizes to enable him to write about these personally difficult subjects. It will be noted that, in the main, I see that Klein distances, or detaches himself or his audience, although he does this in a variety of ways.

Distancing techniques are those which are used to express the separation of the poet, or which act to detach the audience, from that which is being described. In some cases, they suggest, and at times, they emphasize, the alien nature of the subject. In Klein's writing, one notes frequent use of foreign words, archaisms, third person pronouns, irony, unusual choices of rhythm, and inventive word-formations as some of the most common techniques used to detach the author and audience from the subject. These techniques are not always used by Klein for the

purposes of distancing. Still, there are many examples of these techniques being used to stress the separation between subject and author or audience and it is these to which this thesis pays particular attention.

Thus, it will be clear that I will examine only one aspect of Klein's poetry. As well, I will quote only some of the poems which illustrate the various techniques of language, form, voice and tone which Klein uses to distance either himself or his audience.

My text is Waddington's The Collected Poems of A. M. Klein, which has as its major limitation an ordering that gives a distorted sense of Klein's development.³ She has ordered the poems by date of publication of the separate volumes and dates the individual poems accordingly, only occasionally giving the actual date of first publication. Since the text makes accessible to me poems that are otherwise unavailable, and since my argument is not much affected by the date of a poem's writing, I use the text, despite its flaws.

FOOTNOTES

1. Klein, A. M., "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape", The Collected Poems of A. M. Klein, ed. M. Waddington. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1974. p. 335. All poems but one will be quoted from this edition and will henceforth be cited by title and page number. The single poem quoted from manuscript will be identified as such.
2. The *shtetl* literally refers to a town. However, in most cases, the word also includes the sense of community that exists in these Jewish areas.
3. Steinberg, M. W. "Review of 'The Collected Poems of A. M. Klein'", Queens Quarterly, Spring, 1976. Kingston: Queens University Press, n.p.

CHAPTER I

MARGINALITY

Many critics have concentrated on Klein's integration of his Jewish past with his Canadian present. Writing on the evidence of this integration, Lewisohn states:

Klein had the luck...to be born into a family and into an environment in which the lore and tradition of our people were things so alive that the quiver of this aliveness, so tense that it can humourously turn upon itself, has accompanied all his years.¹

Steinberg sees, in addition, the influence of French-Canadian society and of the English literary tradition and writes:

Klein is a product of three rich and distinct traditions, all of which formed his mind and imagination, determined his response to time past and present, to place, and to religious and literary forms and values.²

Waddington recognizes these same influences and states that Klein moves beyond them. She writes:

I began this study with the intention of showing how three traditions had shaped Klein's work. I ended by discovering that though Klein assimilated and possessed all three traditions, he finally went beyond them with his unique innovations in language.³

While I readily acknowledge the influence of each of the three traditions mentioned, my reading of the poetry suggests that to concentrate on these influences and Klein's integration of them, without any attention to his relationship to these traditions distorts one's understanding of the poetry. Indeed, in recognizing Klein's marginality, I have come to see, contrary to Waddington's analysis, that while Klein "possesses all three

traditions", he does not assimilate them. That is, he knows them, but he is not a part of them.

A close examination of "The Psalter of Avram Haktani" results in strong suggestions that Klein felt himself on the edge of much that is regarded as traditional expressions of Judaism. Since Avram is the Hebraic form of Abraham and Haktani is Hebrew for 'small', which in German is 'klein', it can be assumed that the psalms and their subjects are largely autobiographical.

There are thirty-six psalms, a number that is traditionally significant in that it is associated with the *Lamed Vavnik*, the Thirty-Six Just Men.⁴

The first two psalms express the paradox, for the first psalm describes Abraham listening to a holy voice that does not exist, while the second psalm tells of Abraham conversing with the Lord and accepting the statement attributed to God: "I am that I am". Psalm III speaks of the "weight of thoughts...and the harnessed heart" indicating Klein's explanation for the source of the difficulty. Complaints in other psalms about God's indifference, a psalm telling how he does not understand how or why men danced in gratitude to God, and explanations that "the heart that has no morrow" cannot sing, combine to describe a man troubled in mind and spirit.

There are six psalms which describe, in highly romantic terms, the hope and happiness represented by his marriage and the possible offspring from it. Other psalms plead for humility and the blessedness of the legendary sacrificial goat. And the final psalm confirms his recognition

of his history and his part in it. "Still, the majority of the psalms emphasize Klein's doubts, his confusions, his desire for explication:

Reveal, I pray you, do reveal to me
Behind the veil the vital verity;
Show me again, as you did in my youth
Behind the equivocal text the unequivocal truth!⁵

The revelation is asked of Rashi, an 11th century rabbinical scholar and one of Klein's early heroes. Psalms made because of fear of the night and prayers against madness reinforce the questions and the inability to accept past answers that constitute Klein's marginality to traditional Jewish faith. He cries:

O where is that inspired peasant,
That prophet, not of the remote occasion,
But who will explicate the folded present?⁶

Indeed, with the exception of the wedding psalms, no psalms in this poem are untainted by doubt, despair or cynicism. Psalm II, while accepting "I am that I am" is troubled by the poet's inability to justify his ways to his neighbours. Psalm IV praises the green pastures and the still waters, until it becomes clouded by visions of Messerschmitts. Psalm V describes how a disciple finds his master, but the final image of the teacher is an eagle whose talons drop volcanic rock. In the psalm for the chief physician, where one might expect a song for healers, one finds instead a song for hunters. And so on.

The questions and doubts that are described in Avram Haktani are expressed in much of Klein's other poetry as well. Poems written as early as 1928 (when Klein was 19) talk of "Jew phantoms" and "my father and his kind"⁷. In "Haunted House", published in 1929, Klein writes: "Life is a haunted house, haunted by fictions"⁸.

Elsewhere he speaks directly about his lack of faith. An early poem, "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" contains the lines:

my father is gathered to his fathers, God rest his wraith!
And his son
Is a pauper in spirit, a beggar in piety,
Cut off without a penny's worth of faith.⁹

Several years later, in a poem about the cripples who make their pilgrimage to St. Joseph's Oratory, Klein writes:

And I who in my own faith once had faith like this
But have not now, am crippled more than they.¹⁰

Critics disagree as to whether or not Klein was religious. Pacey refers to Klein's having had a desire to be a rabbi.¹¹ Steinberg argues that the struggles in Klein's poems result in a reaffirmation of his faith¹², although elsewhere he also refers to Klein's attachment to the Jewish religious heritage as "intellectual"¹³. Waddington, however, says that Klein was never religious in the orthodox sense. She takes note of the expressions of doubt in the poetry and states that Klein was a secular Jew¹⁴. Fischer and Palnick¹⁵ both report that Klein observed all the religious rituals in his father's strictly Orthodox home but that he later ceased to follow Orthodox custom. Fischer claims that although he didn't observe the religious rituals, Klein would not want to make uncomfortable those who did comply with the religious observances and for that reason, would not state aloud that he disagreed with their position.¹⁶ While these contradictory positions may simply reflect the different understandings each of these critics has about what it means to be a religious Jew, there is a strong possibility that the contradictions reflect Klein's own ambivalence. Certainly, there is no clear categorical statement within

the poetry declaring Klein's position.

Klein understands well the traditions out of which he came. His recognition that he has a wealthy inheritance is conveyed in such lines as:

Not sole was I born, but entire genesis:
For to the fathers that begat me, this
Body is residence. ...
...there look generations through my eyes. 17

"Heirloom", and other poems explain that this inheritance does not consist of financial riches, but of holy books and books of legends. And all of these are filled with memories of his father.

He is nostalgic about his youth when he was learning the details of his heritage. In "Autobiographical", he says about that period:

Never was I more alive.
All days thereafter are a dying off,
A wandering away
From home and the familiar. The years doff
Their innocence.
No other day is ever like that day. 18

The poems about his adulthood reveal doubts and despair about God, man's relationship to God, man's inhumanity to man, God's relationship to these events. The resulting alienation informs much of the poetry and accounts for the ironic tone of many of the poems about such religious figures as rabbis, cantors and members of a *minyán*.

One of his major spiritual difficulties is that Klein is unable to accept traditional responses to the question: Why does this suffering occur? In "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", Klein describes how, in a difficult situation, his father would don his prayershawl and speak with "his" God, resulting in his hearing the holy word and feeling the protection of the seraphim. Klein is unable to follow his father's example:

"I cannot don phylactery to pray", he says.¹⁹ At the end of that poem, he accepts that eventually the nightmare will end. In other poems, he again asks Why?, hears no response, berates God for his indifference and asks for forgiveness for his blasphemy. Finally, he resigns himself to the fact that he will receive no answer that will quell his doubts. This resignation is not out of acceptance, but out of frustration, for it is impossible to argue with someone who won't argue with you.

For I am weary of the quarrel with my God,
Weary of cavilling at the works of the Lord;
For who indeed can keep his quarrel hot
And vigorous his cries,
When He who is blasphemed, He answers not,
Replies no word, not even a small sharp word?²⁰

Elsewhere in the same psalm, he writes: "I shall not ask the question that betrays the doubting soul./...my face shall be a mask." And yet, some years later, in "Elegy", Klein is once again asking for a sign from God that he has noticed what tribulations have fallen on his Chosen People and an indication that those who have perpetrated these crimes will not be allowed to escape their punishment.

Not for the judgment sole, but for a sign
Effect, O Lord, example and decree,
A sign, the final shade and witness joined
To the shadowy witnesses who once made free
With that elected folk Thou didst call Thine.
...for all time a lore and lesson, seen.
And heeded; and thence, of Thy will our peace.²¹

Anti-semitism, particularly as it was manifested in the holocaust of the Second World War, caused a great deal of the anguish and the questions about the meaning of life that can be found in Klein's poetry. Consideration of such horrifying events is in itself agonizing. If one expects that there ought to be a spiritual response to the situation, and

the traditional religious responses no longer apply, then one suffers still greater distress. In addition, there is the survivor guilt often suffered by those who survived the holocaust. In "Meditation Upon Survival",

Klein writes:

those times that I feel their death-wish bubbling the
channels of my blood--
I grow bitter at my false felicity--
the spared one--and would almost add my wish
for the centigrade furnace and the cyanide flood.²²

While attempting to understand the anti-semitism and political posturing that facilitated the murder of so many Jews, Klein also is driven to find a way to avenge the murders and to create a world where "malefaction (might be) brought at last to bay!"²³ In "The Hitleriad", Klein describes what drives him:

I come now rather as a man to men,
Seeking the justice for that voice which cries
Out of the ground, the voice of our brothers' blood!
That blood will not be still again,
Those bones unblest will still arise,
Yes, and those living spectres, of the mind unhinged,
Will still beat at our padded memory, until
Their fate has been avenged!²⁴

He identifies very strongly with those who died. "The faces are my face! that lie in lime", he writes. And later, in the same poem:

Hear me, who stand
Circled and winged in vortex of my kin.²⁵

One aspect of Jewish tradition which Klein shared very strongly with his forbears is the distrust and hatred of the person at various times called the apostate, the renegade, the *marrano*²⁶. A comparison of his treatment of Rabbi Amnon in the poem "Address to the Choirboys", the rabbi who suffered martyrdom rather than convert to Christianity, and the

martyr in any of "Ballad of Signs and Wonders", "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", "Design for Medieval Tapestry", "Sonnets Semitic (v)", or "Ballad of Quislings" shows how despicable Klein found the apostate.

