AN ANALYSIS OF FOUR SHORT STORIES BY LAMED SHAPIRO

by

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ABSTRACT

This is a critical study of four short stories by the Yiddish writer Lamed Shapiro who lived and wrote in America between 1912 and 1948. Although some of the stories are set in Europe and some in America, the stories share common thematic concerns. All reveal that an earlier assumption of Jewish unity has been challenged and seek to explore a redefinition for Jewish life as it confronts the modern world. While some of the stories deal with familiar Jewish themes, their mode or organization is entirely modern.

This study suggests that Shapiro's innovation was due to the development of a highly sophisticated, reliable, omniscient narrator. In tracing the evolution of Shapiro's use of the narrator, this paper will show how his choice of a spokesman created an interplay between the narrator and the restricted point of view to establish a double vision of reality, and to provide the tension each story requires. Shapiro deploys the

narrator to move in and out of the characters' minds in a highly selective manner to control the necessary dramatic irony. This results in an ability to define the precise ordering of values upon which judgment should be based. In addition, the highly selective use of images, symbols, metaphors, and descriptions of all kinds gains our allegiance to the narrator's vision and opens an ironic gap between the reader and the characters. This insures free commentary upon the events along with an evaluation of details, and reveals the narrator's attitudes. In time, this manner of presentation provides the occasion for the projection of an authentic modern Yiddish voice.

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RESUME

Ce qui va suivre est une étude critique de quatre courtes histoires écrites en Yiddish par l'écrivain Lamed Shapiro qui a vécu et écrit en Amérique entre 1912 et 1948. Bien qu'une partie des histoires se déroule en Europe et une autre partie en Amérique, elles ont en commun les mêmes rapports de thèmes. Tout montre qu'une hypothèse précoce de l'unité juive a été provoquée et tout cherche à explorer une nouvelle définition de la vie juive confrontée au monde moderne. Alors que certaines histoires traitent des thèmes familiers juifs, leur mode d'organisation est entièrement moderne.

Cette étude tend à suggérer que la nouveauté dans l'oeuvre de Shapiro est due à la création d'un personnage de narrateur hautement recherché, crédible, et omniscient. Dans l'étude de l'évolution du narrateur chez Shapiro, ce texte montrera comment son choix d'un porte-parole a créé une relation entre le narrateur et le strict point de vue d'établir une

double vision de la réalité et a permis de créer la tension que chaque histoire requiert.

Shapiro voit dans le narrateur un moyen de pénétrer dans l'esprit des personnages et de prendre par rapport à eux un certain recul; il le fait d'une façon très recherchée pour contrôler l'ironie dramatique nécessaire. Ceci aboutit à une capacité de déterminer l'agencement précis des valeurs sur lesquelles le jugement pourrait être fondé. De plus, l'usage très élaboré d'images, symboles, métaphores et descriptions de toutes sortes gagne à notre sympathie la vision du narrateur et crée une complicité entre le lecteur et les personnages. Ces éléments garantissent une liberté vis-à-vis des événements et l'interprétation des détails; ils révèlent les attitudes du narrateur. Enfin, cette sorte de présentation procure l'occasion de faire entendre une voix d'un Yiddish moderne authentique.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like at this point to acknowledge, with gratitude, the many writers whose works so greatly assisted me in the development of this thesis. Two collections of writings which deal specifically with the history and development of modern Yiddish fiction have been most helpful: Ruth R. Wisse, A Shtetl and Other Yiddish Novellas (Behrman House Inc., New York, 1973) and Dan Miron, A Traveler Disguised: The Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century (Schocken Books, New York, 1973). I am most deeply indebted to Professor Ruth Wisse. It was her teaching of Yiddish literature at McGill University that attracted me to the field of Yiddish, and it is her work and most generous advice that informs a considerable part of this thesis. I wish to express my thanks to her kind encouragement and excellent instruction during my preparation of this thesis.

I would also like to thank the staff of the Montreal Jewish Public Library from whom I received most eager support and, lastly, I extend my thanks to the guardians of the archives and library of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York. I am particularly grateful to them for their permission to review some of Shapiro's original manuscripts.

Finally, the problems of translations should be noted. My own translations are that of a lay person, but the transliterations follow the system as it is set forth by the YIVO in New York.

E.F.

BIOGRAPHY

Lamed (Levi Joshua) Shapiro was born in 1878 in Rzhischev, a small town near Kiev, Russia.[1] He received a traditional Hebrew education in Bible and Talmud, continued in Russian studies, and soon began to write short stories in Russian, Hebrew, and Yiddish. In the year 1896, Shapiro left his native town and set out to "conquer" Warsaw. There, he frequented the home of I.L. Peretz which had become the centre for Yiddish literary activities, and soon Peretz's own writing and his commitment to the development of a modern Yiddish literature had a most profound effect upon the young Shapiro. Peretz's vigorous experimentation with the Yiddish language and the new patterns he created for the short story showed how effectively the Yiddish language could be used, and inspired Shapiro with fresh ideas. Although L. Shapiro did not manage to publish any work during this brief stay in Warsaw, his early stories bear witness to the influence of the Peretz era.

In 1898, Shapiro returned to his native town and for five years he devoted considerable efforts to the development

of his literary career. But age old aggressions against Jews were escalating throughout Russia, and during this period, Shapiro experienced his first pogrom. The impact of destruction and terror wrought by this event was to remain at the core of his imaginative world for the rest of his life, and the memory of it was soon to find its deepest and strongest expression in the "pogrom" stories.

Shapiro returned to Warsaw in 1903 and began to publish his stories in local Yiddish periodicals. Of these "Itzikel Mamzer" [Itzikel Bastard] won early critical notice. It appeared in Reizen's Yorburk progress [Progress Yearbook] in 1904, and reflects Shapiro's early thematic and stylistic concerns. Simple language and precise physical imagery evoke sympathy and warmth for the story's sorry central character, but there is also evidence of some of the characteristic features of what Shapiro called "themes of everyday life". By exposing shtetl snobberies he makes fun of the pettiness of the shtetl caste system and shows through gentle satire an awareness of the process of shtetl dissolution. This was a subject to which he would give fuller attention in his later and more mature stories.

Shapiro achieved recognition from the very beginnings of his career; critics noted that the strength of his works

derived from his subject matter and from his own particular style of understatement. He soon began to publish a variety of pogrom stories in local Yiddish periodicals, but despite his early literary success, Shapiro was forced to seek employment in other ways. While in Warsaw, he worked as a reporter and a translator of European literature for the periodical Kultur [Culture], until 1905, when social upheaval and economic instability made life increasingly difficult. Within the year, L. Shapiro, like a host of young and impoverished Yiddish writers, came to America. He contributed a variety of short stories to the periodical Di tsukunft [The Future], while working with the Yiddish newspaper Forverts [The Jewish Daily Forward], but after four years in America he returned to Warsaw. In 1910, he joined the staff of Der fraynt [The Friend], and within the year his stories were collected and published in Noveln [Novellas].

It was not uncommon to be a hungry writer in the lean years of the twentieth century, nor was it unusual for Yiddish writers, to travel about in search for economic stability, but L. Shapiro's life was a good deal more restive than most. In 1910, he left Warsaw for Zurich, where he opened a shop. When this effort proved unsuccessful, he returned to America, and

within the year, opened a restaurant in New York. This too met with similar fate and Shapiro moved to Los Angeles. But he did not remain in any one place for more than a brief sojourn. He crossed the American continent from Los Angeles to New York three times and, though he tried a variety of business ventures, none was ever successful. Once when he was about to try his luck in Cleveland, prospective creditors were warned that "bankruptcy was a habit with Shapiro",[2] and no credit was extended. Shapiro's nomadic quest for economic stability never ceased, and throughout his life he never had the good fortune to find the security he so desperately sought.

Despite extreme geographic dislocation, the years between 1909-1919 were the most prolific of his literary career. In 1919, when his "pogrom" stories were collected and published in Di yidishe melukhe [The Jewish Government], Shapiro won recognition as an important Yiddish writer. This book received great critical acclaim, but of all the stories in this collection, "Der tseylem" ["The Cross"], originally published in 1909, aroused the most critical attention. S. Niger, the Yiddish critic, found it to be the most terrifying story of that kind ever written. Shapiro, he observed, describes the moral breakdown and chaos of man, society, and nature, and confronts the

reader with terror and shame of the unsuccessful Russian rebellion. "Like Bialik", Niger wrote, "Shapiro felt the shame of the past, and since he could not conquer it with sorrow . . . he [tried] to do so with strength."[3]

Yiddish critics were unanimous in recognizing Shapiro's distinctive style, and all were quick to praise his creation of a new type of Jewish hero. Niger admired the writer for depicting the Jew as a tight-lipped angry fighter rather than the usual pale beggar, and Dr. Chaim Zhitlovsky praised his efforts to deal with the mood of defeat which was then sweeping through the intellectual Jewish community. In general, Yiddish critics recognized Shapiro's stories to be a departure from earlier standards upheld in Yiddish prose, and all saw in his efforts an attempt to curse the world and denounce the Jewish suffering of the past.

But this encouraging reception offered Shapiro little satisfaction and, in the years between 1921-1928, he withdrew from literature. With his wife, whom he had married in Europe, Shapiro moved to Los Angeles where he devoted all of his energies to hopes of perfecting a cinematographic invention. Shapiro experimented with various attempts to create colour film and though this was remarkable in intention, he lacked the necessary

equipment and skills to succeed. After the death, in 1928, of his wife who had been of considerable support to him, Shapiro began to drink heavily. He suffered frequent depressions and wrote sporadically. Shapiro did write, however, a group of American stories, and though they are few in number, they give evidence of a maturing artistic sensibility and mirror his recent preoccupations with colour and form. These stories were later collected and published in Nyu Yorkish [In A New York Manner] in 1931.

In 1928, Shapiro returned to New York, and once more involved himself in a variety of literary endeavors. Within the year, he became co-editor of the Yiddish weekly Di vokh [The Week], to which he contributed an important essay about social upheaval then occurring in Palestine and a variety of shorter articles under the pseudonym, Y. Zolot. Shapiro remained involved with this periodical for a short period and, in the year 1933, he left to start his own magazine, Studio. Unfortunately, this effort folded after the third issue. Shapiro continued to publish critical essays on various Yiddish activities in New York and, in 1937-1938, he worked for the Federal Writer's Project of America, while devoting considerable time to the preparation of a novel. Though he himself considered the

novel "Der amerikaner shed" ["The American Devil"] to be of great importance to his literary career, he was unsuccessful in acquiring funds to permit its completion. The novel remained unfinished, but its parts were collected and published in the posthumous Ksovim [Writings, 1949].

