

THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA

MEMORANDUM

TO: Dovid Roskies

DATE: 5/29/86

FROM: Ed Greenstein

SUBJECT: Your paper "On Account of Two Hats"

Overall, a paper that teaches and makes its point--even though it is a point with which I disagree.

Comments: First, great title. Next, you'll be interested in the article by Art Green in the premier issue of Tikkun, the left's answer to Commentary. Whatever you think of its politics, it is a helluva lot more Jewish than Commentary. Typo: p. 5 middle, "ruckus."

There is a not-so-hidden message here that ought to insult rabbinical students and the rabbis they become: they need the "significance" of the story spelled out for them while "graduate students ought to be able to tease out the lessons of a text on their own." That is not, I think, what you really want to say (though it probably is what you really think, and the reason that I don't think even you really believe what you write about rabbinical education). The point, as you put it more directly elsewhere, is that rabbinical education is value-laden in terms of personal and communal commitments while graduate training deals in a discipline that transcends political and religious boundaries, even ethical and to some extent cultural ones.

It is true that by personalizing the story you allow the students to model you and personalize literature on their own. But in what ways have you developed students' abilities to read and interpret literature on their own? It is not clear from your second presentation. In the first, you seek to transmit some generative skills and concepts in dealing with literature; but in the second you don't.

I still think students in the rabbinate must understand some of what a critic of (Jewish) lit. does and why in order to read criticism and translate it for one's own and one's students' use. I agree that we must also show students how to personalize and translate what they learn critically, but by training them to do it, not by spoonfeeding them. Engagement in one's field is not limited to theological education; it is part of academic disciplines, too. I must show I care if I expect my students to do the same.

3/c, דוד רוסקיס