Rabbi Amnon of Mainz is a legendary martyr who, according to the traditional story, refused the demand of the Archbishop of Mainz that he accept Christianity. As punishment his limbs were cut off; taken to the synagogue--it was the time of the High Holy Days--the dying rabbi recited the prayer *U-Netannah Tokeph*. According to the legend, this prayer is incorporated into Klein's poem "Address to the Choirboys" as well. That prayer of jubilation is the essence of Rabbi Amnon and his act of faith is accompanied by the "flutter (of) the wings of angels" indicating not only his ultimate death, but the divine nature of his act. His torn-off limbs are likened to "the white petals of an eastern bloom"²⁷ which suggests the possibility of the lily associated with the Christian Easter, and the sacrificial death of Jesus. It is the rabbi's faith, his power of conviction, strength and joy as reflected in the prayer which the choirboys are learning to chant that they are asked to remember and to continue.

The apostate in "Ballad of Signs and Wonders", on the other hand is, like the original Judas, corrupted by the possibility of earning gold for his nefarious act. Like Judas, he knows precisely where those he betrays are vulnerable, and he hides his murdered victim in the Holy Ark. Later, he shouts out rhymes deriding the Jewish prayers with suggestions of feeding the prayers to hogs.

In "Design for a Medieval Tapestry", the first apostate mentioned

is included in a listing of virulent anti-semites, all part of Reb Zadoc's memories: the hangman; the lady who spits at Jews, a friar telling his beads (as he contemplates the next pogrom?), a soldier stroking his cross-like sword which he will use against the Jews, and the clean-shaved traitor. Later in the Design comes the portrait of Simeon, the only portrait of a renegade that is almost sympathetic in that it attempts to consider what prompts someone to turn against his faith. Simeon feels that all, including the angels, are Judeophobes and hopes that becoming Christianus Simeon might bring some peace, at least in this life. Generally, however, Klein's feeling is one of abhorrence. In "Reb Yom Tob of Mayence Petitions His God", he writes:

Be he who yields to baptism, abhorred;
Shunned as a leper be that one.²⁸

"Ballad of Quislings" outlines how very dangerous these renegades are. The "falseface" is difficult to recognize and thus particularly difficult to extirpate. It is not from the hostile stranger that we need protection, writes Klein,

but from that cordial native
Who rattles for a pleasant noise the shackles of the caitiff,
Preserve us, and protect us, and from our congregation
Uproot him, mask and members, and fling him to damnation!²⁹

Klein's contempt for the apostate is increased by his recognition that the pretense to be other than who one is is all for naught. In "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", he ironically suggests his willingness to become a marrano if that will satisfy his enemy, but he knows that the enemy will be as dissatisfied with that suggestion as with the other suggestions proffered. And in "Sonnets Semitic (v)", he describes Jews'

forgetting their ancestry and attempting to be like the Gentiles. The Gentiles, however, do not overlook the Jewish ancestry and recall it whenever speaking of the Jewish couple.

and Christians, anecdoting us, will say:
"Mr. and Mrs. Klein--the Jews, you know..."³⁰

The ways in which Klein conveys his distance from the apostate will be considered in the next chapter. While historically Jews have always, and with justification, feared the apostate who would often join forces with their persecutors, it seems important at least to suggest the possibility that the intensity of Klein's hostility is only partly for historical reasons. As is shown throughout this paper, Klein expresses clearly his nostalgia for the apparent simplicity of the past with its clear definitions of one's function and role, while indicating his inability to accept the religious rituals and beliefs on which these definitions were based. The Jew who does not present himself in conventional fashion, but rather is attempting to discover a new self-definition, is constantly battling the suspicion that he might be turning against his people in rejecting their traditional ways. This is particularly true if, as Klein does, he comes from the Orthodox tradition which includes a strict adherence to rituals. Thus, the process of finding a new definition of oneself as Jew includes discovering ways of saying: "If I am not one of those in *shtreimel*, beard and *payess*, if I do not go to *shul*,³¹ I am nevertheless NOT one of THOSE traitors!"

The most powerful expression of Klein's self-definition as twentieth century Jew comes in his many references to the State of Israel, or Palestine as it was still called during most of the time that he wrote.

As early as 1928, he wrote of the hope represented by Palestine, saying:

You...speak about a cup of bitter wine?
That cup now has a crack, a crack as great
As the whole length and breadth of Palestine.³²

Occasionally, the descriptions are so romantic as to have little resemblance to the reality of Palestine, but in general, the overwhelming impression is of the power, hope and affirmation that Israel represents to Klein. In "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", as he outlines the possibilities for a Jew's finding refuge, Klein writes:

And there is also Palestine, my own,
Land of my fathers, cradle of my birth,
Whither I may return, king to his throne, ...³³

In addition to refuge, Palestine provides the opportunity for renaissance. One reflection of this is shown in "Greeting On This Day":

If this be a Jew, indeed, where is the crook of his spine;
and the quiver of lip, where?
Behold his knees are not callous through kneeling; he is proud,
he is erect.
There is in his eyes no fear, in his mind no memory of faggots.
And these are not words wherewith one tells a Jew.
...
A son has returned to her that bare him; at her hearth
he grows comely; he is goodly to behold.³⁴

The traditional yearning to return to Jerusalem which is a part of the Passover prayers is described in "The Still Small Voice" in the poem, "Haggadah". This, and "Yehuda Halevi, His Pilgrimage", in particular, tie Klein's twentieth century convictions to desires felt throughout history. Still, there are particular difficulties that he as a twentieth century Jew suffers, especially as one who lives in North America and thus does not actively participate in the realization of the Zionist dream. As he writes in "Sonnet in Time of Affliction":

And woe to me, who am not one of these,
Who languish here beneath those northern stars ...³⁵

This distress necessitates Klein's using distancing techniques in some of his writings about Israel as well as in the other areas described.

The Jew who comes out of the tradition of the Eastern European *shtetl* and longs for the peace and security that is expected with the resettlement of Israel, but lives in neither of those two places, has difficulty in feeling "at home" where he does live. Thus Klein's poems describing his Quebec and Canadian environments, with other histories and traditions, languages, customs either hostile or accepting, provide further examples of marginality.

This is particularly seen in his poems about such political caricatures and figures as "Monsieur Gaston", "Hormisdas Arcand", the organizer of the Nazi Party in Quebec, and Camillien Houde, mayor of Montreal, to whom "Political Meeting" is dedicated. It is also apparent in the descriptions of "The Spinning Wheel", an "aftermath of autre temps" (former times), and other members of his profession, law, whom he describes in "Université de Montréal", as

The solid men. Now innocent and fun.
...
Soon they enter
their twenty diaries, clogged and elaborate,
And soon, too soon, begin to live to leave
en bon père de famille,--a sound estate.³⁶

Even in "For the Sisters of the Hotel Dieu", which praises the Catholic sisters who nursed him through a childhood illness, he describes his childhood fear as including the recognition that he was "not of your race".³⁷

Such existential questions which Klein--and other twentieth century

North American Jews--raise create a great deal of mental anguish for the questioner. Not surprisingly, Klein often writes nostalgically about the past, a time of greater order and fewer options, thereby forestalling the questions with which he feels burdened. At other times, he longs for an end to all this thinking in which he is constantly engaged.

Would that the Lord had made me, in place of man-child, beast!
... For easier is the yoke than the weight of thought 38

What concerns Klein most of all is that all these cares and concerns and unanswerable questions might lead to madness. In "The Psalter of Avram Haktani", he seems haunted by his fear of madness and indeed, in "Ballad of the Nursery Rhymes", he suggests that the world's last survivor will inevitably have been driven mad by the madness around him:

Upon a day, and after the road had died,
And the dust had settled, and the cities were no more,
He sat him down, alone, in a world that was wide,
As wide as is to a child his nursery floor.

And he sang all alone remembered snatches of song,
He wandered with the wandering of his mind:
Hey-diddle-diddle, and the music all gone wrong, ... 39

While at times, Klein feels on the edge of madness, at other times he speaks of *weltschmerz* (worldweariness), and, occasionally, of a longing for death. In one poem, adapting a line from Keats, Klein writes:

And more than ever, mortal, it seems rich to die! 40

Thus, it can be seen that there were occasions when Klein felt on the edge of life generally or on the edge of particular areas of his life as Canadian, Jew, involved human being.

Klein overcame his feeling of marginality with the power of

language. Referring to a general feeling of distress and how it is transcended, Klein writes:

Sometimes, depressed to nadir, he will think all lost, will see himself as throwback, relict, freak, his mother's miscarriage, his great-grandfather's ghost, and he will curse his quintuplet senses, and their tutors in whom he put, as he should not have put, his trust.

Then he will remember his travels over that body-- the torso verb, the beautiful face of the noun, and all those shaped and warm auxiliaries! A first love it was, the recognition of his own. Dear limbs adverbial, complexion of adjective, dimple and dip of conjugation!

And then remember how this made a change in him affecting for always the glow and growth of his being; how suddenly was aware of the air, like shaken tinfoil, of the patents of nature, the shock of belated seeing, the loneliness peering from the eyes of crowds; the integers of thoughts; the cube-roots of feeling.

Thus, zoomed to zenith, sometimes he hopes again, ...⁴¹

FOOTNOTES

1. Lewisohn, Ludwig. "Foreward to 'Hath Not a Jew'", Critical Views on Canadian Writers: A. M. Klein, ed. T. Marshall. Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1970, p. 14.
2. Steinberg, M. W. "A. M. Klein and the Canadian Mosaic", The A. M. Klein Symposium, ed. S. Mayne. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1975. p. 73.
3. Waddington, M. A. M. Klein. Toronto: The Copp Clark Publishing Company, 1970. p. 4.
4. According to Jewish legend, thirty-six righteous men, to whose piety the world owes its continued existence, live humbly and unostentatiously plying their trade as artisans until a calamity threatens the Jewish community. This arouses them to their appointed duty, and they emerge from obscurity to perform some act by which the calamity is averted. Afterwards, they retire again into obscurity in some town where they would not be recognized.
5. "The Psalter of Avram Haktani, Psalm XXXIV", p. 232.
6. Ibid., Psalm XXV, p. 225.
7. "Candle Lights", p. 13.
8. "Haunted House", p. 22.
9. "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", p. 117.
10. "The Cripples", p. 299.
11. Pacey, Desmond. "A. M. Klein", Ten Canadian Poets. Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1958. p. 262.
12. Steinberg, M. W. "Poet of a Living Past: Tradition in Klein's Poetry", Marshall, T. Op. cit., p. 106.
13. Ibid., p. 104.
14. Waddington, M. Op. cit., p. 11.
15. Palnick, E. E. A. M. Klein, A Biographical Study. M.H.L. thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1959. Part II, p. 8.
16. Fischer, Gretl. A. M. Klein: Religious Philosophy and Ethics in His Writings. Ph.D. Dissertation, McGill University, 1972. p. 23.

17. "The Psalter of Avram Haktani. Psalm XXXVI", p. 234.
18. "Autobiographical", p. 273.
19. "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", p. 118.
20. "Psalm 175", p. 261.
21. "Elegy", pp. 292-3.
22. "Meditation Upon Survival", p. 288.
23. "The Hitleriad", p. 207.
24. Ibid., p. 206.
25. "Elegy", p. 294.
26. *marrano* is a Spanish word, meaning 'swine' as an expression of contempt. During the Spanish Inquisition, it referred to a Jew or a Moor who professed to accept Christianity in order to escape prosecution.
27. "Address to the Choirboys", p. 283.
28. "Reb Yom Tob of Mayence Petitions His God", p. 241.
29. "Ballad of Quislings", pp. 262-3.
30. "Sonnets Semitic (v)", p. 154.
31. A *shtreimel* is the black, broad-brimmed hat worn by orthodox Jews, while *payess* are the earlocks worn by the orthodox Jews. The *shtreimel*, *payess* and regular attendance at the *shul* (synagogue) are obvious indications of one who follows the Orthodox traditions.
32. "To the Jewish Poet", p. 12.
33. "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", p. 114.
34. "Greeting On This Day", p. 126.
35. "Sonnet in Time of Affliction", p. 128.
36. "Université de Montréal", p. 302.
37. "For the Sisters of the Hotel Dieu", p. 300.
38. "Psalter of Avram Haktani, Psalm III", p. 211.