The years 1938-1948 were generally clouded by a haze of depression, yet when Der shrayber geyt in kheyder [The Writer Goes To School] was published in 1946, E. Greenberg, the Yiddish poet and critic, was impressed by the unexpected toughness and precision of the book. This autobiographical text, with insights into the writer's craft, and notes on the essay and the novel, was seen by Greenberg to be an indispensable contribution to Yiddish literature. This book, designed to show the many ways Shapiro wandered until he forged his own writer's path, is one of the first analyses of its kind in Yiddish prose. Greenberg praised its observations and recommendations, and saw it as an important and rare understanding of the various theoretical problems confronting modern Yiddish writers.[4]

Although Lamed Shapiro was not the most fulfilled writer in Yiddish prose nor its central figure, he nevertheless has an important place in Yiddish literature. His pogrom

stories belong to the strongest work of this type, and his impressionistic depictions are one of the first of this kind in Yiddish prose. He was a most meticulous craftsman of Yiddish fiction, indeed, his carefully controlled, highly polished, and structured stories "stand in sharp contrast to his own chaotic and restless life".[5]

Footnotes to Biography

1. Biographic information is based on:
Encyclopaedia Judaica (Encyclopaedia Judaica Jerusalem: New York: Macmillan Company, 1971), vol. 14, pp. 1304-1305.
Lamed Shapiro, Ksovim (L. Shapiro Ksovim Committee: Los Angeles, 1949), pp. 7-33.
See the biographical sketch of the author by S. Miller.
Z. Reyzen, Lexikon fun der yidisher literatur; presse un philologie [Lexicon of Yiddish Literature] (Vilner Farlag, Vilna, 1929), vol. 4, pp. 466-470.

2. Shapiro, Ksovim, p. 12.

3. S. Niger, Vegn yidishe shrayber: kritishe artiklen [About Yiddish Writers: Critical Essays] (Warsaw, 1912), vol. 2, p. 109.

4. Eliezer Greenberg, "Bay undz un arum undz" ["Among Ourselves and Around Us], Getzeltn, vol. 3 (1945), 103-106.

5. Encyclopaedia Judaica, p. 1305.

INTRODUCTION

Lamed Shapiro's innovations cannot be fully understood without at least some awareness of his relationship to the literary tradition which preceded him.

When modern Yiddish literature first blossomed forth during the latter half of the nineteenth century, it was as much a response to the changing needs of the internal culture as it was to the gradual encroachment of the enlightenment from the world at large.[1] In the literature which emerged, Yiddish writers reflected the break up of their religious past, and their search for new secular models for the culture's beliefs. One can speak of the development of a formal Yiddish literature as the effort made by Yiddish writers to shape the spoken language into formal literary patterns: an effort often painful, aimed at finding new vocabularies for self definition as well as towards establishing a literary language through which new experiences could be comprehended.

One of the overriding problems facing this generation of Yiddish writers was that, in a large sense, it was in the position

of having to start from the beginning. In contrast to other writers in other languages, the Yiddish writer, both in the nineteenth century and in the early decades of our own, did not take the use of the language for granted. It is not simply that the norms and boundaries of the language were not yet delineated; it is also that the Yiddish language itself was considered a 'jargon', and as such was not felt to be fully able to articulate the inner life of the author. "Yiddish", as the critic Dan Miron observes, "was almost never the first choice of the nineteenth century Yiddish writers."[2] Every writer who turned to Yiddish did so initially in the spirit of self sacrifice, to address a folk which was then regarded to be in need of enlightenment. In time, the supposed utilitarian function of Yiddish came to be discredited and, in the 1870's and 1880's, Yiddish writers began to experiment with the hitherto untouched expressive capacities of the language.

The quest towards the standardization of the language was undertaken by many, but most notably by the three classic Yiddish masters--Mendele, Sholom Aleichem, and I.L. Peretz. Although their efforts were remarkable in developing a rich literary tradition, and though they certainly displayed how variously the language could be used, their efforts were insufficient in themselves to bring about the full regularization

of literary Yiddish. A dim sense of its 'abnormality' persisted, and every subsequent Yiddish writer, including those who wrote well into the twentieth century, remained concerned with the task of shaping the language to the forms he wished to create. Of his own beginnings, when he was still in Europe in about 1896, Lamed Shapiro writes:

> At that time Yiddish was still 'jargon'. We did not yet understand that every language is a jargon--a blending of indigenous formations with sounds and expressions from other languages. We did not yet have a grammar, that is to say, no grammarian had yet put together a textbook explaining how Yiddish should be spoken and written based on the manner in which Yiddish was spoken and written. . . .[3]

Looking back on some of his earlier stories, Shapiro recalls his own struggles towards his development as a Yiddish writer. His shrewd observations into the writer's craft give evidence to the difficulties encountered by Shapiro himself, and surely lend insights into some of the struggles experienced by Yiddish writers during the early decades of our century. Accusing himself of having twisted Yiddish to fit the rules of Russian syntax, Shapiro observes:

> I pushed our poor language into Russian syntactic structures that suited it as well as a uniform suits a bellboy. While I was torturing our etymology and syntax, the easy-natural flow of our language, I lay awake nights over the lexicography.

> . . . The Slavic elements didn't seem to fit well into the German basis of the language. Hebrew with its innermost pathos sounded like a quotation from somewhere. The only choice appeared to be German, that is [to write] Germanically. There was an obvious danger of being drowned by foreign words, and this in fact was the source of my exaggerated purism.[4]

Shapiro's dilemma, as well as the method he chose of solving it, was symptomatic of a whole generation of Yiddish writers, especially as they changed in their perceptions of the Yiddish language as a vehicle for literary use, and in their relationship to the tradition which preceded them.

Up to the end of the nineteenth century, Yiddish writers almost always held the community to be responsible for its own problems. Despite their awareness of the tragic, if not worsening conditions of Jewish life, they addressed their readers out of a sense of unity with the culture, in the seemingly agreed upon and mutually shared conventions of a stable unit. While each of the three classic Yiddish masters developed distinctive personal literary styles, and considerable skills for projecting their materials, Mendele, Sholom Aleichem and, to a lesser extent, the early Peretz developed personae who could speak to their readers in the voice of an internal observer. However, towards the end of the nineteenth century, when revolutionary

ferment intensified throughout Russia, I.L. Peretz was the first of a host of moderns to begin a ruthless examination of the forces pressing against Jewish society. Nor was the threat only from without. Widespread social struggle activated Jewish masses to the formation of national and political movements, and Zionism, Socialism and other ideological movements swept their way into, and established themselves upon the world of East European Jewry. Within the decade, sharpening conflicts increased in Russia and the literature mirrored a growing class consciousness and a mounting anger. Peretz, the last of Yiddish writers to be at home in the past, was also the first to call forth what seemed to be the appropriate response of protest and anger.

Peretz had an enormous effect upon the future of Yiddish literature around the turn of the century. He was an intellectual, deeply steeped in Jewish tradition, and no less equally aware of current intellectual trends, who "changed the whole atmosphere of Yiddish literature, and as is usually put 'modernized it'".[5] In trying to make the language resemble the narrative tones of European literatures, he smoothed away its folksy sound, and in turning Yiddish into a fluid literary instrument, Peretz paved the way for the creation of an intellectual commentator.[6]

With the growing awareness of class consciousness, the gap between the reader and writer widened and, since the earlier body of works had demonstrated how effectively the language could be used, the Yiddish writer was ready to experiment with hitherto untried subject matters and styles. Also, since he was no longer able or perhaps willing to veil the deeply shocking reality of Jewish life, he raised his eyes above his shtetl world to note what lay around. "Naturalism" and "social realism" became the dominant literary modes replacing the satire of the earlier decades, and Yiddish writers hastened to experiment with new and more personal tones. But just as the Yiddish writer was ready for exploration of new and untried subject matter, the social changes brought on by the aborted Russian Revolution of 1905 cast into opposition dreams of triumph and promise with untold acts of barbarism. The vast assaults on Jewish life which followed it resulted in a massive exodus of Jews and a way of life which had been buttressed by its own institutions suddenly crumbled. It is not as if the shtetl disappeared, but rather the sweep of social change from within, and the extraordinary assaults from without, drained the traditional society, and radically undercut the cultures' ability to resist.[7]

The Yiddish writer, so rudely evicted from his own home, fell into the tenements of modernity, and it is hardly surprising that the theme of disintegration became an overriding literary concern. Lamed Shapiro, like a host of other young Yiddish writers, came to America after the aborted Russian Revolution and, like many of his contemporaries, he brought with him the memory of mutilated Jewish life and the defeat of promised social ideals. In a later essay, written in about 1939, Shapiro writes his own observations of the impact of the past on the present developing Yiddish literature:

> Two historical catastrophes brought waves of immigrants to America: the pogroms against Jews in Russia, and the unsuccessful Russian Revolution of 1905. Both had a direct and tremendous impact upon the development of Yiddish literature in America.[8]

There were many important differences of outlook among the Yiddish writers who broke into print during the early decade of our century, and therefore many innovative styles, but one of their more important similarities was the way in which they sought to express the reality of their lives in personal tones. As they stood at the crossroads of two cultures, between the dissolving shtetl in Europe and the new and potentially vital life in America, theirs' was a unique

vantage point of vision and this lent tension to their works. This generation of Yiddish writers was influenced by the tradition which preceded it, but in their efforts to get beyond their shtetl backgrounds, and explore a wider range of modern experiences, the writers turned away from what seemed to them to be the literary staleness of the past. Some turned to contemporary European models to import new tones, others to the idea of a Nietzchean image for the Jew, but what made them such a new force in Yiddish prose was their refusal to speak on behalf of political ideals, and their violent repudiation of the ethic of 'eydelkayt' [refinement, politeness]. By introducing violence, erotic passion and the underworld into their works, they sought to rebel against the earlier tradition of humanism, and by using the vocabularies of strength and power, they strove to revitalize the Yiddish language and put Jewish muscle back into their works. In retrospect, what now seems clear is that, by calling attention to the ideals of strength and violence, they were trying to bring back ideas of Jewish heroism, and by this effort, show that an earlier assumption of Jewish unity based on ethical humaneness was no longer viable. They turned away from the standards upheld in earlier Yiddish writings to rebel and experiment, and as they drew upon their new experiences they sought to bring the discovery of physical

impulse, social struggle and personal expression into Yiddish prose.

