

# Notes on The Second Scroll

A.M. Klein (1909-1972)

## I A man ahead of his time

### A. Growing up a few blocks away

- never heard his name until Spring 1966
- a vague legend to Mc Gill Jew. students
- what happened?

### B. Jew-American vs. American-Jew.

- 1) not Cohen - English / Yiddish split; assimilationist
- 2) Teziarska } off to Hollywood
- 3) Odets }
- 4) Henry Roth

### C. Ideal of cultural synthesis

<87-8> Letter to Nigun

horizontal / vertical legitimization

### D. leading Joyce scholar; aspired to be a major exp.-lang poet

## II Biography of an engagé Jew

### A. B. Raton (not Mtl) 1909; emigrated 1910

- everything in Second Scroll = autobiographical
- program in 1919 - when he's 10
- Hzd. education

### B. Mc Gill 1926-1930

- discovers his poetic calling and ... Joyce's Ulysses

### C. Law degree - practice in Mtl, rural Quebec town, Mtl

### D. Turning Point

1930 - editor Canadian Jew. Chronicle

Nov 18 1938 - 1st initialed editorial (Kristallnacht)

1939 - Sam Bronfman's speech writer

1940 - Hatz Not a Jew

1942/3 - Hitleriad - parody, mock-heroic (pub 1944)

1944 - Poems - Psalter of Avram Haketzni  
Lament / liturgy

1949 - trip to Israel - Paris - Rome

1950 - Second Scroll



### E. Montal breakdown: 1950-1955

"And in that drowning instant"

- irreconcilables of being both committed Jew & Eng poet
- own personality, pride, paranoia
- the more he identified, the more cut off he was from Eng-Ling mainstream
- the better he wrote, the less his Jew. audience understood

1953 "The Bible's Archetypal Poet" - all true poets (eg Joseph) are persecuted by those nearest them.

### III Autobiographical kernel

#### A. Childhood in Mtl (= Genesis)

- real descriptions of people, places

#### B. Trip to Israel in 1949

- fact-finding mission to Israel, Europe & North Africa
- sent by Canadian Jew. Congress
- actually travelled to Israel 1st
- rising progression in the novel
- record of a pilgrimage; the must culminate in glory & consolation of a nation's rebirth
- contains whole segments of his Journal

#### C. Ideas vs. Characters

- as fiction writer, always preferred former
  - 1) real people or
  - 2) allegorical types
- main fictional character =  $L^2N$

#### D. Possible hint

- missed Herzl's reinterment by <sup>1</sup>search dept
- reported delirium
- quest for heroic Jew. personality, idealized father-figure, genius, savior, alter ego, who constantly eludes the worshipful seeker



# Form

- 1) detective thriller = plot device
- 2) 2 epigraphs

a) Milton: Scriptural promise is literal: don't rationalize it away <sup>or narrative fertility: that which is written  $\neq$  that which is read</sup>

b) Levi - fitshole:  $\delta \sqrt{3} 13$  - I/Thou dialogue  
conflict & win it; optimistic but anonymous  
not his song but Gods: everything attributed to p/s

## 3) Pentateuchal structure

elegiac { GENESIS - break with tradition Melech as Adam, Abraham, Joseph, Jacob  
EXODUS - Egyptian servitude = European Holocaust  $\rightarrow$   
redemption turn Melech's resurrection, return Melech as Moses  
ends w/  $\delta \sqrt{3} 13$

a) AET

LEVITICUS - Rome - humanitization - religion of love  
cult = theological dialogue;  $\delta \sqrt{3} 13$  = Nadav & Avihu  
blasphemer of Lev. 24:10, sexual prohibitions;  $\delta \sqrt{3} 13$

b) Justice

NUMBERS - Carthago - the despair of a living diaspora  
delays his pilgrimage to Israel; of the spies  
statutes, encampments; Korah = Luggis march

c) Faith

DEUTERONOMY - return to Zion  
passenger's theory of Jewish history = Moses' orations on dependence on God  
song / Hallelujah  
funeral of Melech / Moses; narrator  $\rightarrow$  Joshua