39. "Ballad of the Nursery Rhymes", p. 263.
40. "Variations of a Theme", p. 265.
41. "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape", pp. 331-2.

CHAPTER II

DISTANCING TECHNIQUES

The most obvious occasion calling for distancing techniques occurs when a poet is attempting to describe something that is apart from, or alien to, him. In such a case, he will make use of images and phrases that reinforce the alien nature of that which he is describing. Thus, it will be seen that much of the marginality described earlier is supported in the poetry by any of a variety of distancing techniques. In Klein's writing, one notes frequent use of foreign words, archaisms, and third person pronouns to emphasize that what is portrayed is outside of his own immediate experience.

"Diary of Abraham Segal, Poet" is an example of a poem in which the language is used to emphasize a distance from the present. The mediaeval word endings and images romanticize and make interesting to Abraham Segal what is otherwise a harsh beginning to yet another day at work in the factory. How much more manageable awakening becomes if one can think of the lark's song and the shepherd's pipe and dream of imps and friendly witches! Travelling to work is the antithesis of the romantic waking and this second section is very much of the twentieth century with short words, cryptic abbreviations and phrases in the form of newspaper headlines. This manner of describing his own life as though he were reading about it in the newspaper continues into the next section, although there is also biblical allusion and a reminder of the pitch of the circus barker or the early American medicine show. Each of the first eight sections is written as

first person narrative, but in a form of language that suggests the distance of the non-present. Section three is full of biblical allusion; section four is full of irony and slogans and the poet's true thoughts are unspoken. Even his unspoken thoughts are expressed in French. Section five couples biblical tones with American slang, while section six shows Segal so immersed in his reading of Shakespeare that his very description of it is with Shakespearean phrases. Section six, with Segal returning home for dinner is filled with various subjects of Jewish worship, none of them the poet's. There is "my father's God", "my brother's...Herr Karl Marx", the uncle's Herzl, and the cousin's "Herzlian-Marxian growth". After dinner in the next section, once again, his true feelings are unspoken, but thought in a foreign language; French, and the activities of his friends evoke a yawn, leaving the poet

undernourished, surfeited,
Wearied but sleepless, sick at heart,...crying: Life is dead
Echo...¹

In the final stanza, however, the poet is with his sweetheart and very much in love with life and all of the universe. He speaks of the comradeship of the grass and refers to the bird-song as a prothalamium. The scene and the tone of its description might evoke a sense of immediacy and involvement, however, this section alone is written as third person narrative. The sudden shift in narrative voice, following nine sections written in the first person acts, in a manner different than that used in the rest of the poem, to create a distance from the event.

Klein was well-read and in many languages. There are many poems which indicate that his knowledge of language and his ability to combine

them in novel ways is used in playfulness or in order to be inventive, or to authenticate the time in which a poem is set. For example, his inventiveness is indicated in the first four lines of "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" where he names his protagonist in four languages: Hebrew (Zvi), Latin (Cerf), German/Yiddish (Hirsch), and English (Harold).²

"Manuscript: Thirteenth Century"³ offers an example of a poem with strong mediaeval influence, with its castle, jousting, knights vying for the hand of fair Blanche and the robber named Roland. Such Anglicized French words as Boisvert, horloge, oriflamme, hesperidan, and souriant add to the mediaeval environment, since mediaeval English shows much evidence of French influence. In this case, the language forms work to create a poem which is simply a period courtship and love ballad.

It is when Klein uses archaic forms to write about pogroms and other forms of anti-semitism, or plays with words as he writes about madness and death or the monotony of daily existence that one suspects that it is not done entirely for the sake of authenticity and fun. Indeed, the cumulative effect of so many torturous events, especially those preceding and during the Second World War and Klein's inability to accept traditional religious justifications for such suffering made it imperative that Klein create some measure of distance from the events so that he could write effectively about them. In "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape", Klein writes:

it is stark infelicity
which stirs him from his sleep, undressed, asleep
to walk upon roofs and window-sills and defy
the gape of gravity.

Therefore he seeds illusions.⁴

And so, in poems about madness, one finds Hebrew expressions that disguise the theme and in poems about the horrors of war, one discovers iambic rhythms which lull one into nostalgic reminiscences of nursery rhymes.

In addition to such techniques as combinations of language and poetic forms from different historical periods, invented words, changes in voice, and unusual choices of rhythm and rhyme scheme, Klein frequently uses irony and parody to detach the author and audience from what purports to be the subject of his poem. Examples of each of these are cited further in this chapter. As is the case with the other techniques cited, irony and parody are not always used by Klein for the purposes of distancing. Still, there are many examples throughout the work of the distortions of parody and the ironic twist acting to stress the separation between subject and author or audience. Thus, for example, the parodying in "The Hitlerliad" emphasizes those portrayed as oddities on display, viewed by spectators from behind a guardrail as, perhaps, in a zoo, while the ironic thanksgiving in "Who Hast Fashioned" confirms the distance of God.

In the sections that follow, I will survey poems which deal with Klein's religious questions, anti-semitism, madness, death, and the hope represented by Palestine (Israel) with a view to examining the techniques he employs either to confirm his own sense of separation or confusion or his attempts to control subjects which may be especially difficult for him personally. I will endeavour to deal with these systematically, but since a single poem will often refer to more than one of these themes, the categorization will not be strict.

I. Religion

It is clear that religious questions plagued Klein throughout his writing life. While his manner of expressing his separation from traditional religious convictions changes according to the poem, the fact that such convictions do not belong to him remains constant. An early poem, "Epitaph",⁵ first published in 1930, is a statement of faith, hedged with such qualifications as 'may' and 'perhaps'. "Sonnet Unrhymed", dated 1945, tells of the frustration of crying Abba (Father) "in the muffled night" and of awakening to see "hanging Absaloms"⁶. "Who Hast Fashioned" and "Stance of the Amidah" were each published in 1951. The former is an ironic thanksgiving to God for the orifices in man, while the latter poem alludes to previous occasions when the ritual formulae were performed and "(we) almost know Thee" and "Yet holiness not know"⁷. Sardonic comments about "understanding of what in the / inscrutable design is for our dooms-day-good;" are replaced later in the poem by an earnest petition for peace. Whether the peace he pleads for is the peace of understanding or the cessation of questions, or some other form, is not declared.

"The Psalter of Avram Haktani" contains many psalms directly on, or referring to, Klein's continuing struggle to discover an authentic religious faith. There are straightforward statements that the "still small voice of the Lord" is still indeed, as the title to the first psalm, "A Psalm of Abraham, When He Hearkened to a Voice and There was None", for example, clearly indicates. Others include outcries against God's indifference to blasphemy and evil. Another describes the cargo of a ship from Jaffa, contrasting the sumptuous fruits, nuts and wine from the east with

the accessories for religious rituals and their connections with gloom and death. Unlike other poems where Klein refers to religious faith as belonging to someone other than himself (e.g., his father "in converse with his God")⁸, there are within this psalter, statements of faith which appear to be his, but which on closer examination are seen to be ironic.

"Psalm XXIV: Shiggaion of Abraham Which He Sang Unto the Lord" is a particularly interesting example of an ironic statement of faith, for it is a poem whose ironic content may be perceived only if one understands Hebrew. At one level, it may be read as a psalm that is sung by the biblical Abraham and traces the process by which the Jews came to know God's name. Since Abraham was prior to Moses, there was no name for God in his time, except for the tetragrammaton syllable YHWH. Phrases in the poem allude to other names that later came to be attached to God: "the name" (Hashem); "the noise of thunder", "the sound of strife" (Shaddai); "the hush of Peace" (Harahaman).⁹ In the end, Abraham decides that he has sufficient faith that he can pray without knowing the name for that to which he prays.

However, *shiggaion* is a Hebrew word that refers to a meditative psalm that is rather wild, that has been wrested from the anguished singer. It originates with the word *l'hishtagaia*, meaning 'to be crazy' and *shiggaion* is roughly translated as 'a meditative craziness'. With this understanding, a second, and quite different, reading becomes possible. Especially in the light of the preceding Psalm XXII, "A Prayer of Abraham, Against Madness", this psalm refers not to the biblical Abraham, but to Abraham Klein and the fear of madness that seemed to haunt him during

this period. Rather than an affirmation of faith, this poem becomes a desperate attempt by Klein to convince himself of his faith.

It is difficult to comprehend quite why Klein chooses to make the deeper meaning of this poem inaccessible to much of his audience. It may be that the reward of greater insight is offered only to those who have enough knowledge or are willing to do sufficient research in order to overcome their deficiencies. It is possible to speculate that it is the poem's subject--Abraham's desperation for a faith that will offset the chaos that seems to exist without that understanding--that is the reason for hiding the meaning within foreign words, especially since other poems indicate that Klein was afraid that he was going mad.

Yiddish and Hebrew words are frequently found in Klein's poetry and while the difficulty in interpretation that occurs with "Shiggaion" is present in these other poems, they do not deal with the same subject. In many cases, the Hebrew and Yiddish expressions portray religious characters.

"Portraits of a Minyan"¹⁰ is a series of portraits of the ten men who constitute a *minyan*, the quorum required for religious services. Palnick asserts that the portraits are based on people seen when Klein as a boy went to synagogue with his father:¹¹ Of the ten portraits, nine are ironic and in many of them, an understanding of the Jewish tradition and of Yiddish is needed for the perception of the ironies. Understanding that *pilpul* describes the form of analysis and dialectics in Talmudic study is important for a comprehension of the irony of the portraits of the landlord and the sophist. Knowing that *pintele* means

'point' helps one understand the brief, but ironic portrait of the Jew who claims to be an agnostic but is at the synagogue in order to say *Kaddish* (the prayer for the dead) for his father, since a pointed head is often the image of a dunce.. That the word *kaddish* originates with the Aramaic *kadosh* meaning 'holy' adds to the irony of the portrait. Similarly, it is useful to the comprehension of his portrait to know that a *shadchan* is a 'matchmaker' and that allusions to familiar Yiddish anecdotes are incorporated into this short poem.¹²

"Of Holy Vessels"¹³ is another poem of fine portraits. Some of the descriptions are readily recognized by readers unfamiliar with Hebrew or with Jewish traditions, others are obscure. Whether one knows that *Aleph* and *Tauph* are two letters in the Hebrew alphabet is of limited significance to the portrait of Elijah. Nor is the portrait of Rev Owl greatly diminished by one's ignorance that *rev* is a form of *rabbi*, teacher, and *shtreimel* is the name of the black, broad-brimmed hat worn by orthodox Jews. However, the intensity of the irony of the portrait of the cantor is lost if one does not recognize that *kdusha* is the cognate form of *Kaddish* and *Mizraah* refers to the framed picture indicating what direction to face when praying (i.e., the direction of Jerusalem). Likewise, knowing that *mishna* is a basic part of the Talmud, itself an explication of the Torah, *gemara* the commentaries upon the *mishna*, and *rashi* the commentaries of the mediaeval scholar, Rashi, enhance the sardonic description of the scholar.

It is the portrait of the venerable bee that is, in my opinion, most enhanced by the Hebraic terms, if one understands them. The *shamash*

is the sexton or caretaker of the synagogue and this explains the devotion with which the bee attends his duties, while the "torah scroll", containing the Five Books of Moses, is considered priceless.¹⁴ Since *becomim* means 'spice', the reference to its scent becomes clear. *Kiddish*, meaning 'sanctification', refers to the blessings recited before the Friday-night Sabbath dinner begins. Hence the blessed state of "that happy one". How diminished the portrait is without these images!