Lamed Shapiro has much in common with the prose writers of his generation, but he belonged to no group. As he went his own way struggling with the quest of self definition, he developed one of the most forceful voices of modern Yiddish prose. What makes Shapiro a major figure is the successful ability to blend traditional Jewish images with his own particular sophisticated techniques.

Shapiro appeared on the Yiddish literary scene only a short time after Peretz became its dominant spokesman, and though he surely profited from the master's innovations, he realized his own starting point as a Yiddish writer with the recognition that Yiddish was like all other languages a living organism, capable of literary use. His initial awareness of the expressive capacities of the language prompted an immediate effort to cleanse it of its Germanic impurities. In fact, what distinguishes Lamed Shapiro and other Yiddish writers of this generation from their literary predecessors, was that the decision to write in Yiddish came from an inner sense of identification with the language, and a firm belief in the efficacy of its literary use. Indeed, he was one of the first

of Yiddish writers to speak of his own art in aesthetic terms, and one of the first to formulate theoretical principles for the short story. Of this Shapiro writes:

> The composition of the short story should create a circular pattern, so that the story returns the reader to the beginning. Unity and harmony are to be developed through a central character, and through the structure of the story itself. Materials for the short story should be sought not only in the external world, but also in the self.[9]

Lamed Shapiro was familiar with the works of Flaubert, de Maupassant, and Chekhov, and though he sought to emulate the standards upheld in their works his formal terms reveal that he was attempting to define the task of Yiddish literature in a new way. His theoretical principles would suggest that he was seeking a method that could define for himself that the task of Yiddish literature belonged in an artistic domain. Shapiro's key terms indicate an effort undertaken as much to sever himself from the earlier commitment to national and political ideals as aimed at showing the necessity of a proposal for a definition of "art" as independent from the needs of an audience. What seems clear is that Shapiro was striving for a set of formal theoretical principles to free himself, to explore areas of subject matter hitherto not touched by earlier Yiddish writers. Shapiro indicates that he found his own solution with the

definition that style is related to "controlled temperament". Whether or not Shapiro followed his own principles, his formal terms reveal a variant of Buffon's famous sentence, "Le style est l'homme même", and suggest his own attempt to realize the rendering of art in the aesthetic realm. Shapiro's solution suggests that, for him, style is related to the life of the self, yet the notion of control reveals that Shapiro was no less aware of his own pain and closeness to the issues of his art than he was to the need of finding new forms for his particular concerns. Hence it is, that most of his theoretical discussions about the author's technical choices, what he calls ways of achieving "unity", "harmony", and "composition", is for the most part a discussion of principles about ways of shaping his own feelings and the world as he saw it to be, into formal artistic patterns.

The Yiddish critic, A. Tabachnik, presents an overview instructive for the purposes of this paper. In an article on Lamed Shapiro, he writes:

> In no other Yiddish writer is the self conscious style, the creative control and discipline so apparent as in L. Shapiro. He was not only a writer who always went to school, he was a writer who went contrary to the stream of his own talent. In essence Shapiro was a writer who leaned towards the poetic monologue, and therefore attempted to

> load his words with conscious creative will. In a sense Shapiro's works sustain the reader's attention not so much with their content as with his attempt to create a reality with the quiet word, the appropriate sign, the cool remark, and the uncaring stance. The signs of Shapiro's style, and the energies of his works derive from their ability to remain within the confines of formal decorum.[10]

Of the pogrom stories in particular, Tabachnik observes:

> Through wonderful stylistic devices, Shapiro distanced himself from the bloody occurrences which were so painfully near to him, and [he] rendered their timeless quality. . . . Because Shapiro taught himself to speak cooly of matters which pained him the most, and because they attempt to understand both the victim and the murderer, they not only reflect the tragedy of the Jews, but also the tragedy of all of humanity.[11]

Tabachnik rightly suggests that, by drawing upon the destructive impulses of his experiences, Shapiro created a fictional form which explores the radical ambiguity of what it means to be human in a world of chaos. Tabachnik also rightly suggests that Shapiro's remarkable success was due largely to the kind of formal control he exerted over his material. While it is true that Shapiro suffers from too much control over his material rather than too little, it is out of an attempt to be "objective" and "subjective" at one and the same time. In their recurrent efforts to reinterpret the conditions of Jewish life as it confronted the changes brought on by modern society, his stories

both of Europe and America engage us in a description of milieux and institutions which lead us to repeated confrontations with destructive social changes. At the same time, Shapiro provides for a commentary of feelings upon them. It is precisely the double goal of "objective", "subjective", yielding in turn the nature of the world and the intensity of personal feelings, that accounts for the kind of spokesman he created.

This study suggests that through the use of a reliable omniscient narrator, Shapiro created a sophisticated vehicle for projecting the patterns of his stories. By creating a spokesman who is effectively distanced from the author, yet is reliable and omniscient, Shapiro found a useful way of conveying to an audience only those facts which he wished to explore, while at the same time revealing only those feelings which the facts required. In each story, the kind and amount of information given depends upon the world Shapiro wished to reflect, and in all instances the elements of selection are such as to portray two views of reality. By giving his narrator a high degree of selectivity, and the privilege of omniscience, Shapiro could filter the events of the story, and at the same time reveal what is in the characters' minds. In his best stories,

there is an interplay established between the voice of the narrator and the kind of silence he maintains, and the selective dramatization of specific events from the character's point of view.

One of the ways in which Shapiro achieves his effects is to give the narrator the freedom to establish the specific norms each story requires. This framing device describes each specific social reality and allows the narrator the authority to propel the action of the story. By selectively dramatizing only those aspects of characterization which meet the requirements of each story, Shapiro forces the reader to judge the character in the light of the norms established by the narrator. Furthermore, by giving the description of setting and appearances to the narrator, Shapiro gives the story an air of objectivity. At the same time, depending upon the degree and kind of distance from which the character's views are revealed, he creates a disparity of understanding. This provides the tension each story requires, and opens an ironic gap between the reader and the character. Since the reader and the narrator share a knowledge which the character does not, and since there is a marked contrast between what the character understands about his acts and what the narrator reveals, the dramatic irony in each story is controlled to shape the reader's response. But this

kind of selection is not enough. Through a choice of images, symbols, metaphors, and other descriptions, the narrator heightens and reveals feelings.

Bearing this in mind, this study will trace the evolution of Shapiro's use of the narrator through four stories, the discussion of which I have divided into two parts. The first two chapters will examine Shapiro's "pogrom stories"; this will be followed by an analysis of stories which deal with "themes of everyday life". Although the stories focus upon the Jewish milieu, both those stories which are set in Europe, and the last one, which is placed in America, confront us with a view of modern society as an organism which sometimes tramples the individual in it, and sometimes does not. In each story, whatever qualities are portrayed for whatever effect, they are always in relation to the narrator's ability to define for us the precise ordering of values upon which our judgment should depend. By clarifying for us where his chief focus of interest lies, Shapiro is asking the reader to accompany the narrator, and in the last story, it provides for the creation of an authentic modern Yiddish self.

The format for the discussion will be as follows: A short plot summary will precede a close structural and thematic

analysis where special attention will be given to the various narrational devices of which I spoke earlier. In some instances, meanings will be inferred by drawing upon broader concepts outside the story. These contexts will include passages from the Bible or simply selections from the writer's canon. In some cases, the writer's use of specific imagery will direct interpretation from psychological, sociological, historical systems of ideas from which the writer seems to have drawn. In all instances, an examination of the stories will be based on primary sources and, unless otherwise indicated, their translations are available in print. In all other instances, the translations used will be my own. Following the analysis of the stories, the data will be accumulated and interpreted in terms of the role of the narrator.

Footnotes to Introduction

1. Ruth R. Wisse, A Shtetl and Other Yiddish Novellas (New York: Behrman House, 1973), pp. 1-21.

2. Dan Miron, A Traveler Disguised: The Rise of Modern Yiddish Fiction in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), p. 11.

3. The quotations are from Wisse, A Shtetl and Other Yiddish Novellas, p. 6.

4. Ibid.,pp. 6-7.

5. Miron, A Traveler Disguised, p. 11.

6. Wisse, A Shtetl and Other Yiddish Novellas, p. 6.

7. Ibid., pp. 9-10.

8. This quotation is from Lamed Shapiro, "Yidishe belletristic un belletristn in nyu york" (c. 1939), it was found in the archives in the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, and is one of several essays written for the W.P.A.

9. The quotation is from Lamed Shapiro, Der shrayber geyt in kheyder (New York, 1945), pp. 23-27.

10. A. Tabachnik, Dikhter un dikhtung [Poets and Poetry] (New York: Knight Printing Corporation, 1965), pp. 421-432. The quotation used may be found on p. 421.

11. Ibid., pp. 421-422.

Chapter One

AN EXAMINATION OF "SHFOYKH KHOMOSKHO"

[POUR OUT THY WRATH]

Between the years 1906-1918, the period in which all of Shapiro's pogrom stories were written, attacks against Jews escalated throughout Europe. But the scope and gravity of the pogroms before, during and after World War I, exceeded anything that had been previously known in the Pale of Settlement.

The two pogrom stories to be discussed in the following chapters reflect the way in which Lamed Shapiro strove to re-interpret the destructive impact of the pogrom experience upon the East European Jewish world. Both stories evoke a reality in which Jew and Gentile alike are caught in a world of irrational violence, but whereas the earlier story--"Shfoykh khomoskho" [Pour Out Thy Wrath]--reflects Shapiro's effort to call forth a new heroic response to this experience, the later one, "Vayse khala" [White Chala], shows the call for Jewish heroism to assume a puny aspect when it is silhouetted against the background of destructive might.

"Shfoykh khomoskho" [Pour Out Thy Wrath] is the second of three pogrom stories written between 1906-1909.[1] In this

early story, one which precedes tales of actual violence, Shapiro renders the impact of a pogrom through the filtered memory of Meir, a nine year old boy. The story begins with a springtime pogrom that occurs in the town of Tartilov, and Shapiro exploits the Passover Holiday motif of rebirth, to record the consequences of the pogrom upon Meir and his family. Meir witnesses the pogrom through the basement window of his schoolroom, but he does not understand the significance of the event in the context in which it occurs. When he returns to his home and sees the brutal assault of his parents, he still does not grasp the meaning of the violent act.