Theme of the Book: individual  $\rightarrow$  collective

## 1) Melech as paradigmatic modern Jew

- a) abandonment of religion
- b) flirtation w Marxism / Christianity
- c) passionate humanitization
- d) trauma of the Holocaust
- e) return to Zion

## 2) Melech as Jesus

- (23) publicly flogged by pogromists
- (26) like Jesus chasing moneylenders from the Temple  
puts a halt to proceedings at Warsaw bourse
- (35) Killed (buried alive) & resurrected  
(= central motif in post-Hol. literature)
- (44) Epistle to the Romans
- (45) Settemo = tempted by Setzer
- (68) leads blind, maimed
- (91) Anointed with gasoline

= exemplar of martyred Jesus



## 3) Melech as Jewish collective

1) Jewish East / West

Ashkenazi / Sephardic

2) All the synonyms for crown, being

Melech, Krul

Dauphin

Ketter

Krongold

3) Lamed-vov - catalogue of rogators, anonymous saints

pp. 74 ff

4) the creative spirit - embodied more in the folk than in

the indiv. poets < trenchant critique >

miracle of Hebrew reborn 84 ff

5) Miracle of transformed stone - Arch of Titus

6) Find image < 92 >

naturalizing the miracle

4) Melech (and his nephew) as chroniclers of Jew. history

THEME 2: 1st scroll → 2nd scroll

CYCICAL NATURE OF JEWISH HISTORY

- biblical paradigm of destruction & rebirth

- like Yeats, Joyce

4) Melech (and his nephew) as (chronicles of Jan. Hist)

a) from early childhood

- Melech's reputation as *yisro* inspires narrators to study

- *yisro* / apostate → his name unattractive

b) Melech as Bolshevik

- Nephew rewrites himself after reading one of his pub.

c) Nephew's mission to compile antho of Heb poetry that will express ethos of new land

d) Melech's letters → vicarious experience of European hist.

e) Casablanca : nephew's symbolic reenactment of Melech's experience

lit. traces uncle's descent into Hell

analogous to uncle's passage into New World at Sistine Chapel

nephew, too, enters Melech thru orifices

Whirlwind of forms → poverty of ghetto - lime-pit-in-the-streets

colors of frescoes → stench of rotting flesh → nausea

f) Search for quintessentially Hebrew voice → continually disappointed; discovers not poetry per se but miraculous rebirth of the limf in everyday life  
only this can redeem *yisro*'s unhappy narrative

∴ 2nd scroll = ~~not~~ not the nephew's, but the nation's!



## Midrash on Michelangelo

### A. Most humanistic

Michelangelo = sacred text  
divinity of humanity

### B. Not literal reworking, but midrash, inversion, application

### C. <S1-S2> Commentary

### D. Takes panels in reversed order (i.e., anti-Christian)

1. not chronological

2. not theological (ending with continuity of sin)  
ignores NT material in the panels

3. consolatory

4. not spiritual but overwhelmingly physical

## I Origin of Sin

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1. Flood Drunkenness of Noah <sup>1) grotesque vitality</sup> 2) hist. process: dead = living dead
2. The great flood 3) line used both for freeways & for managing mass graves
3. Noah's offering & covenant w/ God

110-11

## II Origin of mankind in destruction of God-in-man

1. Fall of man, expulsion from Eden
2. Creation of Woman
3. Creation of Man

} מלאכה

## III Origin of the World = beginning of consolation

1. Separation of water/earth
2. Creation of sun, moon, planets
3. Dividing light/darkness = יְהוָה יֵרֵא

## IV Miraculous salvations of Israel

1. David & Goliath
2. Judith & Holofernes
3. Brazen serpent
4. Esther & Haman

\* Culture as crucible

\* The neoclassical impulse - return to archetype; ingathering of sources

\* America cannot provide the framework