It should be noted that this technique of distancing, in some cases to the point of inaccessibility, by using Hebrew and Yiddish, is not restricted to poems about religion or religious figures. Examples of this technique used with other subjects will be shown in subsequent sections of this paper.

A contrast to the technique utilising Hebrew or Yiddish is Barricade Smith's speech, "Of Psalmody in the Temple", which is entirely in English but which employs a variety of tones to parody the biblical Psalm 23, 'The Lord is My Shepherd', and indirectly, make an ironic comment about the soporific effect of religion's comfort. There are lines replete with phrases with religious associations, lines such as "Sores of the spirit, failings of the flesh!" Other lines are filled with American slang. The over-all metaphor is of the making of a movie, a metaphor which adds to the distancing effect since a movie's subject is generally seen to be outside one's own life and its intent is usually to entertain rather than, say, provoke.¹⁵

Irony is the most common distancing technique in these poems which raise religious questions. Sometimes, there is an ironic twist,

as in the final line of "Psalm 166". After asserting that his intentions had not been blasphemous, suggesting his awe and love for God, Klein writes: "And I never loved one more than I did my father"¹⁶, a strange statement if one accepts the commonly-held sentiment that one's love for God should be greater than one's love for any of God's creatures. As he has said earlier in the poem:

...my speech
 It does not mean what it does seem to say.¹⁷

Ironic statements about the power that comes with religious belief are to be found in two poems about *golems*. The golem is a legendary figure and refers to a shapeless, robot-like figure that is conjured by a rabbi. Often the golem is kind and virtuous, but he is quite stupid. "The Golem" symbolically tells of religious power gone amok. In this poem, the golem is formed apparently to do the heavy work for the rabbi, both on the sabbath when such work is forbidden orthodox Jews, and on other days as well. Unfortunately, there is no incantatory power for undoing the creation. There is a suggestion here that the rabbi's creation of the golem is akin to God's creation of man.¹⁸

The creation of these senseless creature and its symbolic parallel to God's creation is seen also in the poem "Talisman in Seven Shreds", which title includes an ambiguous pun on the word talisman, for a *talis* is a prayer shawl. In the first of the seven poems, the suggestion is made that the golem is the image of God, for man was created in the image of God, and the golem is an effigy or image of man. The irony does not end here, however, for, as in the previous poem, what has been done, cannot be undone. The creation occurred, not because God was absent-mindedly

being inattentive, but because:

custodian of Israel; He entrusts
unto a guided nit-wit his chief house; 19

The rabbi fashions this robot while he prays instead of thinking--"phylactery on brow in lieu of thought". This deplorable act is further derided in the section entitled "Enigma", when the poet ironically asks whether the survival of the Jews may be attributed to salvation by the golem. In the poem which follows, the perplexed are guided to the realization that:

matter is chaos, mind is chasm, fool,
the work of golems stalking in nightmare... 20

All the dogmatic statements about God and the myths about Christ and his resurrection are but "a baying at the moon". And in a final condemnation of the wistful desires of the religious, the poet asserts that, contrary to "leaps of faith" on the matter, there is no life after death. Of course, he says, the golem might say otherwise, but that's only because it suits his fancy to do so.

In the poem "Scribe", Klein pays tribute to a man who has devoted his life to inscribing three pentateuchs. The description of the act of writing conveys the devotion of the scribe. Even "the heart beats out the tetragrammaton". Still the poet is very much a spectator, for he perceives the act in a way that a participant would not. He claims that the essence of the writing

joyous as a lark
Will settle on God's wrist, devoutly proud! 21

Klein nevertheless refers to the arm-encircling phylacteries as a charm and adds that "This prayer-shawl is armour to this Jew".

"Reb Levi Yitschok Talks to God" is yet another poem which

appears to be within a tradition but which exhibits much of Klein's doubt and frustration. While Rev Levi's altercation with God is typical of the sort of talk Job or Isaiah or another prophet might have, as it queries and berates, the poem does not conclude with a positive resolution. Though referred to as "an ever-querulous child/Sitting on God's knees", Reb Levi does not, in the end, put his child's hand in the out-stretched, stronger hand of God. Rather, he sits there still, for God does not respond to him. The references to Rev Levi's childlikeness are pejorative: his arguments are "infant", he is "talking to himself". There have been suggestions throughout the poem that God will not respond, for the description of the physical environment is, if not entirely diabolical, at least reminiscent of witches.

The moon grinned from the window-pane; a cat
Standing upon a gable, humped and spat;
...
The candles flicker,
And peeping through the windows, the winds snicker. 22

II. Regarding Anti-Semitism

Many of the religious questions already referred to are prompted by Klein's awareness that throughout history, there has been almost continual suffering by Jews, those whom Klein refers to in "Stance of the Amidah" as "rejected Thine elect". These sufferings and the concomitant questions which obsess Klein provide the subject of many of his poems.

The poem "Elegy" is one of Klein's strongest expressions on the subject of the persecuted Jews, his identification with them, his horror

at their plight, and his need to have God indicate that he has taken note of their sufferings and will not allow the perpetrators of the suffering to go unpunished. The poem opens with a reference to the cousin's having been named after the poet's grandfather, an act which suggests the continuance of his heritage. This intimation of life contrasts sharply with the immediate recognition that the cousin is dead, what was his hand is ash. The subsequent images are of death, including not only the common tomb and mounds, but the arm bone now the haft of a peasant's knife and the lampshade made from "tattoo'd skin", death images which became common only with the Second World War. Those who have died have died too young, in ugly ways, and for unspeakably horrible reasons. Within the catalogue of death is a statement from the poet that he identifies with those who have died, they are his family, their faces are his. Life, laughter and celebration have been destroyed and what remains is a void and

...only the million echoes
Calling Thy name still trembling on the air.²³

The impact is so intense and so horrifying that the poet, in great anguish, beseeches God to notice the empty chimneys of the gas ovens, overcome with ennui because of the never-ending monotony of their task. The punishment the poet requests resembles that which was given in Moses' day, when plagues and boils were visited upon Israel's enemies. This punishment would, in addition, serve as a sign to the poet that, not only had God noticed, but he cares. The poem ends with a request that the whirlwind be recreated into new life in the Palestine of Jerusalem and Carmel. Throughout the poem, one is struck by the horror of the event and the profound distress of the poet.

One other poem on this subject imparts a similar conviction that the poet identifies both with the victims of the persecution and its guilt-ridden survivors. "Meditation Upon Survival" describes the sense of obligation which the poet feels to live life on behalf of the six million who had died. While he wishes to live for them, he is so filled with guilt that he has survived the holocaust that he translates the need to live for them into a need to suffer each of their nightmares. Thus only can he justify his survival.

At times, sensing that the golgotha'd dead
run plasma through my veins, and that I must live
their unexpired six million circuits, giving
to each of their nightmares my body for a bed--

...
I grow bitter at my false felicity--
the spared one--

....

However, one continues to live, though mortally.
Q, like some frightened, tattered, hysterical man
run to a place of safety--the whole way run--
whose lips, now frenzy-foamed, now delirium-dry
cry out, the tenses of the verb to die.
cry love, cry loss, being asked: *And yet unspilled
your own blood?* weeps, and makes
his, stuttering innocence a kind of guilt---²⁴

Furthermore, having survived, he is an odd specimen, needing to be encased and labelled in a museum as "a curio", an example of a race that is now extinct.

Other poems on the subject of anti-semitism or persecution in the form of pogroms or the holocaust of World War II do not convey the same sense of involvement. "In Re Solomon Warshawer"²⁵ tells of the apprehension of a Jew during the German occupation of Poland in 1939. The poem begins with an archaic dating on Wodin's day, and the narrator

is a reporter who "did cover my beat" and who dispassionately describes what he sees. Although the Jew pleads his innocence, the reporter merely records his words verbatim, "refus(ing) to be impressed by talk of that sort". There are references to the Jew's wandering all over Europe, ending up in the *nalewkas* (Polish for 'streets') of Warsaw's Jewish ghetto and these confirm the metaphor of Solomon, "the quintessential wandering Jew"²⁶. However, the archaic dating, the foreign words, and the unemotional recording of the reporter combine to leave the reader feeling as though he is reading a newspaper report of an event occurring in a foreign place. Since it obviously, therefore, has nothing to do with his own life, the reader is little moved by what he reads.

"Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" attempts to show that persecution of the Jews has occurred throughout history. To emphasize its universality, the poem begins in Middle English and ends in contemporary English²⁷. It tells of the actions of Judeophobes and adds that all gates of refuge have been "shut, and barred, and triple-locked". If one is to accept refuge with communists, one must shed one's heritage, while asylum in Palestine is contingent upon paying several thousand pounds to England for the land. The poet attempts, with the use of logic and reason, to understand the source of anti-semitic thinking: is it the goods the Jew owns that the non-Jew covets? Is he guilty of false thinking? Each of the suggestions is dismissed as the poet recognizes that what is wanted is his death. What makes his own situation particularly difficult is that traditional ways of coping with persecution are not open to him: while his father can pray to "his God" and Esau might take up arms, the poet can either commit

suicide or stubbornly refuse to do this and simply live in the hope that the nightmare will go away. That the nightmare is a foreign intrusion into life is emphasized by Klein's use of the French *cauchemar*, the only use of French in this poem.

In "Design for Medieval Tapestry"²⁸, Klein attempts again intellectually to understand the persecution and to reason out what might be the appropriate response. That the design is a diabolical one is suggested by the frog, the hooting screech-owl, the clawed, choked mouse and the anonymity of the cause of the terror in the first two stanzas. Indeed, Reb Zadoc's memories are full of torture and hatred, betrayal and malice. The nature of Reb Daniel Shochet's reflections is stressed by his name, for a *shochet* is the man authorized by a rabbi to be the ritual slaughterer.

Nahum, whose name in English is the acrostic for 'human' and in Hebrew means 'consoler' or 'consolation', probably refers to the first century prophet Nahum of Ginzo who is reported to have said "everything is for the best" on the occasion of every misfortune that happened to him²⁹, for in his effort to make sense of his suffering, he determines that it is a desirable thing and that "for this was Israel meant". However, like the biblical figures, Isaiah recognizes that martyrdom is painful and Job rails against an indifferent God. Other responses figure in the tapestry as well, Ezekiel asserting that following the proper ritual will ensure that "these things will never be repeated", while Solomon Talmudi, the scholar, feels already dead since his scholarship, which constituted his life, has been destroyed. Judith understands full well that the virtuous knight of the ballads does not resemble the crusading rascals of real life with whom

one must struggle. Simeon, on the other hand, perceives his environment in terms of the church--cathedrals, sermons, priestly robes, ecclesiastic German, mass lamps, altar, angels--and concludes that the appropriate action is to convert to Christianity and thus to achieve some measure of peace and security, at least in this life. It is Esther who has sweet memories of grace and blessing, of lullabies and even of laws being crooned. Still, her portrait, too, ends in terror and rampage. Despite the reasoning of the earlier portraits, hers again repeats the question, "Wherefore, Lord, and why?" and the final lines of the portrait, and of the poem,

The sun rises and leaps the red horizon
And like a bloodhound swoops across the sky

confirm a sense that there is no hope, no way of avoiding the anti-semitic bloodhounds. Certainly, it was hopeless in the past, the time in which this poem is set.

There are two ballads written about executions by the Germans, "Ballad of the Thwarted Axe" and "Ballad of the Nuremburg Tower-Clock". Both of these are reminiscent of nursery rhymes, in what might be an effort to show that the atrocities have affected even childhood innocence. In any case, their rhythms manage to make banal what is a serious subject. In "Ballad of the Thwarted Axe", it is the refrain whose singsong rhythm lends a light-hearted tone, despite the words, as in:

Headsmen, headsmen, whet your axe,
Against the sparking stone,
The blade that's eaten by the flint,
The better eats the bone!³⁰

The stanzas of the poem act as a foil to the changing lines of the

refrain: what one sees against this background of blood is an executioner readying his tools in order to cut off yet another head: However, the executioner is cheated, for it is only a puppet that stands in the dock.