As the story unfolds, the family immigrates to New York and Meir gradually begins to see a physical change in his parents. The mother displays extreme pain to a recurrent physical illness, and his father slowly acquires animal-like characteristics. A year passes, but even as Meir attempts to participate in "normal" childhood activities, he becomes more and more aware of a deep unhappiness in his household. When the story nears its end, the mother's pregnancy is revealed. It concludes with the family's preparation for the celebration of a Passover Seder, but since the mother's condition is a consequence of the pogrom of the past, the story ends with a total inversion of

the traditional meaning of Passover. As Meir recalls his terrifying memory of the pogrom in Tartilov, the father expresses his own wrath in a new and personal prayer to God.

In this story, the pogrom is the given of the plot, it is known from the beginning, but the effect of the story depends upon the child's discovery of its consequences upon his family. Since all the changes in this story are those which take place in time and unfold as altering states of awareness, the rearrangement of the chronology of events is a most significant dimension. Shapiro is suggesting a causal relationship between the past and the present; while he records the events from Meir's point of view to heighten suspense, he gives the narrator the full force to support the values of the story. A highly selective omniscient reliable narrator introduces the frame from which the events unfold, and supplies the reader with the context against which the child's perceptions are to be interpreted. Since the child's lack of understanding is supplied by the larger authority of the introductory paragraph, it creates a disparity of understanding, and opens an ironic gap between the child and the reader. This effectively evokes two antithetical views of reality and controls our feelings until the full significance of the past is revealed.

The narrator begins with a selective description of the past:

> True, it was a vicious storm, but when one is nine years old, one forgets the worst of storms. And Meir had just turned nine a few weeks before Passover.[2]

The "storm" image is quickly introduced in order to set forth the specific atmosphere the story requires, and the modifiers "vicious" and "worst" simultaneously reveal the narrator's moral values. Shapiro connects Meir to the Passover Holiday, and draws upon the well known motif of rebirth and redemption, to widen his characterization for the reader. Therefore, from the very beginning, the texture of the background is such as to establish a physical base and a social circumstance, and these are clear forces given by the narrator to lead the action in a particular direction. At the same time, the symbolic overtones lift the character out of his naturalistic setting, to indicate that Shapiro is exploring a universal situation as well.

A quick shift to the present in New York brings the action up to date:

> However, it was also true that the fierce icy, heart-piercing winds that blew through the house always reminded him. But Meir spent more time playing in the wild streets of New

> York than in the house. Tartilov and New York. New York had innundated Tartilov and washed it out of his mind. Only a memory and a dream remained. And, moreover, when one is nine, every storm is quickly forgotten.
>
> But even if it were only a dream-what a terrible nightmare it had been.[3]

Looking more closely at the above passage, one notes that the present is connected to the past through clearly destructive "storm" images. This sustains the unsettling tone the story requires, and evokes a terrible and potentially destructive presence in the present. In addition, the use of conjunctions, "however", "always", "but", "moreover", show a logical connection between the past and the present, to comment upon the boy's experience and interpret it for the reader.

As the story unfolds, the distance is reduced, and the reader is asked to share the terrifying impression of the pogrom through Meir's eyes:

> Suddenly, doors slammed and through the school windows they saw Jews running helter-skelter, spinning and twisting about like leaves in a whirlwind. Suddenly, a witch rose from the earth in a column of dust and spun over the street.[4]

Although the reader accepts this as the process of an actual pogrom, the surrealistic quality of the images makes clear the terror of the child unable to understand the events he witnesses.

Shapiro, always as scrupulously careful about the "truth of human nature", as about the "truth of the nature of events", psychologically validates the terror of the above experience with a concluding explanation.

> Separated from his parents, he and other youngsters and several older people lay hidden in the bathhouse for two days without food or drink.[5]

Later, when the pogrom is over, Meir is brought home. "Neither his father nor his mother said a word to him." The destruction of his home, and the brutalization of his parents are, however, clearly visible:

> At home, everything had been smashed. Father's arm was twisted and his face beaten. Mother lay in the bed, her blonde hair disheveled, her eyes sleepy, her face dirty and pale, and her body crumpled and neglected, like a heavy, wrinkled bedspread.[6]

The reader, unlike Meir, recognizes the implications of the above scene, but with Meir, we do not yet grasp its full significance. In the above passage, the blended images of the parents certainly evoke the viciousness of the assault, but by introducing them from Meir's perspective, Shapiro ensures that we share in the fearful discovery of its consequences. Special attention to the figure of the father as he "silently paced in the house", adds to the secret fear we are asked to share with the boy.

The narrator shifts the story abruptly to indicate the passage of time. Likewise, two portraits of the parents, presented once more from Meir's perspective, effectively note their change. Now in mid-ocean, on the way to America, as the mother lies "in the lower bunk vomiting piteously", the father, in a near quarrel with a peasant, shows a remarkable transformation:

> Father just stared at the man--apparently it was no more than a look--but the peasant became frightened, retreated, and crossed himself. . . . Meir, too, was frightened seeing his father's mouth twisted, his teeth grating and his eyes protruding. Soon his father continued pacing on the deck.[7]

In the above portrait, Shapiro evokes one of the most powerful and recurrent of images in the pogrom stories for the first time. Although actual violence does not occur here, there is in evidence an early prototype of Shapiro's new Jewish hero. No longer prepared to accept his victimization, Shapiro's Jew, when confronted with potential violence, begins to respond with the animal like characteristics of revenge. In this story, the father's strength is made manifest by the fear his new appearance evokes in the peasant. Looking more closely at the above passage, one notes that the father's image is connected to an earlier description through the recurrent "pacing" image. In

its earlier use, it was linked to silence, but in the above context, its use connects silence to a gradual acquisition of animalistic features. This shows that, for Shapiro, silence stands for control of frustrated rage, and in time it finds its expression in slow irrational eruption. The clear build-up to the father's explosive prayer with which this story ends is effectively maintained by restricting us to the child's point of view, and this is made evident as the story continues.

The narrator once more brings the action up to date, and when the story shifts to New York it proceeds in the present:

> Like all other boys, Meir went to school, threw snowballs rode a sled. . . . He lived in the street.
> Cold, piercing drafts penetrated the house and made it uncomfortable.[8]

The conjoining of sentences, juxtaposes the past with the present, and the "cold, piercing drafts" recall the earlier "storm" image, to remind us of the shadowy presence of evil. This time, however, the past is cast into deliberate opposition with the ostensible freedom of the present. Since Shapiro finds it necessary to involve the reader in the need for revenge, he builds up a sense of frighteningly naive optimism through Meir's limited vision. At the same time however, the narrator makes clear that Meir's playfulness is purely due to a child's lack of

understanding. Here, the reader and the narrator share a knowledge which the character does not, and as the evil of the past begins to encroach upon the child's vision, we are made to feel that it will impose itself upon his innocent life, and are therefore ready for the father's explosive desire for revenge.

The passage of time is once again rendered from Meir's perspective, and once more it is noted as a perceptual change in the parents. Two portraits are given to make the presence of evil more evident. The mother begins to show animal like characteristics in response to the outrage inflicted on her body. Now in terrible pain,

> her lower lip became bloody under her sharp, white teeth, and her dreadful groans expressed unbearable pain. And she often vomited, as she had at sea. She vomited as though her intestines were coming up out of her throat.[9]

Since Meir does not yet understand the significance of the mother's state, he likens her to Mishka, a dog he once played with in the village of Tartilov. The description of the dog, "who chewed his paw as though he wanted to devour it", carries the comparison between them to suggest an instinctive urge to exorcise their pain. But what is made explicit is the inability to do so.

At this time, with Meir we note that the father changes as well:

> He no longer paced in the house. Now he ran, and the cigar between his teeth smoked and rasped ceaselessly. Instead of the one cloud that hung perpetually over his brow, many clouds now ran through the deep, broad wrinkles, accompanied by an occasional flash of lightening.[10]

The addition of "cloud" and "lightening" images heightens the portrait of the father to foreshadow his elevated description with which the story ends. Indeed, the entire story shifts to another plane, as now during the mother's illness, the house feels "like a shul on Rosh Hashana, just prior to the blowing of the ram's horn."

Because of the use of traditional Jewish images, the atmosphere of the story is raised to that of hushed expectancy, of fear, since the ram's horn traditionally seals the supplicant's fate. But, "as a dark shadow again spreads over the house", after the mother's recovery, we feel that the presence of evil here is inescapably and permanently present. The writer has conjoined the past with the present, to show that the past will leave its mark, and hopes for a clear and new beginning are utterly futile.

Once the level of the story is elevated, it is sustained until its end, to suggest that Shapiro is not simply probing an

individual catastrophe, but one which has universal significance as well. While Meir's point of view is maintained, it becomes expanded to include his memories of the past in Tartilov and his present experiences in America. They are joined together and the story nears its conclusion with the ritual preparation for a Passover Seder.

Shapiro's build-up to the story's climax is rendered quickly. As Meir is shown to recollect earlier and more joyous preparations for the Passover Holiday, he also begins to remember his terrifying impressions of the pogrom. Though a brief moment of joy suffuses the present with the bustle of Passover, the mood is abruptly broken, as a neighbour points to the mother and says: "So we'll soon have a celebration at your home." Although the reader has been prepared for the mother's condition, the direct statement gives weight to the shocking revelation of her pregnancy. This is immediately followed by the father's response, which is rendered through strong poetic simile:

> His voice made the windowpanes rattle as though a heavy wagon were crossing a wooden bridge.

The heightened language used to describe the father's voice draws attention to its weighted sound, and effectively foreshadows for the reader the subsequent outcry against his terrible burden.

After the mother's pregnancy is made known, the story concludes with a full description of a Passover Seder. With obvious inversion through a reliance on traditional Jewish symbols, the occasion of joy and celebration is turned into an event of mourning. The reader is reminded that Meir was born on Passover, but more importantly, that this holiday traditionally commemorates Jewish release from slavery, and looks forward to a new redemption.

Meir, on the contrary, feels the Seder to be "like the last meal before Tisha B'Av." Similarly, when he is called upon to ask the ritual Ma-Nishtana [the four questions], it sounds like "in a shul when an orphan recites his first Kaddish". Taken together, these similes undermine the Passover Setting: Tisha B'Av, the day of mourning, during which Jews fast and commemorate the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, is obviously the antithesis of the celebration of Passover. Kaddish, the prayer of sanctification of God's name, is recited after the death of a parent: "There is a deep silence in the synagogue as everyone gives his due respect to the orphan reciting, and waits to answer, Amen".[11] In this story, the heavy silence in the atmosphere is most contrary to the communal response of "Amen", for the only sounds to be

heard are those made by the father. He recites the Haggadah "as if a hand were strangling him".