Fischer claims, in writing about this poem, that

in a metaphysical sense the victims cannot be harmed; they cannot be reached. The murderers grasp the shadow, not the essential being. Thus Klein consoled himself, and no doubt, he meant to console others in this way. ³¹

I find, however, that it is the rhythm, rather than the concept that consoles, in the same way that whistling a tune in the dark reassures one, and this removes any need to search for comfort in the words.

A similar effect occurs with "Ballad of the Nuremberg Tower-Glock". This poem is written in couplets, with an iambic rhyme which carries one along without attention to meaning. Indeed, by the sixth stanza, one readily emphasizes the wrong syllables of words in order to maintain the rhyme scheme.

The Fuehrer's words, vulpine, prolix,³²
Annulled the song of the hour of six.

A change in rhythm occurs with the eleventh chime, as the pause in the final line emphasizes the expiration of time. Meanwhile, the Nazi horrors have become rhyming items in a ballad reminiscent of the counting songs one learned as a child.

In like fashion, the rhyming couplets of the "Ballad of the Dancing Bear" have the effect of making trivial what might, to its participants, be a most serious event. Certainly the Jews of the hamlet were "smitten dumb...Fasted; they ate Sorrow's breads" and refrained from donning sackcloth only because sackcloth was what they wore daily. The

rhyme scheme falters seriously in places; nevertheless, the general rhythm, in addition to the final lines of the poem combine to suggest that it is all in jest, albeit possibly in bad taste.

And God in His heaven hums,
Twiddling His contented thumbs³³

The poem "Autobiographical" distances the persecution and murder of Jews in yet another way. The report of the murders is merely one item in a catalogue of memories. That the event is serious is suggested by its ability to stop the cardgame and the humming, presumably of chitchat, and to evoke oaths to take revenge. However, no further details are given and the list of memories continues.

Again my kindergarten home is full--
Saturday night--with kin and compatriot:
My brothers playing Russian card-games; my
Mirroring sisters looking beautiful,
Humming the evening's imminent fox-trot;
My uncle Mayer, of blessed memory,
Still murmuring *maariv*, counting holy words;
And the two strangers, come
Fiery from Volhynia's murderous hordes--
The cards and humming stop.
And I too swear revenge for that pogrom.

Occasions dear: the four-legged *aleph* named³⁴
And angel pennies dropping on my book;

There is no doubt that Klein's intention was not to diminish the events, but rather to focus attention on them and to elicit a response that would echo his own outrage. In an effort to do more than howl with agony and rage, Klein uses a variety of traditional poetic devices and conventional formulations. Lawrence Langer³⁵ argues that "l'univers concentrationnaire" demands a new artistic tradition. If he is correct, this may explain why several of Klein's efforts act to diminish the holocaust

events which occasion his poetry. I will examine Langer's argument further in the next chapter when I attempt to attend to questions which arise from Klein's poetry.

Klein's difficulties in portraying the events and their perpetrators is shown also in his poems about nazi leaders. He attempts to show their lack of humanity by describing them as grotesque caricatures, objects of ridicule. A good example of this is "The Hitleriad".

When it was first published, "The Hitleriad" was severely criticized, in part because it was felt that the author was not sufficiently distant from, and in control of, his subject. For example, Flint writes:

The Hitleriad tries to direct against Hitler the voice of public ridicule. But its author, Mr. Klein, has not enough ingenuity or verbal dexterity or malice--as distinguished from rage--to lead in such an enterprise. Most of his gibes are too laboured or else his tactics are inapposite. ...³⁶

And Livesay writes: "The Hitleriad is not a successful poem. It lacks... objectivity."³⁷

I suspect that the kind of distance to which Klein's critics referred, that would mute his outrage, is impossible to achieve, even before the end of the war, when the poem was written and when less was known about the kind and intensity of atrocities performed by the nazis and their supporters. While I would agree that Klein neither adequately nor appropriately describes the nefarious work of Hitler and his henchmen, I feel that he does exhibit an aesthetic distance from his subject. Klein attempts to write about Hitler using such formal verse forms as sonnets, and these, in addition to his use of caricature and satire, serve to make an effort at detached moral indictment. Indeed, on the surface, Hitler

appears to be an oddity on display, viewed by spectators from a safe distance.

The description of Hitler begins with a parody of a line from Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus":

See him, at last, the culprit twelve men damn.
Is this the face that launched the master-race
And burned the topless towers of Rotterdam?

It continues with a slight suggestion of a common humanity, but this suggestion soon changes to a description of the non-human.

Why, 't's a face like any other face
Among a sea of faces in a mob--
A peasant's face, an agent's face, no face
At all, no face but vegetarian blob!
The skin's a skin on eggs and turnips fed,
The forehead villainous low, the eyes deeper--
The pervert big eyes of the thwarted bed--
And that mustache, the symbol of the clown
Made emperor, and playing imperial pranks--...³⁸

Klein pokes fun at this displayed object with ironic remarks, plays on words and unusual language combinations. For example, about Hitler's family name, Shicklgruber, Klein writes:

Methinks this lacks the true imperial style,
And certainly no poet's nor mob's tongue
Could shake from shekel-shackle-gruber--song!³⁹

Since a shekel is an item of money, shackle refers to a manner of imprisoning one's victims and gruber comes from the German *grube*, meaning 'hole', the pun creates of the name an image of a gravedigger, certainly an apt image of Hitler, although its impact is not as threatening as the name 'gravedigger' might be. In other stanzas, Klein creates double meanings with some of his plays on words in order to indicate indirectly his attitude toward the subject. For example, stanza viii, describing the

Munich putsch, ends with the line "Such was the pattering-out of the Great Putsch!"

Hitler's henchmen, "passive and active allies", and law are all satirized by Klein. Clemenceau, for example, is referred to by his nickname, Tiger, and with a reference to Blake, "The Tiger, ever-burning bright!" Those in the League of Nations are dismissed as

...old men gesturing themselves to death.
Were these the men to put teeth in the law,
Who had no tooth in their collective jaw?
Were these the men that would the peace maintain
Themselves upholding only with a cane?
Could these look in the future, who could not
See without specs, and those, at home, forgot?... 40

When the description changes from ironic to realistic, and Klein attempts to relate the horrible nature and effects of the Hitlerian horde, he does so using the metaphor of the film, thus maintaining his distance. Hitler's crimes are "on historic film...Felonies flickering from celluloid!" Later in the stanza he writes, as though narrating the film and anticipating the action:

(Watch for the montage of accomplished guile:
As Skoda skids, the four smug men will smile.)

The scenes now change, but madness knows no halt.

...
(Montage again: the camera goes berserk
With vertical flame and towers diagonal;
Then rests to show the generals; they smirk.)

Closeup. ... 41

And in the following stanza, the facts related are as a "footnote" to the scenes of "the headlined Terror".

Only the final three stanzas of this twenty-seven stanza poem are written with a sense of immediate personal involvement, from the

perspective of a man driven by the spectres of the victims of Hitler's atrocities and the need to avenge the murders.

I come now rather as a man to men,
Seeking the justice for that voice which cries
Out of the ground, the voice of our brothers' blood!

...
Efface the evil; let it be no more.
Let the abomination cease; and through
Implacable Justice let emerge the world, clean, new!

Bold malefaction brought at last to bay!
Avenged the martyrs! Mankind truly purged!

Returned at last the spectres to their clay!...⁴²

"Foes will ever seek to sunder / Life from Judah"⁴³ writes Klein in an early poem about a renegade. In this poem, "Ballad of Signs and Wonders", the traitor is linked with "the first betrayal" in a reference to him as "the snake", and to Judas, both by references to Easter and to his coveting "the Christian gold". The non-human nature of this betrayer is emphasized by his being called "the nameless", although its effect is diminished by the fact that none of the characters in this poem is named.

Still, in this and the other poems that refer to apostates, the suggestion is that the treacherous behaviour emanates from a diabolical nature. Even the setting of "Design for Medieval Tapestry" is diabolical with its

frogs among the sedges croaked
Into the night a screech-owl hooted.

A clawed mouse squeaked and struggled, choked.
The wind pushed antlers through the bushes. ⁴⁴
Terror stalked through the forest, cloaked.

As the narrator attempts to determine the source of the disturbance, he suggests the possibility of robbers or knights and the likelihood that it is a provost seeking Jews.

The images of the frog and the wind appear again in the section of the Design which treats Simeon's decision to convert. As he examines the pattern in the sky and listens to the wind and the frogs, Simeon says

The leaves rustle. Come, who will now determine
Whether this be the wind, or priestly robes,
The frogs croak out ecclesiastic German.⁴⁵

Whether this suggests the diabolical nature of the church or the possibility of the church as a respite from the diabolical is not clear: Simeon, however, feels that it is possible for the individual to choose and to gain, at least for now, some comfort and salvation.

The poems on this subject which have a more contemporary setting suggest the diabolical more subtly. For example, in "Sonnets Semitic (v)", the renegade has no past: "we...suffer loss of memory"⁴⁶. Unlike the poems quoted above, the main technique in this sonnet indicating the poet's dislike of those who deny their heritage is irony. Although the narrator may lose his memory and his ability to speak his mother tongue, and although he may take on the surface appearance of a pork-eating gentile, the Christians have not forgotten his history and for them the kike is no phantom.

The traitors in "Ballad of Quislings" receive more overtly pejorative treatment. The use of the word 'quislings' in the title begins the catalogue of disparaging terms, a catalogue which includes poltroons, renegade, falseface, traitor, caitiff, with "parrot-screech" and "weasel-speech". That the narrator condemns him to hanging from a "fifth column"

confirms his treachery. Further, that traitors are diabolical is again implied when it is suggested that

His soul go up in sulphur, and he go out a-sizzling
To that place where no horses are, nor any unsinged quisling!⁴⁷

In each case, the traitor is regarded as less than human. Thus the poet expresses his detestation of, and separation from, such wicked behaviour. At the same time he can confirm that, although he may express his Judaism in other than the Orthodox fashion, he, being human, is not one of THOSE.

III. Madness

Several of the poems written as psalms concern madness and Klein's fear that he is being invaded by it. Indeed, in "Psalm 173: A Psalm of Abraham of that which is visited upon Him", madness is personified as a prowler, poisoning wine, meddling with food, always invisible, but leaving signs of his having visited. While the prevailing metaphor is of a hostile outsider encroaching on another's territory, the poet acknowledges in the conclusion his conviction that it is no outsider, but kith and kin.

It may be that madness is a member of the family, but it is no less frightening for that. In "Psalm XXII: A Prayer of Abraham, Against Madness", the narrator indicates that he is so frightened of madness that he would gladly suffer physical disability rather than have his mind touched. He says:

Palsy the keepers of the house;
And of the strongmen take Thy toll.
Break down the twigs; break down the boughs.
But touch not, Lord, the golden bowl! ⁴⁸

He describes the "touched ones" as lifeless, barren, docile, in their own private hells as they "fight with ghouls". Further, they are regarded as less than human as one is described as

...scrabbling on the door!
His spittle falls upon his beard,
As, cowering, he whines before ⁴⁹
The voices and the visions, feared.

This psalm just precedes the "Shiggaion of Abraham", discussed earlier. They are both included in a psalter which begins with a psalm describing Abraham listening for a holy voice, which apparently does not exist. Since this and other psalms at least raise questions about the existence of God, if they don't absolutely deny it, one wonders why entreaties that sanity be preserved come in the form of a prayer. In addition, there is the usual question as to whether the Abraham of the title is the biblical Abraham or Abraham Klein, for the reference seems to change from one psalm to another. One assumes that the reference is to Klein, but the very acts of contemplating that question and of reflecting on the propriety of praying for sanity to an entity one isn't sure exists serve to externalize the problem and raise intellectual and academic considerations for the reader. The distractions of these questions offset the emotional impact of the powerful fear of madness.

If the description in "Penultimate Chapter" is an accurate one, then it is no wonder that the last survivor, in "Ballad of the Nursery Rhymes" goes mad. Even the nursery rhymes of childhood have been turned

inside out as the survivor sings.

O sad was his song when he sang Jack's tumbled crown,
And Jill who fell in channel from frying-pan,
And all the bridges that were broken down
And fee-fi-fum, the bloods of the race of man. 50

The madness described here is, conceivably, somewhat different than the madness referred to in other poems, for the others give no particular examples of cause, while this poem states clearly that it is war that causes both the desolation of the countryside and the inevitable madness.

This is suggested also in the poem "Sennet from Gheel"⁵¹, whose title is reminiscent of the ghoul with which the "touched ones" fight in "Psalm XXII: A Prayer of Abraham, Against Madness". The signalling trumpet of the sennet, followed by the noise of thunder, lyre, drum, boom and steel, outlines in images of madness the horror of war. Although the language of the poem is not quite English as we know it, the hidden references to delirium, the Mad Hatter, Bedlam, bats in the belfry, and the lunatic asylum, in addition to thoughts of raving and daft wildness are sufficiently clear that the sense of madness is strongly conveyed. The notion that Bedlam and hundemonium (the pandemonium of the Huns?) are composed and sane compared to the sickness "Of these wildbats that frap in belfrydom" or the possibility that the war is a harbinger of the kind of horror that can be expected for the future leads the narrator to request that the "un-levined" (referring, perhaps, to the unleavened bread eaten by Jews at Passover, celebrating another time of escape from persecution) be flung back to the asylum of the blessed. The language dislocations of this thirteen-line Sennet so emphasize the distortions and displacement of war that one senses that even language has gone mad.

There is a danger in writing this way, however, because the reader easily becomes swept up in the problem of unravelling the puzzles that the poet has created and this allows the reader to be less serious about the apparent subject of the poem.

IV. Death

The problem suggested above with language dislocations forming the content of a poem becomes still more obvious in a poem about death-- "Variations of a Theme". If one compares the effect of this poem with the parody of Pound in "Cantabile: A Review of the Cantos of Ezra Pound", one can see that while, in Cantabile, the distortion of language in a Poundian fashion serves as a strong emphasis of Klein's dislike of Pound and his poetry, the language in "Variation" seems instead to make light of a subject which other poems suggest that Klein took more seriously.

The first three and the final lines of "Variations of a Theme"⁵² parody lines from Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale", with increased emphasis on death because of the word changes that Klein makes. Keats' "Call'd him soft names" becomes "Knelled him soft names" and Keats' "To take into the air my quiet breath" is, in Klein, "Or, vault-face, trumpeted my herald breath". This latter change is particularly effective for the volte-face not only justifies the new and loud sound of the breath, but it enables Klein to play on the word 'volte' and to suggest the sounding of the trumpet at the Day of Judgment.

The rest of the poem continues with such plays on words that

become, in effect, a catalogue of death-associated words. Sometimes they appear to be an international list of great names, including "Le Comte de Funct"; "Mr. O. Topsy-Turf, of Cher Noel (Charnel?) House"; the "Russ Undone Checkofsky" (Chekhov?); "Sven Swansong" (swan song, a slang term for death, also the title of a Chekhov play); the "Cryptic Patriark"; and "Allover Cromlech" (Oliver Cromwell?). Even "Chief Wenanwei" (weep and wail) is there to keen at the wake. After the dignitaries are listed comes a catalogue of some of the various arrays in which death is garbed, as "Abbot ware" (abattoir), in "black ossuary" and "cere-monies", amongst other costumes. The biblical allusion in the penultimate line and the adaptation of Keats in the final line return the poem to a literary frame. Throughout, the tone has been one of levity, emphasized by references to "gags", "joker-knots", "escapades" and his "tryx" (tricks). While this is an impressively clever parody of Keats and other serious poems on death, I think it a curious choice of subject for a parody, especially from a man who earlier wrote:

Speak me no deaths. Prevent that word from me.
From such discourse can come no earthly good.
I like it not. 53

Indeed, most of Klein's writing about death revolves around the understanding that death is a part of life, its spirit pervading the life spirit. One area where death's touch is obvious, he writes, is in the life of commerce. In "Pawnshop", materialism is referred to as "our dialectic grave". There is death terminology throughout the poem. The shop is a grim place, with each cupboard

skeleton'd
with ghost of gambler, spook of shiftless souse,

with rattling relic⁵⁴ of the over-dunned!
Disaster haunts it.

Even the three balls which are indications of a pawnshop are seen as "bombs / set for a time, which ticks for almost all". Everyone is in bondage, even the clerk "himself in pawn".

"Psalm 170: To the Chief Bailiff, a Psalm of the King's Writ" extends this metaphor. In this poem, Death would hold all the tickets, be the owner of the shop. As soon as one stops paying for the merchandise, he confiscates all of the things that are important, "hearth, home and hide," and when nothing of these is left, he confiscates one's breath.

In each of these poems, the human is in bondage to some uncontrollable external force so that even one's life is a living death. This death spirit is parodied in "Actuarial Report" a satire on the insurance industry, poking fun at its pseudo-legal "officialese" terminology and attendant statistical appendices. The effect is to distance the whole idea of death until it becomes a figure in the curve on a graph. It is anti-life both in its absence from life and in its transferring all events to calculations of death probabilities. Death touches all about him and brings all into his service:

we
have become the keepers of his diary.⁵⁵

These servants are so swept up in the anti-life movement that, although they are called magi, they are unable, like the magi of old, to celebrate life by announcing "A son is born". Instead, they see all in terms of death:

Regrettably, all that we can see for the present fiscal year
Is many a father dying.⁵⁶

Probably the most striking of these poems showing the pervasiveness of death is "The Break-Up". The break-up of ice is known to be an indication of spring and its concomitant associations of new life. The characters in the poem are hesitant to assume that spring is imminent, but they have sufficient faith to lay bets on how soon the day will occur. That it will come they are certain, but they talk of its coming in the "dead of night", raising

from their iced tomb
the pyramided fish, the unlocked ships, 57
and last year's blue and bloated suicides.

One infers from these poems and others dealing with suffering and death that Klein took the idea of death quite seriously; hence the especially startling and distancing effect of his parody in "Variations of a Theme".

V. Palestine

The hope that transcends the struggles and the agonies of life are represented, for Klein, by Israel. Throughout history, Jerusalem has represented sanctuary and homeland to the Jewish people and in Klein's poetry, it is, in addition, the symbol of hope and of life. One example of this occurs in "And In That Drowning Instant", whose initial description is of death and persecution. The archetypal wandering Jew is, at one and the same time, drowning, and moving from the ghetto to the *shtetl*, then immigrating to Amsterdam and Cordova, both sites of conversion to Christianity, especially in the latter place through coercion from the Spanish

Inquisition. The image, as the narrator is about to go down for the last time, is of the Roman Catholic Church. And yet, in the end, the death does not occur, for many march backward from the church to Jerusalem, the narrator among them, and instead of sinking,

(the) body rises
And finds the good, the lasting shore!⁵⁸

This is reiterated in the poem "Haggadah", which refers to the narrative that is read aloud at the Passover seder, a narrative which includes the statement "Next year in Jerusalem!" In this poem as well, that is the concluding salutation. Prior to that, the poem parallels the tale of the Haggadah, relating the historic trials of the Jews, the symbolic manifestations of those trials, as "The Bitter Dish", the songs of celebration, and above all, the homey scene of kettle humming, spluttering candles, wine-stained tablecloth and matzoh crumbs. Over this image of home is superimposed the image of Palestine, the "eastern land", with paschal sheep, almond blossoms, vineyards and oranges, and the hope that next year, the Passover seder will take place in Jerusalem.

Many of the poems are as romantic as the dream image cited above. "Sonnets Semitic (ii)" begins with the recognition that its narrator is unhappy where he is. He says:

These northern stars are scarabs in my eyes.
Not any longer can I suffer them.
I will to Palestine.⁵⁹

Although the scarab is a sacred beetle of ancient Egypt, an oriental reference, the northern stars refer, presumably, to Canada. Once again, the description of the destination of the travelling lovers includes orange blossoms and sheep on the hills and in addition, there are fluttering white

doves and sparrows twittering their congratulations. Although the drive towards Palestine is presumably a real one, the image of that place is entirely fantastic.

This air of fantasy is conveyed in a somewhat different fashion in "Yehuda Halevi, His Pilgrimage". This poem recounts the tale of an actual mediaeval Hebrew poet who lived in Spain and who made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Legend has it that he was killed by an Arab rider just outside the gates of the city. Klein's admiration for Halevi's poetry is great and he incorporates his translation of a Halevi poem in his own poem, stanzas 34-39⁶⁰. Klein's poem is a tragic one, expressing not only the tragedy that befell Halevi, but also symbolizing the yearning which Jews have felt throughout history for Jerusalem. Despite its possible universal message, the poem is full of archaisms and is composed in Spenserian stanzas. The use of the dream convention adds to a feeling of the poem's historicity and fantasy, and in spite of the repetition in the first and final stanzas of the line, "Liveth the tale, nor ever shall it die!", the final effect of the poem is of an ancient tale, portraying events that occurred in the distant past.

FOOTNOTES

1. "Diary of Abraham Segal, Poet", p. 88.
2. Waddington, Miriam, Op. cit., pp. 9-10.
3. "Manuscript: Thirteenth Century", p. 68.
4. "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape", p. 334.
5. "Epitaph", p. 340.
6. "Sonnet Unrhymed", p. 285.
7. "Stance of the Amidah", p. 345.
8. "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", p. 117.
9. "The Psalter of Avram Haktani: Psalm XXIV", p. 224.
10. "Portraits of a Minyan", p. 118.
11. Palnick, E. E., Op. cit., Section II, p. 5.
12. Waddington, Miriam, Op. cit., p. 23.
13. "Of Holy Vessels", p. 178.
14. Rosten, Leo. The Joys of Yiddish. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1968. pp. 404-5.
15. "Of Psalmody in the Temple", p. 105.
16. "Psalm 166", p. 285.
17. Ibid.
18. "The Golem", p. 284.
19. "Embryo of Dusts" from "Talisman in Seven Shreds", p. 133.
20. "Guide to the Perplexed" from "Talisman in Seven Shreds", p. 135.
21. "Scribe", p. 150.
22. "Rev Levi Yitschok Talks to God", p. 146.
23. "Elegy", p. 291.

24. "Meditation Upon Survival", p. 288.
25. "In Re Solomon Warshawer", p. 234.
26. Steinberg, M. W., in Marshall, T., Op. cit., p. 106.
27. "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", p. 113.
28. "Design for Medieval Tapestry", p. 136.
29. Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. 8, p. 89. New York: Universal Jewish Encyclopedia Co. Inc.
30. "Ballad of the Thwarted Axe", p. 241.
31. Fischer, G., In Search of Jerusalem. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1975. p. 154.
32. "Ballad of the Nuremberg Tower-Clock", p. 262.
33. "Ballad of the Dancing Bear", p. 173.
34. "Autobiographical", p. 272.
35. Langer, Lawrence. The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975.
36. Flint, F. Cudworth. Review of "The Hitleriad", The New York Times Book Review, Sept. 3, 1944. Extract quoted in Marshall, T. ed., Op. cit., p. 22.
37. Livesay, D. "The Polished Lens: The Poetic Techniques of Pratt and Klein", Marshall, T. ed., Op. cit., p. 126.
38. "The Hitleriad", p. 187.
39. Ibid., p. 188.
40. Ibid., p. 200.
41. Ibid., pp. 203-4.
42. Ibid., pp. 206-7.
43. "Ballad of Signs and Wonders", p. 14.
44. "Design for Medieval Tapestry", p. 136.
45. Ibid., p. 141.
46. "Sonnets Semitic (v)", p. 154.