In accordance with the ritual, Meir is then sent to open the door for the prophet Elijah. As legend relates, this is the night when Elijah dressed as a beggar, visits each house to see if he will be received, to see if the world is yet ready and worthy of the Messiah. Suddenly, a wild scream is heard, and the father's voice, ricocheting around the room "like a wild bird in a cage", breaks the deadly silence. The simile is carried forward to a description of the father, and with Meir we perceive the wild transformation of this once silent man:

> A wild figure in a snow-white cloak, dark beard and brown, bony face stood straight as a taut string near the table, its eyes glowing with a dark, weird fire. Its teeth grated, and its voice occasionally sounded like a savage lament of a beast roaring for fresh meat and blood.[12]

The strong emphasis upon animalistic images, heightened by their "weird fire", clearly suggests the figure of the father to be a mocking contrast to the humble legendary image of the prophet Elijah. This would indicate a rejection of the ideal of potential redemption, to propose animal like revenge instead.

At this point, Meir's memory surfaces to discovery:

> Meir clearly sensed that all this had not

> ended, that it was just the beginning, and that the real catastrophe would soon overtake them like a thunderclap.[13]

As Meir recalls the frightened Jews, Shapiro, for the last time, conjoins the past with the present to make abundantly clear that the catastrophic burden of the past is unquestionably present. The figure of the father stands in direct contrast to the earlier submission of Jews, and the prayer which ends the story, ultimately calls forth a personal challenge to God.

The story ends with the father's prayer, which draws upon a prayer in the Haggadah, to create a new association of meaning. The father recites his prayer as follows:

> Great God, all your anger on the peoples who
> have no God in their hearts.
> All your anger on the lands that do not recognize
> Your name.
> He devoured my flesh,
> He ravaged my house,
> He ravaged me.
> Your anger pursue them,
> Pursue and catch,
> Catch and wipe them from the face of the earth.[14]

The source of the prayer of which the above is an interpretation is located in the following passage:

> O pour out thy wrath upon the nations who
> know thee not, and upon the kingdoms who
> invoke not thy name;
> for they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste his
> beautiful dwelling.

> Pour out thine indignation upon them, and cause thy fierce anger to overtake them;
> pursue them in wrath, and destroy them from under the heavens of the Lord.[15]

Looking more closely now at the father's text, it is obvious that Shapiro has personalized the original text. Hence, the ideas underlying the father's prayer are also to be distinguished from the original source. Traditionally, the prayer from the Haggadah asks God to wreak vengeance upon those who have "devoured" his people. Therefore, implicit in the prayer lies the assumption that God is capable of an ongoing protection of the People of Israel. But if we consider the father's prayer, the question arises, on whom is God's vengeance wreaked? It seems to have been wreaked on them, since they bear its consequences. Moreover, the father seems to be calling out for a sign from God in the first four lines of his text. But contrary to the traditional show of protection, the evil wrought upon this family suggests that God has forsaken his people, and more desperately, that the presence of evil is permanent. By asking the reader to participate in Meir's heightened experience of terror, Shapiro is suggesting the existence of an irrational horror so great, that even after its meaning is revealed, it does not eradicate the emotion. It is not simply that his narrator has made us feel the moral evil of the pogrom from the beginning,

but more importantly, through the free use of images and heightened language, he interprets the brutal act to be irreversible. This makes us feel the rightness of the desire for the personal and desperate challenge to the traditional source of redemption, and permits for the call of a new kind of revenge.

One of the most characteristic features evident in this early story, and one which Shapiro continued to reflect in all the pogrom stories, is the challenge to the traditional belief in the ideals of faith in reason and justice. As he has chosen to tell them, Shapiro's pogrom stories reflect a view of the world where violation of human life is inescapably present, where reality is a nightmare, and society is so utterly devoid of spiritual meaning that human beings become brutalized by its machinery and behave accordingly. This view of society invokes an argument to show that the earlier Jewish values of humaneness and reason are of no help; and supports the need to call for the release of aggression instead of the traditional value of reason, and the desire for revenge over an accepted reliance on justice. While this rendition of society proposes that the only mechanism of adaptation to such a world is

necessarily through Jewish strength and resistance, and suggests therefore the need for a new Jewish type of hero, only "Der tseylem" [The Cross], a story of which I spoke earlier, reflects a full bodied hope for a new life. It is the single story in which the victorious future of Jewish heroism is foretold.

Footnotes to Chapter One

1. This story was published for the first time in A. Reisen's Kunst un Yebn (Warsaw: Farlag Progress, 1906), pp. 33-41. It was then republished with "Der kush" (Warsaw: Farlag Progress, 1909). It was included in a collection of short stories and republished in Noveln (Warsaw, 1910), pp. 51-60. The story was then revised and included in a new edition of short stories Di yidishe melukhe (New York, Farlag: Naye tsayt, 1919), pp. 117-127.

2. The quotations may be found in Lamed Shapiro, "Shfoykh khomoskho", Di yidishe melukhe, pp: 117-127. The translated version used here may be found in Curt Leviant, The Jewish Government and Other Stories (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1971), pp. 141-151.

3. Leviant, The Jewish Government and Other Stories, p. 144.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., p. 145.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., p. 146.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., p. 147.

10. Ibid.

11. Curt Leviant, "Lamed Shapiro Master Craftsman of the Yiddish Short Story." (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Columbia University, 1957), p. 21.

12. Leviant, The Jewish Government and Other Stories, p. 150.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., p. 151.

15. This quotation is taken from the Passover Haqadah, rev. and ed. by Dr. M. Stern (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co.), p. 21.

Chapter Two

AN EXAMINATION OF "VAYSE KHALA"

[WHITE CHALAH]

As has already been noted, all the pogrom stories show similar thematic concerns, yet none depicts more desperately the brutalization of men by machines of death than "Vayse khala" [White Chalah], the subject of the following discussion. In this last story of the pogrom series, Shapiro addresses himself to the broadest questions of Jewish survival and human nature, for as it is told, the atrocities committed against human life are seen not simply as deviations from the good as it were, but become themselves enthroned as a pervasive morality. "Vayse khala" [White Chalah] is a story of relentless violence, and its view of the world is more ferocious than any of Shapiro's earlier pogrom stories. There is no hope here, only the whirlwind cumulative acts of brute behaviour. Hence, it is that if Jewish heroism or Jewish resistance, however just, was called for as a way of repudiating the suffering of the past in Shapiro's earlier tales, this story records a view of evil so vast, that human response to it becomes clearly absurd. This story marks a change in the writer's conclusions, and a subsequent change in his style.

"White Chalah", written in 1916, dramatizes the events through the eyes of an ignorant Russian peasant. Shapiro was one of the first of Yiddish writers to explore the gentile community, and here he specifically attempts to reflect the destruction of Jewish life from the point of view of the murderer.

Intelling the story of Vasil, Shapiro traces his evolution from peasant to soldier and from pogromist to high priest, through a clear set of sociological circumstances. By maintaining a balance between the characterization of Vasil, and the world out of which he emerges, Shapiro describes how an entire society reared in the climate of brutality can lead to unnamable waste of human life and massive pogroms against Jews. As the story unfolds, the reader is shown how the violent experiences of Vasil's early childhood warp his mind so that he learns to perceive only through his physical instincts; in fact, his greatest pleasures are derived from his sense of taste. Since he cannot think, his view of Jews is coloured by only those facts which he can instinctively grasp, or by the accepted views of the society in which he lives. As the story continues, Vasil spends most of his adult life soldiering, fighting endless battles in a seemingly endless war. The dehumanizing conditions

of war reward extreme brute behaviour on a grand scale. While in the army, Vasil meets Nohum Rachek, a Jewish soldier, with whom he develops an ambivalent bond. When the tides of battle turn victory to defeat, Nohum Rachek, among others, dies in the massive military slaughter. Defeat spurs on wild anti-semitism amongst the soldiers, and Vasil, like his companions, becomes transformed into a pogromist. They lay waste to an entire population of Jews, and the story ends with Vasil's utter transformation from man to beast. Totally crazed, he murders a Jewish couple and then partakes in the eating of human flesh. In his last loathesome act of cannibalism, he is shown to create his own kind of covenant between man and "God".

Shapiro develops the sociological clarification of violence through the cool and distanced tone of an omniscient and reliable narrator. The narrative tone maintains the required distance between the reader and Vasil, but also reveals Vasil's perceptions of Jews as they occur during crucial events in the story. One of the most important effects achieved by the narrator is that he gains in the verisimilitude of a reporter, and can therefore record the events in chronological time. This involves the reader in a cumulative process,

until the action of the story seems propelled by an inner fury of its own. This process is carried forward to its farthest conclusions, up to the moment when the entire reality of the story is reduced to the irrational logic of a nightmare, then evil seems to become the natural condition of man, and all who are part of it behave according to its logic. At the same time, however, poetic parallelisms and heightened images reveal how the narrator feels about the events hs records. The disparity between the narrator's own attitudes, and those which are attributed to Vasil, provides for a double vision of reality and builds up the tension the story requires. Since the narrator's position gains our allegiance, he opens an ironic gap between the reader and Vasil to control the dramatic irony of the story and shape our response.

In this story, since L. Shapiro is no less concerned with depiction of an individual pogromist than with the reflection of the environment out of which he evolves, he has the narrator open the story with a selective description of the circumstances from which the events unfold:

> One day a neighbour broke the leg of a stray dog with a heavy stone, and when Vasil saw the sharp edge of the bone piercing the skin he cried. The tears streamed from his eyes, his mouth, and his nose; the

> towhead of his short neck shrank deeper between his shoulders; his entire face became distorted and shriveled, and he did not utter a sound.[1]

The emphasis upon Vasil's physical features, together with the noted inability to "utter a sound", give weight to his grotesque physical nature, and his silence in the above context becomes the principle from which all his subsequent actions are derived. By establishing an emphatic physical base, Shapiro binds Vasil to his environment, but the external approach to Vasil's depiction maintains theneed for explanation, even when Vasil's inner thoughts are given. This permits the narrator's focus upon Vasil's evolution.

The introductory passage is quickly followed by additional information given by the narrator:

> Soon he learned not to cry. His family drank, fought with neighbours, with one another, beat the women, the horse, the cow, and sometimes in special rages, their own heads against the wall.[2]

One notes in the additional description an intention to show the reader Vasil's early internalization of violence, but what is equally obvious, is that Vasil's social milieu is such that rage and brutality are the only known guides for human conduct. One of the interesting features evident in the above passage, and one which is recalled in subsequent depictions of violence

in this story, is the way in which the narrator describes the behaviour of the group. With deliberate stress on a descending order of rank, Shapiro draws our attention to an inherent pecking order in mindless behaviour, while, at the same time, the listing device effectively mocks the society where this kind of behaviour seems only too natural. Once the social environment is introduced in this manner, the overall development of the story is shown through ripening depictions of violence, so that a parallel between the destructive impulses of the milieu and Vasil can be drawn. Since the effect of this story depends upon the reader's acceptance of the "naturalness" of Vasil's evolution to the beast he becomes, the consistent use of lists effectively underscores the cumulative nature of the brute behaviour itself.

The narrator then enters into Vasil's mind to show us the way in which he perceives Jews:

> In town there were Jews--people who wore strange clothes, sat in stores, ate white chalah, and had sold Christ. The last point was not quite clear; who was Christ? why did the Jews sell him, who bought him, and for what purpose?--it was all as though in a fog.[3]

In rhythmic structure, the short phrases, coupled with the clear stress upon Vasil's total lack of understanding, place sharp focus upon the peculiar way in which Vasil organizes facts.

This shows the reader that Vasil can understand only what he perceives through his senses. In addition to the above, the narrator underscores Vasil's particular pleasure in taste:

> White chalah, that was something else again: Vasil saw it a few times with his own eyes, and more than that--he once stole a piece and ate it, whereupon he stood for a time in a daze, an expression of wonder on his face. He did not understand it at all, but respect for white chalah stayed with him.[4]

By stressing his pleasures of taste, Shapiro not only confirms his animalistic nature, but emphatically sets Vasil up in opposition to all that ultimately stands for human reason.

As we follow Vasil from his immediate social milieu, to his career in the army, the atmosphere of violence increases:

> Here in the army beatings were again the order of the day: the corporal, the sergeant, and the officers beat the privates, and the privates beat one another, all of them. [Vasil] could not learn the service regulations: he did not understand and did not think.[5]

Repeated and rhythmic stress upon the word "beat", in the above passage, recalls its earlier use, to show a continuum of brute behaviour, and the descending order of the list once more comments upon the inherent mindlessness of the group.

The story continues with a full depiction of extreme hardships of war. Nameless battles and nameless towns, foreign

places and strange people, deliberately evoke the terribly dehumanizing effects of war upon the soldiers:

> Everyone was fighting now, and this time it was no longer just beating, but fighting in earnest: they fired at people, cut them to pieces, bayoneted them, and sometimes even bit them with their teeth.[6]

Vasil grows more savage at the same pace. In the Yiddish text, his increasing relish of violence is presented through eating imagery. "Er hot alein oykh geshlogn, un vos vayter farbisiner." Shapiro plays on the word "bisen" to connect his earlier joys of taste with his present pleasures of violence, to foreshadow the final act of cannibalism with which the story ends.

In this story, the utterly dehumanizing violence is made abundantly clear by the narrator's emphatic use of precise military language. For instance, an extensive list of the dead deploys a body count technique to show the reader the way in which men in the society he is depicting enumerate their members. While this technique ostensibly describes a list of human qualities such as this man's ability to sing, and that one's beautiful features, as a description of the dead it clearly draws our attention to the grotesque consequences of war, and a still harsher comment upon a world where violation of life seems natural.

As the story continues, the horrifying effects of war are heightened, until the spirit of war itself becomes personified:

> The surrounding mountains split open like freshly erupting volcanoes, and a deluge of fire, lead, and iron came down upon the world.[8]

This passage also marks a change in the tides of war, and as the bloodied men move from the hills of victory, to the trenches of defeat, they grow still more savage. At this point, Nohum Rachek is introduced to the story. Like Vasil and the others, he shows himself to be at least in conventional terms--a "hero" in warfare. His inclusion, suggestive of the dehumanizing effects of war on Jew and Gentile alike, nevertheless shows him, unlike Vasil, to be brutalized not in the personal but in the social sense.

A clarification of the distinction between the two is made obvious by their overt reactions to the general upsurge of antisemitic propaganda. Since Vasil, not unexpectedly, does not understand the issues at hand, Rachek is called upon to explain the utterly maddening accusation of treason. With the single use, in the story, of direct discourse, Rachek explains:

> Yes, about me. It says I'm a traitor, see? That I've betrayed us--that I'm a spy.[9]

While the narrator ostensibly clarifies the rise of anti-semitism to be the consequence of defeat, the dramatic device in the above context functions in several ways. Firstly, it reveals how well and how bitterly the Jew understands. But more importantly, it is placed in a most strategic location, to show how utterly futile this kind of understanding really is. Hence, the obvious and heavy irony, made evident by Rachek's explanation, releases the dramatic comment from the Jewish point of view, and marks a change in the direction of the story.

The story continues, armies are driven to defeat, and Nahum Rachek, one among thousands, is killed. With explicit care, the narrator moves in and out of Vasil's mind to clarify his change:

> Something broke in Vasil; in blind anger he kicked the dead body, pushing it aside, and then began to fire wildly.[10]

The reader is then invited to share the way in which Vasil organizes his understanding of the event:

> The Jews . . . traitors . . . sold Christ . . . traded him away for song.[11]

Taking the above passages together, one notes Vasil's "anger" to be transformed to terrified wildness, but what is made equally clear as well, is that his understanding is emphatically

in accordance with the rhetoric of propaganda. At the same time, the broken rhythmic strokes through which Vasil's thoughts are rendered, recall his earlier assumptions about Jews, and once again underline their inherent faulty association of facts. The narrator confirms the change with additional information and the scene concludes with the following sentence:

> He ground his teeth and clawed at himself in his sleep.[12]

As I have mentioned earlier, Shapiro is no less interested in a sociological examination of the fierce destruction wrought by the pogroms, than in a depiction of the development of a pogromist. Therefore, just as the first part of this story is built up through increasing acts of brutality, the events which follow are rendered through decreasing depictions of available essentials for life. Once panic and deprivation set in, these become the conditions out of which massive destruction of Jewish life follows. Once more, Shapiro maintains the balance between Vasil and the community of soldiers, and similarly, depicts their evolution from soldiers to pogromists, in comparable terms.

The acts of atrocity committed within the group expand, and the narrator effectively shows Vasil to be but one example of a community "naturally" driven to destruction. Whereas earlier

indications of brutality were presented according to a descending order of military rank, the present state of degeneracy is made evident by an explicitly detailed description of massive annihilations of entire battalions of men. The clear build-up in this story would seem to imply that, given such social norms, a moral and ethical code simply cannot exist. In fact, since the reality it proposes instead stands in its principle in total antithesis to the principle of Jewish existence, it proposes a direct challenge to any possible belief in a Judeo-Christian morality.

This is made clear as the story nears its conclusion. For once the necessary logic for degeneracy is put forth, the atmosphere of defeat widens to evoke a mood of awesome terror. The army, by now bereft of food and drink and other essentials for life, runs

> like stampeding animals fleeing a steppe fire . . . without order, in deadly fear.[13]

Even the land is

> dry and gray and riddled, like a carcass of an ox disemboweled by wolves.[14]

With an ever widening and horrendous description of death and decay, the narrator shows us the total reduction of human life, only to raise the level of the story to apocalyptic proportions:

> And while the armies crawled over the earth like swarms of gray worms, flocks of ravens soared overhead, calling with a dry rattling sound--the sound of tearing canvas--and swooped and slanted in intricate spirals, waiting for what would be theirs.[15]

Looking more closely at the above passage, one notes that earth and sky, man and beast, are united through the "spirals" of circular images. These "spirals" evoke the tension of an evil so great that the earth can no longer contain it. Indeed, the mood of evil explodes. In the passage which follows, the narrator employs such starkly violent descriptions of vast mutilation of Jewish life that the world is seen in holocaust proportions. In strong poetic simile, the words "get them" release the wild rampage of death that follows. The narrator begins with sharp focus on Vasil, and explains his behaviour:

> At first Vasil held back, but the loud screams of the women and children and the repulsive, terrified faces of the men with their long earlocks and caftans blowing in the wind drove him to frenzy, and he cut into the Jews like a maddened bull.[16]

The passage foreshadows for the reader the final act of fury with which the story ends; the "earlocks" and the "caftans", recall Vasil's earliest perception of Jews in "strange clothes", to show us the way in which Vasil has evolved. As the call to kill the Jews spreads, the narrator describes the world at large. Shouts of antisemitic slogans soar, "like a peal of thunder",

and villages and cities alike, from the most remote corners of the land, join hands with the armies of destruction. The atmosphere of doom, at once a description and setting of chaos, effectively evokes the shock of a world gone mad. Extreme violation of life turns reality into nightmare, and inverts night and day. As "burning cities lighted their path by night", and "smoke obscured the sun by day", the world is obscured in a blurred cloud of overwhelming horror. With deliberate contrast to the earlier nameless war, the narrator now draws attention to the named villages destroyed, to call sharp focus to what extent East European Jewry was "wiped from the face of the earth." But the legions of destruction grow still larger, until they include the entire gentile community, and all join in their enthusiastic outcry to be rid of Jews. The narrator, relentless in his fury, is no less sparing of the Jewish community. Great traditional Jewish centres, religious institutions, fasting, prayer, scholarship, are all mocked by their ruthless destruction. Even Jewish attempts to resist are mockingly met with "thunderous laughter". This story clearly shows hope, and even Jewish resistance to be utterly futile against massive, widespread aggression. In the description of doom, one notes the inverted use of "fire" and "smoke" imagery. If we look at the Biblical source from which

these images seem to be drawn--Exodus Ch. 13 v:21--we can see that Shapiro is probing a metaphysical condition as well. The Biblical text is as follows:

> And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night.

"Fire" and "cloud" in the Biblical context suggest God's protection of the People of Israel. In this story, the narrator's use of the above imagery, clearly indicates that the moral universe has been inverted. Furthermore, since the narrator has also shown us how social circumstances become the molders of ethics, he is now suggesting that, under such deterministic conditions, a world is created which lives by a logic so destructive to human life, that the possibility of Jewish resistance, and perhaps survival, is impossible. The idea inherent in this nightmare view of the world is carried to its farthest conclusions in the final chapter of the story.