47. Ballad of Quislings", p. 263.
48. "The Psalter of Avram Haktani: Psalm XXII", p. 223.
49. Ibid.
50. "Ballad of the Nursery Rhymes", p. 263.
51. "Sennet of Gheel", p. 266.
52. "Variations of a Theme", p. 265.
53. "Sonnet VIII" from XXII Sonnets, MS; p. 8.
54. "Pawnshop", p. 311.
55. "Actuarial Report", p. 271.
56. Ibid.
57. "The Break-Up", p. 314.
58. "And In That Drowning Instant", p. 268.
59. "Sonnets Semitic (ii)", p. 152.
60. Waddington, Miriam, Op. cit., pp. 75-80. Waddington points out that this accounts for the quotation marks around the six stanzas. She further asserts, on comparing Klein's translation with Bialik's and Schwartz's of the same poem, that Klein imposes his own style on Halevi.

CHAPTER III

FUNCTION AND IDENTITY OF THE POET

Extensive research into the meanings of the words, Klein's choice of technique and his biblical, cabbalistic and Chassidic and other references leads the interested reader to reconstruct the poetry in order to more fully understand it. It also leads inevitably to the questions: what is the intention behind the intricately created puzzles within the poetry? What does Klein see the function of the poet to be?

Much of the inventive word formation, punning, and plays on words can be seen as written for the sheer fun and challenge of it. For example, in "Montreal", Klein deliberately set out to write a bilingual poem, one that could be as readily understood by a unilingual English person as a unilingual French person. In describing the intention of this poem, Klein writes:

...I have sought to ... express some of the appreciation for that place which to me is both urbs and orbis.

Suiting language to theme, the poem, you will note is written in a vocabulary which is not exactly orthodox English. It is written so that any Englishman who knows no French, and any Frenchman who knows only English prepositions, can read it intelligently. There is here not a word which is not either similar to, derivative from, or akin to a French word of like import. It is our country's first bilingual poem-- and in a single version.

In reading other poems, however, one becomes mystified as to the motivation behind the use of words and expressions that remain elusive even after consultation of dictionaries, encyclopaediae, and

scholarly works.

It is easy to understand that Old and Middle English archaisms and Hebrew references and Yiddish plays on words might be used to support Klein's description of the rich Hebrew and English literary tradition which he inherits, as he does in "Ave Atque Vale". His association with the two traditions is immediately introduced in the first stanza where he refers to his speaking Hebrew while "quaffing the lusty toast" before the "goodly feres / In the Mermaid Tavern". Klein's use of such phrases as "heigh-nonny-no", "lack-a-day", "in sooth", "parfait", works well to emphasize the Chaucerian and Shakespearean inheritance. The use of such mediaevalisms and sixteenth century phrases to justify Klein's identification with his Hebrew tradition is, however, a little bewildering. And since some of the added Hebrew allusions are unfamiliar even to those well acquainted with Jewish tradition², the result is a poem that, except for its surface meaning, is inaccessible to most of Klein's audience.

Talmudic scholarship has a reputation such that the first five stanzas of this poem may be understood, even without knowing who ben-Zakkai, Titus and Reb Zadoc are. Research by the interested reader can elicit edifying information about many of the men mentioned, but such phrases as "smiling Kahana" (stanza six) remain closed even after extensive research, for the Jewish Encyclopedia lists six men named Kahana and there is no clue as to which man and which episode Klein had in mind³. There are, of course, readers who are not Talmudic scholars but who understand Yiddish. While they would share the difficulty with the Hebrew allusions,

they would have no trouble, for example, understanding the ambiguity of "ambiguous Resh Lakish", for they would be aware that *lakish* is Yiddish for 'oaf'. To those who do not understand Yiddish, however, even this pun is lost.

Without a knowledge of Yiddish and Hebrew, one can nevertheless comprehend that, according to its title, in this poem, Klein bids farewell to Shakespeare, Marlowe and Jonson, and hails his Hebrew forbears, and throughout the poem, affirms that he has acquired much from both these traditions. However, the precise nature of the Hebrew inheritance can only be guessed at.

Likewise, in "Sonnet in Time of Affliction", there are levels of meaning that simply cannot be perceived without a knowledge of Hebrew. For example, in the reference to "Bar Cochba's star" in "Bar Cochba's star has suffered its last fall"⁴, it is clear that this is intended as an example of a mighty person (a leader?) who has lost his power, whose star has fallen. Knowing that Bar Cochba was indeed a leader who led a temporarily successful revolt in the third century supports this reading. The knowledge of Hebrew adds to the reading a delight in Klein's punning, for *bar cochba* means 'son of the star'.

Because of the many similarities between French and English words, the use of French in the poetry does not present as great a hurdle to the reader as do the Yiddish, Hebrew or Polish words. As indicated earlier, there are occasions when French is used to enhance the meaning of especially the French Canadian poems, such as in "Parade of St. Jean Baptiste", "Montreal", or in "M. Bertrand", where the use of French

emphasizes the conflict which M. Bertrand feels about Parisian and joul forms of French. In other poems, however, French seems much more to provide a way of expressing something which the poet does not wish to say aloud or clearly.

The most striking example of this occurs in "Hormisdas Arcand". Arcand was the most vociferous and effective organizing force of nazism in Quebec in the 1930's. While a party platform was occasionally referred to, his only real concern was to improve the purity of French Canadian life by getting rid of the Jews. Thus, it would seem that any portrait of this man would say clearly and unequivocally what he was about. However, in this poem, Arcand's message is in French and the description of his delivery of it contains joul slang. While repeating a Frenchman's message in French might serve to emphasize it, in this case, Klein's use of French seems rather to allow him, Klein, to repeat statements that are particularly repugnant to him: Away with the Jews! and kike (*yapin*).

In "Diary of Abraham Segal, Poet", French is used to express those sentiments which the poet Segal does not (dare not?) express aloud. It is also interesting to note that both in this poem and in "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", the nightmare, whether of one's dreams (Segal) or of anti-semitism (Childe Harold) is expressed with the French word, *cauchemar*.

That the poet Segal uses another language to confirm his separation from the things that frighten him supports my contention that, on occasion, the poet Klein likewise employs other languages to confirm his separation, alienation, distance. Steinberg claims that:

Klein tried to achieve a kind of linguistic apartness that would reinforce the similar impression of the community and its traditions that he was writing about.⁵

I would add that he uses the same techniques to emphasize his personal apartness. The obscurity and elusiveness of some of the references are, possibly, due to the ignorance of the audience, but they may also be an illustration of Klein's ambivalence about expressing aloud his fears and dislikes. He may feel the need to say it, but be somewhat unwilling to have his audience know it.

Klein refused, when requested, to offer his personal definition of poetry. On one occasion, he wrote to A.J.M. Smith on the subject, saying:

Simply expressed, I write poetry only to reveal my civilization, my sensitivities, my craftsmanship. This, however, is not to be quoted.⁶

On another occasion, he refers to other poets' attempts which he finds paltry and rhetorical and concludes that it is both impossible and undesirable to attempt to define poetry. He writes,

Should it be granted me some fine day, 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.⁷

He did, however, write about other poets, and in these writings, there are a few clues to his perception of the function of the poet, especially the Jewish poet.

In a series of articles, Klein writes about Joseph as "The Bible's Archetypical Poet". This is, on the surface, a curious choice, for there is nothing in the story of Joseph that is written in a manner.

that we recognize as poetry. But, writes Klein,

we are here primarily concerned to discover...not so much the Bible's texts of all-excelling poetry as that instance of biography, that scriptural *curriculum vitae* that would best illustrate, with the very sanction of Holy Writ, the typical role and function of the poet...It is, to our mind, the young Joseph whose life presents the coveted paradigm.⁸

The instances in Joseph's life which are, for Klein, illustrative of the life of the poet are that he is a dreamer, but rooted in reality; he never loses touch with people or things; all of his life's efforts are "towards...a recognition of his brothers"; he is made to suffer but through this learns humility and comes to a closer understanding of his brothers; and he becomes fruitful because he continues to live close to the roots of his life. Referring to Jacob's prophecy regarding Joseph's life, Klein writes:

Here, then, we find, issuing from the lips of Jacob, a blessing, the benign visitation whereof must go to make the poet complete. He must be, first, a fruitful bough, must have natural talent, be a poet born...But even the bough, naturally fruitful, cannot forever drain sustenance from itself. ...Not isolated, not alone, not altogether self-sustained, does the poet live; he lives hard by a refreshing and ever renewed source of water; he lives and labours within a tradition.⁹

Klein interprets this part of the benediction as a reminder to Joseph that he should not alienate himself from his brothers, but adds that a true poet will grow beyond the tradition.

The true poet is he who, nourished upon the ancestral heritage, yet--if only in the slightest--deviates therefrom. Rooted in the common soil, he turns his eyes to new directions. ...Thus are the ideas of convention and revolt, of tradition and innovation, conjured up in the single image of Jacob's benediction.¹⁰

In addition to its insights into Klein's perception of the poetic impulse, this reading of these chapters of Genesis provides us with Klein's image of the poet's relationship with others. He writes,

It is impossible to preserve this story, detail after symbolic detail, without realizing that here we have encountered the classic design figuring the relatives between the poet and his fellows. ...It is a design which, beginning with misunderstanding and envy, moves on towards conspiracy, suggests, at first, a mere humiliating of its victim, then, feeding upon its own thoughts, soon clamours for revenge, and thus, by its own clamorous blood encompassed, broods on the ultimate: murder. From that ultimate it recoils; it cannot bring itself to strike the killing blow, but by this time, the distinction is purely technical: *The child is not.*¹¹

Klein states that Joseph's brothers threw him into the pit because he was a dreamer, and since his coat of many colours is symbolic of his imagination, the brothers strip him of it. When they decide to sell him, they settle for a price of twenty pieces of silver. "Thus was Joseph not simply sold," writes Klein, "he was undersold". In addition, the fact that the coat was dipped in goat's blood in order to deceive Jacob emphasizes Joseph's role as scapegoat.

Thus, it is clear that Klein sees the life of the poet, the interpreter of dreams, as involving much misunderstanding from others and the very real possibility of suffering at the hands of others. To what extent he uses this as an explanation for the difficulties in his own life is not made clear and any suggestion that it accounts for his difficulties in getting recognized and published and in making a living is purely speculative.

What seems most important in this paradigm is that the poet is rooted in his heritage, but deviates from it somewhat, as a sign of new

growth. This may account for Klein's many poems which express his need to articulate his Jewishness in terms other than the traditional religious ones that his father uses. It is, of course, easiest to state what one does not feel is authentic to oneself and thus, he uses a variety of techniques to express his distance from these traditional expressions. However, distance from the rituals is not intended to imply a separation from the essence of Judaism.

In a review entitled "Jewish Self-Hatred", Klein discusses the poetry of Karl Shapiro in Person, Place and Thing. It is important to consider this review, not simply for its comments about Shapiro's work, but for its elucidation of Klein's image of the Jewish poet. It is clear, says Klein, that Shapiro found the dialects of his forefathers hateful.

That this is so is seen again in his poem about his grandmother whom he pities because history has moved her "through strange lands and many houses, confusing the tongues and tasks of her children's children":

The cause of this confusion is quite obvious. It is obvious not only from the things which Shapiro has remarked about his people, but also from those which he has failed to remark. There is not any indication anywhere that the poet is aware of the rich cultural heritage which should have been his; he who succeeds in glamorizing a soft drink emporium can find nothing worthy of reference in a culture which has spanned the centuries and covered the continents. It is the grandson who is to be pitied, and not the grandmother.¹²

Klein feels that Shapiro's poetry exhibits a "studied--and un-alleviated--denigration" of his people, a regrettable path of self-hatred, not least because it is followed by a poet, one whom Klein regards as "mon frère et mon semblable".