In terse staccato voice, the last chapter returns the reader to Vasil. Clipped concrete images reveal his angry mood, as he smashes the lock on the door to the home of a Jewish couple. Hungry and exhausted, his demand for food is met with silence. The narrator reveals Vasil's perception of the couple:

> At the table stood a tall Jew in a black caftan, with a black beard and earlocks and gloomy eyes.[17]

The images "black caftan" and "earlocks" recall their earlier use, to prepare the reader for the violence which follows. Similarly,

> Near the window he had caught sight of another figure--a young woman in white.[18]

As Vasil begins to piece things together, we enter into his mind for a clarification of his perceptions:

> What kind of woman is that? What kind of people? God! Why, why, did they have to sell Christ? And on top of it all, responsible for everything! Even Rachel admitted it. And they just kept quiet, looking through you. Goddam it, what are they after?[19]

The above passage pulls together all his earlier questions, to show how Vasil has resolved most of his confusions. Since he still has no understanding of the issues at hand, but more importantly, since the reader is well aware that Vasil's inability to think is expressed as a violent rage, feeling what he takes to be hatred from the Jew, he begins his savage attack. With sharp focus now on the woman, the narrator moves quickly in and out of Vasil's mind to indicate his change to utter madness. The woman attempts to save her husband from an inevitable death and so she steps between them. But Vasil, dizzy with rage,

tears at the white figure, and clearly sees her to be like white chalah. The narrator enters into Vasil's mind once again to confirm the association:

> Damn it--these Jews are made of white chalah.[20]

Although the reader has been carefully prepared for the final act of cannibalism upon which the story ends, the shock of its occurrence far exceeds the elaborate preparation. The shock felt by the reader is achieved deliberately through a change in narrative tone. The nervous voice which introduces the concluding chapter differs markedly from the distanced tone used up to this point. The change in tone effectively releases the reader from the taut emotional control so that one can feel more fully the final horror of the bestial act. One of the ways in which this is achieved is through a change in pace between what we are told by the narrator and what we are shown in Vasil's mind. Throughout the story, short phrases are used to indicate Vasil's thoughts, whereas longer expository remarks are used to explain their consequences to the reader. But in this scene, the voices are reversed. Short, terse, accelerated phrases explain Vasil's maddened bestial state, and slow luxurious images depict his feelings. Taken together, they release the full impact of cannibalistic ecstasy upon the reader.

A clarification of the above is made evident by looking at the final passages of the story. "Narrowed eyes" and "bared teeth" make clear Vasil's utter bestialized state. He quickly murders the husband:

> The woman screamed . . . he pressed her to the floor . . . now she was repulsive . . . she uttered a shrill cry--short, mechanical, unnaturally high. . . . The cry penetrating his brain maddened him completely. He seized her neck and strangled her.[21]

Once again the staccato voice of the narrator clarifies the event:

> A white shoulder was quivering before his eyes; a full drop of fresh blood lay glistening on it. His nostrils fluttered like wings. His teeth were grinding; suddenly they opened and bit into the white flesh.

The reader is invited to share Vasil's feelings for the last time, to confirm the pleasures of his taste:

> White chalah has the taste of firm juicy orange. Warm and hot, and the more one sucks it the more burning the thirst. Sharp and thick, and strangely spiced. Like rushing down a steep hill in a sled. Like drowning in sharp, burning spirits. In a circle, in a circle, the juices of life went from body to body, from the first to the second, from the second to the first--in a circle.[22]

From Vasil's ecstasy, the repeated stress on circular imagery shifts the level of the story to another plane to indicate that Shapiro is probing a universal situation as well. The elevated

tones are maintained, and the story ends by recalling the earlier inversion of Exodus, ch. 13, v: 21:

> Pillars of smoke and pillars of flame rose to the sky from the entire city. Beautiful was the fire on the great alter. The cries of the victims--long-drawn-out, endless cries--were sweet in the ears of a god as eternal as the Eternal God. And the tender parts, the thighs, and the breasts, were the portion of the priest.[23]

Looking more closely at the final passage, one recalls the "smoke" and "fire" imagery of the earlier passage. Whereas its earlier use made clear the necessary aura of doom, in the above passage there lies the implicit idea that the sacrifice is acceptable. Two aspects of the original are lost in the translation and require a note of explanation. Firstly, the word "victims", in the above context, stands as "korbones" in the Yiddish text, and means both "victims" and "ritual sacrifice". Secondly, "Eternal God" in the above, is not capitalized in Yiddish, and therefore does not create such a definite distinction between the two gods as the translated text would suggest. Hence, Vasil may be seen as the high priest of the evil god. As such, he offers a real victim as a sacrifice to a divinity who seems to require such a service. This, therefore, suggests the existence of a god of violence who is co-eternal with the Judaic God of Justice. Since this is most contrary to the

basic tenets of belief, Vasil becomes not an aberration of human nature, but an eternal part of an ever present evil, and by his presence, creates a new covenant between "God" and man. Indeed the use of the word "korbones" fuses the real and symbolic levels of the story. Since "white chalah can symbolize the shew bread of the temple", that is to say, bread which is displayed and consumed only by the priest, the priest who takes his share takes what is rightfully his. Vasil is therefore seen to take his rightful share. This seems to be confirmed in the last lines as well. In a fusion of verses from Biblical laws of sacrifice, (Lev. 7:31, 32, 33) there is mention of the parts of an animal which belong to the priest. Vasil is therefore shown to partake of two priestly shares at one and the same time. The story concludes with the suggestion that a "god of violence" rather than a Judaic God of Justice reigns supreme, and proposes a despairing challenge to the belief in any kind of ethical system of morality.

One of the most important effects achieved by Lamed Shapiro is the terrifying interpretation of the eruption of utter evil, and one of the ways in which he captures its intense and ghastly core, is through the selective portrayal of Vasil. By filtering the events of the story through a narrator who can

record both the norms of the society out of which Vasil emerges, and reflect only those perceptions which pertain to Vasil's assumptions about Jews, Shapiro proposes to reinterpret the destruction of the European Jewish world as a challenge to a held metaphysical "truth". Part of the horror implicit in this portrait is to show how easily Vasil soaks up the rhetoric of destruction. By giving the narrator the privilege of reliable omniscience, the narrator gains the reader's allegiance and by his authority provides the reader with a multitude of clues through the specific use of poetic parallelisms and symbolic overtones. This makes clear that Vasil, if not his entire milieu, is so utterly blocked off from human language, that he becomes the vessel of the presence of an evil that can only culminate in the carnal ecstasy of cannibalism. At the same time, the poetic devices and heightened language reveal the narrator's own attitudes to the world he records, and controls our response. The narrative manner provides the occasion to pronounce judgment upon the stark brutality of the menacing hordes, but also reveals the bitter and ironic awareness of the utter futility of human response in a world devoid of spiritual meaning.

Footnotes to Chapter Two

1. The quotations may be found in Lamed Shapiro, "Vayse khala," Di yidishe melukhe (1919), pp. 67-82. The translated version by Norbert Guterman may be found in I. Howe, and E. Greenberg, eds., A Treasury of Yiddish Short Stories (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), pp. 325-333.

2. Howe and Greenberg, A Treasury of Yiddish Short Stories, p. 325.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., pp. 325-326.

6. Ibid., p. 326.

7. This quotation is from Lamed Shapiro, "Vayse khala," p. 69.

8. Howe and Greenberg, A Treasury of Yiddish Short Stories, p. 327.

9. Ibid., p. 328.

10. Ibid., p. 329.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., p. 330.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., pp. 330-331.

16. Howe and Greenberg, A Treasury of Yiddish Short Stories, p. 331.

17. Ibid., p. 332.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., pp. 332-333.

21. Ibid., p. 333.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

Chapter Three

AN EXAMINATION OF "GEGESENE TEG"

[EATING DAYS]

Thus far I have examined L. Shapiro's violent pogrom stories. By looking first at an early story, and then at the last of the pogrom tales, I have attempted to indicate that the narrative manner is closely bound up with Shapiro's attempt to redefine the break up of the Jewish past. In both stories lies the suggestion that Jewish destiny is somehow connected to a most destructive European social milieu. While the earlier pogrom stories argue for the possibilities of individual revenge upon a society which rejects its members, the last story clearly holds forth little hope for such a possibility. Hence it is that, if strength and power were considered to be a way of coming to terms with the splintering of the Jewish world, the last story shows a tragic, if not utterly hopeless awareness of how pathetic Jewish resistance really is.

The stories to be discussed in the following chapters begin what has been called the second stage of Shapiro's literary career. Seven years of silence span the two periods of Shapiro's works, and from his own writings we know that he

himself came to regard these later stories as belonging to a new epoch in his development as a writer. Shapiro describes how he came to feel the need to create different kinds of stories, and we know that the author was concerned with the importance of dealing with matters he called "Themes of everyday life". In fact, in later years, he particularly decried the style and theme of "Der tseylem" [The Cross]. "A bombastic piece," he said, "written with a scream".

The following stories neither created the same critical furor, nor gained the same critical acclaim, but they give evidence to a wider range of subject matter and a maturation of style. The two stories to be discussed are less violent in outlook than the earlier pogrom stories, and their social milieu is therefore less threatening to the individuals in it. Nevertheless, they similarly explore various forms of circumstantial disruption and decay.

Lamed Shapiro continues to suggest that the protagonist's destiny is connected to his social milieu, but the narrative manner is different. In the stories already discussed, the character and the events were filtered through the eyes of the narrator, and though crucial moments of Vasil's inward life were revealed for their specific effects, he, like Meir and the father,

remains as a dramatized aspect of actuality rather than as an individualized figure. In the stories which follow, we can see Shapiro's attempt to experiment with a variety of interior modes. Because the characters externalize the subjective, they may be seen to speak from a sense of identification with the values they seek to redefine, and though some of them too are shown to be shaped by their surroundings, the strident challenge of the values of the past, so evident in his earlier stories, is undercut by obvious intimations of its imminent loss.

"Gegesene teg" [literally, Eaten Days], was written in 1926-1927, and records the break-up of the European Jewish world through the sufferings of a yeshiva student, torn between wordly and spiritual appetites. In this story, Shapiro exploits the shtetl tradition of assigning new yeshiva students to various households for meals, to tell the story of a young man who comes to the shtetl Zahorye to study Talmud. He is assigned to take his meals in three shtetl households, and therefore on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday respectively, the reader is introduced to Buni the butcher, Isser Tabachnik the merchant, and Stissy the widow. As the story unfolds, the young man becomes aware of the Yeshiva's moral decay and, by contrast, of the attractive features of the outside world. Gradually, the pull between

wordly and spiritual appetites arouses tremendous conflicts in him, and as he becomes more tempted by the outside world, he likewise grows less dedicated to Talmudic study. After much torture, he succumbs to his temptations, and commits three acts of transgression which ultimately lead to his break with orthodoxy. As the story continues, the lure to wordly appetites grows stronger, and the student becomes sexually infatuated with Isser Tabachnik's married daughter Henye, who comes to Zahorye for a brief visit. This attraction completely distracts him from his Talmudic studies, and the story concludes with his decision to leave Zahorye.