Further consideration of expressions of self-hatred is found

in another article examining the work of young Jewish poets. In "Those Who Should Have Been Ours", Klein states outright that he feels that the "destined function" of the Jewish poet is to "contribute something towards the preservation and advancement of the tradition in which they remain, whether they would or not, inextricably involved..." The article discusses the results of a symposium by Jewish writers, who, he says, "were at pains to reveal what their Judaism meant to them". In all but one instance, there was agreement that their Jewish origin had only a negative meaning to them. Even the one contributor who felt positively influenced by his heritage is seen in a less than positive light by Klein for this man had become a scholar in Scottish literature. In expressing his profound regret that these young men separate themselves from their ancestry, Klein writes, "Will these talents at last come to realize the alternative that faces them: that they are ours--or nobody's?" Elsewhere he quotes from Delmore Schwartz' comments on T.S. Eliot, suggesting that Schwartz agrees that the remarks apply also to the situation of these Jewish writers: "The protagonist of Gerontion uses one of the most significant phrases in Eliot's work when he speaks of himself as living in a rented house; which is to say, not in the house where his forbears lived."¹³

It is clear that Klein does not include any of these poets as Josephs "rooted in the common soil, (turning) eyes to new directions". Likewise, he does not perceive his own querulous remarks, deprecations and ironic statements as emanating from the same source as the remarks of others, which he describes as expressions of self-hatred. The remarks are seen to be anti-semitic because the poets do not recognize the richness of

their heritage. And while Klein is fully aware of that inheritance, he does not see that his is often a romantic perception, full of nostalgia. Nor, with the exception of his Zionism, does he find an authentic expression as twentieth century, non-traditional Jew.

Since he openly declares his questions about the efficacy and validity of traditional rituals and does not mean, thereby, to be anti-semitic, he has always to reaffirm his conviction that being a Jew is tremendously important. He berates Untermeyer and Fadiman who, he says, "travel incognito" and therefore have nothing original to contribute. And he regrets that Delmore Schwartz feels that his inheritance conveys only negations, and no positive values.

In another article, Klein responds to Sartre's pamphlet "Anti-semitism and Jew" which proposes that emancipated Jews forget about their Jewishness altogether and continue their philanthropic work in the socialist camp so that they could both remain true to their ethics and escape persecution. Klein writes,

Socialism, it is clear from Sartre's exposition--involves assimilation, the loss of distinction, the unified amalgam, and thus the solution is, after all, but the dissolution one was seeking to avoid. Of such a solution, in which the Jewish is lost, lost not vainly but for the enhancement of the human, but lost none the less, of such an existence, the authentic Jew can only ask: Do you call this living?¹⁴

He is concerned about the future of Jewish society and especially in the postwar context, he feels that it is incumbent upon the English-speaking Jews to speak for their people. In the article reviewing the symposium of young Jewish poets, he writes,

...it would seem...only the English-speaking Jewries who today, in our traumatic muteness, might perhaps supply

our people with utterance that is direct and authentic. Certainly it would be a long time before the Jewries of Europe regain their speech; even for those who have survived, the memory of horror still paralyzes the tongue.¹⁵

Even during the war, Klein was one of the few poets who wrote about the atrocities committed by Hitler and other nazis. The distancing techniques in many of these poems have been examined in an earlier chapter, but their effect is worth re-examining because they provide a different problem in understanding than do the other sorts of poems where distancing is employed. What Klein seems to be attempting in these poems is to show how the "natural order of things" is disrupted and how inhuman are its perpetrators. Thus, he has poems that indicate how topsy-turvy even the innocent world of childhood has become and he describes nazis in terms so grotesque that they are seen as totally inhuman. His poems do provide evidence of a world turned upside down, although the form of many of the poems seems to create poetic pieces, rather than indicate the rage that presumably motivated their writing.

The main problem in a critical examination of these poems is that we now know much more about the nature and extent of the atrocities than was known then. Thus, what the contemporary reader sees in the poetry is how it diminishes both the events and the actors. While Klein successfully portrays the inhumanity of the chief nazis, for example, the portraits act to focus attention on a few individuals as peculiar aberrations. Greater knowledge of the events of the war, however, shows that the holocaust was not the work of one man and a few wicked supporters but was the result of evil deeds committed by entire nations. Thus, to concentrate on the

"inhumanity" of a few is to miss the larger horror, that they are not inhuman, but human, and that to examine these few must involve an examination of the nature of mankind itself. And what is required is not an examination from a distance, even an aesthetic distance, but a form which makes of the reader " a direct emotional participant in the experience"¹⁶.

Lawrence Langer argues that the implications of the concentration camp experience require that new literary techniques and forms be devised. The writing which attempts to state the unspeakable he calls "the art of atrocity" and says,

The art of atrocity is a stubbornly unsettling art, indifferent to the peace that passeth understanding and intent only on reclaiming for the present, not the experience of the horror itself, since by common consent of the survivors this is impossible to do vicariously, but a framework for responding to it, for making it imaginatively (if not literally) accessible.¹⁷

This does not require painstaking recording of details, for such recording ignores the chief source of the horror--"existence in a middle realm between life and death with its ambiguous and inconsistent appeals to survival and extinction, which continuously undermined the logic of experience without offering any satisfactory alternative."¹⁸ More than that, the relation of details tends to allow the reader distance for it works to remind the reader that this is not his reality. It happened, he says, in another time.

Those writers whose sensibility is shaped by the concentration camps often employ universalized metaphors, so that the reader is forced to say "it is happening" rather than "it has not happened". Alternatively, the writer duplicates the contradictions of the holocaust without providing

the opportunity for assembling the details into a meaningful pattern.

If one accepts Langer's argument, as I do, the nature and effect of the distancing techniques which Klein employs become increasingly apparent. Thus, he distances the actions of Hitler and his aides in "The Hitleriad" not only by focussing attention on these individuals, but by emphasizing his perception of them as outside our common humanity, and by attempting to see, and react to, them logically.

Where Klein writes more effectively and with a sense of personal involvement is in those poems where he expresses the guilt and questions of the survivor. Perhaps the problems associated with his other poems about the war are due to a combination of lack of involvement, bad choice of form for writing about evil, and historical timing.

Unlike the younger poets whose writing troubles him, Klein both acknowledges and fulfills his commitment to the victims of the holocaust and writes often about the positive values of his Jewish heritage. One should not infer, however, that merely because he identifies with his Jewish past, he is spared the sense of "living in a rented house". While he seems to have solved the problem of being a Jewish poet, he has not resolved the difficulties of being a Jewish poet in an English and French context. In diary entries written after he was offered the post of teaching English as an assistant professor at McGill, Klein writes:

Now that it seems practically settled, I am full of misgiving. ... I am worried about the students: A Jew teaching English poetry! About students who will have come back from the war: And where were you all

this time? About the subjects I will teach. About what will constitute the measure of success! About the experimental nature of the thing: ...¹⁹

Elsewhere in this entry, Klein refers to his dislike of the legal profession. Wondering what he might do once the teaching contract is fulfilled, he writes: "And then, what? Return to the law? I'll never do that."

In another reference to his teaching appointment, Klein writes of his telephoning his wife to tell her the news. She was delighted and kidded him about his new title. And, he says, "calculated the number of people whom the announcement would slay. A pleasant thought."²⁰

It is my feeling that Klein writes a great deal about the Jewish past, not only to indicate and share his heritage, but also because there is a comfort in nostalgia where things, at least in one's memory, are fixed and stable and therefore easier to cope with. One knew where one stood in the *shtetl*. Expressing a similar argument, Benjamin writes:

Klein...has no answer to the challenge that confronts the Jewish artist. Instead, he turns to the past which, seen in a dimmer perspective, eliminates the diffuseness which the picture of contemporary life presents and creates the illusion of compactness and unity which the artist ever strives to capture. Hence Klein's nostalgia for medievalism and his fascination for it--for that era when the word Jew had a simpler connotation than it has today; for that period when the Ghetto set definite boundaries to Jewish aspirations and as a consequence, produced a certain homogeneousness.²¹

The challenge that Benjamin refers to is to utter a message of courage and hope despite the lack of homogeneity, indeed the "serious disintegration in Jewish religious, national and cultural life". Those poets who seemed to refer to this disintegration Klein feels to be victims

of self-hatred and as a result, he does not speak of it at all. In a conversation with Palnick in 1958, Layton refers to this problem:

In private, he made disparaging comments about these *balabatim*, the reception groups, the businessmen. Yet he never allowed this to enter his poetry. He would disguise this contempt, rationalize it. Abe was inhibited from destroying this image even if it meant the destruction of his own personality. The lack of freedom--this is his tragedy.²²

Although it is true that Klein does not make obvious pejorative statements about Jews, or about the difficulties he encounters and the personal depressions he suffers as a Jew in Montreal, an unsuccessful lawyer, and a defeated political candidate running in a Jewish constituency, there are allusions to these trials in his poetry at least insofar as he describes his marginality to traditional expressions of Judaism. With the exception of a few poems on the survivor of the holocaust and his Zionist poems, there are no poems about the modern Jew, and this fact tends to support the contention that he either could not or did not allow himself to write things that might be seen to be depreciatory, nor could he respond hopefully to the contemporary situation.

Since it is known that Klein did not write for the final fifteen years of his life, and that no public explanation for this is given, it is easy to assume that he became so despondent about his own situation that he could no longer write. However, there is no published evidence for this, so the evidence is speculative. We await with great interest the publication of the letters and other papers, in the hopes that these papers will aid efforts to comprehend the life and work of this brilliant and enigmatic poet.

FOOTNOTES

1. MS. Letter to Dr. Sandwell, n.d.
2. Birney, E. "Canadian Jewish Poet" Review of "Hath Not a Jew", Canadian Forum 20 (1940): pp. 354-55. Quoted in Fischer, G. Op. cit., p. 116-7.
3. Fischer, G. Op. cit., p. 117.
4. "Sonnet in Time of Affliction", p. 128.
5. Steinberg, M. W., Op. cit., p. 117.
6. Mayne, S. ed. The A. M. Klein Symposium. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1975. p. 3.
7. "A Definition of Poetry", Canadian Jewish Chronicle, 19 April 1946, pp. 8, 12.
8. "The Bible's Archetypical Poet", Canadian Jewish Chronicle, 6 March 1953, p. 7.
9. "The Bible's Archetypical Poet", Canadian Jewish Chronicle, 20 March 1953, p. 4.
10. Ibid.
11. "The Bible's Archetypical Poet", Canadian Jewish Chronicle, 13 March 1953, p. 4.
12. "Jewish Self Hatred", Canadian Jewish Chronicle, 14 January 1944.
13. "Those Who Should Have Been Ours", New Palestine, 16 November 1945.
14. Canadian Jewish Chronicle, 5 November 1948, quoted in Fischer, G., Op. cit., pp. 123-4.
15. "Those Who Should Have Been Ours", Op. cit.
16. Langer, L. Op. cit., p. 182.
17. Ibid., p. 12.
18. Ibid., p. 43.

19. Diary entry, 4 May 1945.
20. Ibid.
21. Benjamin, L. "A. M. Klein" Canadian Jewish Year Book, '1940-41, p. 161 ff.,
quoted in Palnick, E. E., Op. cit., p. 8.
22. Palnick, E. E., Op. cit., p. 16.

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1945, pp. 30-31, 43.

"Jewish Self-Hatred". Review of Person, Place and Thing by
Karl Shapiro. Canadian Jewish Chronicle,
14 January 1944, pp. 4, 15.