This story is told as a retrospective tale, and uses the narrator as a protagonist reporting his own experiences. The narrator is therefore the chief authority for the events he records. The sustained inside view involves the reader in the pain of spiritual dissolution as it occurs, and also permits a full bodied description of all manners of shtetl life. However, the retrospective device through which the story is introduced preserves a contrast between the past and the present, and therefore establishes the required distance for ironic comment. The frame of a narrator recollecting his own past, opens an ironic gap between himself as narrator, and as

a participating character, and makes obvious the youthfulness of the protagonist not completely able to grasp the significance of the decisions he makes. This disparity of understanding permits for an exploration of the possibilities for self definition in a dissolving social milieu.

"Gegesene teg" [Eating Days] is meticulously organized so that the atmosphere of the story parallels the mood of the narrator. The story begins with the memory of the past. Here, the required distance between the past and the present is established in the single sentence of introduction:

> At that time, I was on eating days and I lacked a Tuesday.[1]

Assuming that the reader is familiar with the shtetl tradition, one is at once aware that the story teller is a new student in a shtetl. What follows, therefore, seems to be a natural description of a boy familiarizing himself with the town, its inhabitants, the students, and the Yeshiva to which he has just come. Once the reader is so firmly placed in the protagonist's past, we can travel with him until the story's end, and share in his changing impressions of his surroundings.

He first remembers the suffocating heat of the day he arrived in Zahorye:

> The village was suffocating under the July sun. Men and women dozed in the doorways of their shops. In the meat market, dogs lay with their tongues hanging out, panting heavily, their glazed eyes staring apathetically, not even interested in the bloody quarters of beef hanging in the windows of the butcher shops. Glinting in the market place were bits of yellow straw, remnants of the last fair day. . . . On the main street all the shutters were closed--gray, white, and green shutters, a long row of all kinds of shutters, and all closed. There was such absolute stillness that Zahorye looked like a town in a dream, and I thirstily absorbed all this newness.[2]

The selection of images in the above passage deliberately evokes the overwhelming sense of "shuttered stillness", to stand in direct contrast with the protagonist's clearly stated "thirst" for newness. This effectively exposes his naiveté to the reader, and sets forth the background from which the rest of the story unfolds. Moreover, stillness and change are set in opposition to one another, to indicate the way in which the protagonist's changing states of awareness are to be developed.

As the tale unfolds, we meet the yeshiva students. From some, we learn that the once great Yeshiva has, for the past few years, been "gradually sinking and no one knows why". Others comment that the people of Zahorye see the Yeshiva as "an old invalid who slowly rots away but doesn't die". The obvious images of decay call our attention to the decline of religious

authority, and we understand this to be an indication of the process of shtetl disruption. Other students are more explicitly introduced. Their portraits and manner of study clearly confirm the state of moral decay alluded to in the earlier passages. In quick succession, three portraits are drawn, of which the first will be shown as the best example. The student from Krutohor is presented as:

> A tall man without a hint of beard or mustache on his small girlish face. He had big, bulging, watery eyes and a child's smile on his red, fleshy sausage lips. He didn't have a bad head, but had no desire to study. But on the other hand, he excelled in the use of foul language.[3]

The above portrait, and indeed the subsequent depictions of various shtetl types which follow show Shapiro's use of impressionistic images to depict all manners of appearance. Their selective brush strokes suggest that physical attributes reflect the quality of behaviour in a most strategic way. In the above context, the emphasis upon grotesque physical features makes clear a crude system of belief. In time, the student is shown to grow even more vulgar, to indicate the decline of religious belief.

As the story unfolds, the scene shifts from a view of the surroundings, to sounds of the riverboats at night. In

contrast to the stillness of the shtetl, the to and fro motion of wheels on water, evokes a pulsating sound and poses the lure to modernity in sensual terms. By setting up a counterpoint relationship between their opposing sounds, Shapiro records the young man's turmoil, as the pull between their conflicting claims of restraint and desire.

The story continues and soon three portraits, in quick succession, introduce the reader to the three households where the protagonist takes his assigned meals. In accordance with the days of the week, three depictions call our attention to various manners of shtetl life. On Wednesday, we meet Buni the Redhead. A butcher with "bristly red hair", he was a "man who didn't know how to pray". The food of his household was heavy, and the "borscht with fat meat" was served on a soiled table. The clear observations of Buni's boorish beliefs, coupled with the deliberate attention to equally crude table manners, clearly highlight a vulgar system of values. As the story continues, Buni's daughter comes to lure the protagonist to commit his first sexual transgression.

By contrast, the home of Isser Tabachnik is rendered with images of elegant finery and gourmet food, in addition to which his "smooth skinned face", "tidy knee-length great coat",

and "soft hat", evoke the distinct impression of a wealthy East European cosmopolite. Yet, in spite of the story teller's obvious attraction to Tabachnik's modern appearance, he also lets us know that, in this house, he is served in the kitchen. In time, Tabachnik's household comes to represent the ambiguous pull to modernity.

The third shtetl type is Stissy the Widow. She, though not rich, is "tall and clever", and takes care of her old yet solid home. While she represents the poor but dignified values of shtetl society, in time these values become most stifling.

Once the social milieu is introduced, the story shifts to the narrator's feelings. To this point, the course and effect of time is developed according to various days of the week, but when the protagonist begins to experience inner turmoil, summarizing sentences embedded with selective poetic similies widen the atmosphere to bring the action up to date. This may be seen in the following example:

> Like demons, summer and winter, snow and rain, frost and heat--they all pinched and pulled me in many directions.[5]

The use of poetic simile, in the above context, elevates the mood of the story to denote the protagonist's state of heightened agitation, and sets forth the atmosphere in which

the break with orthodoxy occurs. In this unsettled mood, the protagonist recalls the three acts which led to his break with orthodoxy. They occur in each of the three homes already described and succeed one another in rapid and more daring succession. Summarized here, each of them represents a growing and stronger pull towards wordly appetites. The story teller recalls his first sin to be that of gluttony, in Isser Tabachnik's kitchen; the second, the touching of Buni's sexually attractive daughter; and the last, and most daring of all, smoking a cigarette on the Sabbath, in Stissy the Widow's toilet. The latter suggests an early break with orthodoxy, and the recollection ends with the following summarizing comment:

> The range of my lusts, like the range of my conceptions, was small, but the evil impulse fell upon me like a tempest, suddenly and from all sides at once. I lived as if in a fever, my heart in constant agitation.[6]

The above passage occurs in the middle of the story, and prepares the reader for the widening distraction from Talmudic study. Bearing in mind that this is a recollected memory, it would seem that the narrator is also casting sly humour upon his own interpretation of the sins he describes. Which is to say, though this story clearly records a historical moment in time when the shtetl is already on the brink of decay, what follows makes

equally clear how very unprepared the narrator is for his role as a modern man.

As the story develops, the first felt stillness evident in the earlier chapters now becomes oppressive. Once again, the change in the narrator is reflected as a change in the texture of the background. This time, however, the impressionistic brush strokes describe various still life scenes. Portraits of sad and patient old women and young men, staring absently and vacantly as if they were waiting for something to happen, capture the sense of being frozen in time, and by their poignant though static pictures, evoke an utterly hopeless image of shtetl life. Their effect upon the protagonist is summarized by the following passage:

> A mingled feeling of hatred and fear began somewhere in my guts and rose to my throat: a corpse, gazing. They had forgotten to close his glazed eyes, so he sat there and stared.[7]

By contrast, the scene shifts and describes the gentile section of the town. Here, "sleighs with jingling bells", and "earthen pots which sang", present a large noisy contrast to the utter stillness of the earlier passage. The clear juxtaposition of the two worlds reminds the reader of the earlier oppositions of stillness and sounds, and seems to indicate the greater

attraction to the outside world. But this gentile world is also one where the protagonist feels that "danger lurked like an angry beast." With the above association, Shapiro lets us know that the outside world is still frightening and unknown to the protagonist. The opposition of stillness and sound once again sets forth the pulls between restraint and desire, to permit a fuller exploration of the lures and fears of modernity in sensual terms. For, inherent in the protagonist's ambivalence, lies the danger of letting go, and as the story nears its resolution Shapiro makes clear how difficult it is to leave the familiar shtetl world behind.

The story now develops towards the protagonist's resolution, and his conflict is expressed as having to make a choice between Tzirl, the quiet yet dignified daughter of Stissy the widow, and Henye, the modern though unattainable daughter of Isser Tabachnik. First, however, the reader is returned to the Yeshiva, which now appears "as though consumed by syphilis". With this crude sexual likeness, any possible return to orthodoxy is decisively repudiated. Since the protagonist is now severed from the institution of religious authority, it permits for a fuller depiction of his choices of more overt sexual terms.

With the protagonist, we return to the home of Stissy the widow, to find that the conventional lures of shtetl life are not without their attractions. Traditional images of food and wine, the holiness of Sabbath candles, evoke a warm and comforting sense of homey familiarity. Still, though the shtetl courts the narrator, he feels the "threads of the web spinning about". Strong intimations of oppressive enclosure evoked by this comparison remind the reader of his growing attraction to the outside world, and foreshadow his final decision to leave. By contrast, the lure to modernity is rendered through a lush, full, sensual depiction of Henye, and the very richness of sexual overtones gives weight to the story teller's stronger attraction to leave. Henye's appearance clearly awakens the protagonist's sexual appetite, and prompts a decided rejection of Talmudic study. But Henye is not attainable, and his erotic fantasies also arouse an awakening of a different sort.

In this story, Shapiro uses the sexual analogy to signify the awakening of self awareness which would suggest that he is probing the possibilities of self definition at a particular moment in time. This is made obvious when the protagonist sees in his lost desire to study Talmud, a co-existent and frightening ill-preparedness for the future.

It is interesting to note that, at this point, the protagonist tells us something about his life before coming to Zahorye. But more importantly, it is made evident that both the story teller and the author, L. Shapiro, come from the shtetl Tarashter. In a discussion of Shapiro's works, Curt Leviant suggests that the personality of Leyb, (the hero of the semi autobiographic novella "The Gerer Family"), was placed into "Eating Days", to explore his deterioration of religious belief more fully. By association, we can infer this story to be of semi autobiographic concerns as well. In fact, Shapiro's own writings would seem to lend authority to Leviant's speculations. Of his own difficult break with orthodox belief, Shapiro writes:

> This was my first difficult experience, and given my age [thirteen], perhaps the most difficult.[8]

The point of difference between the two stories is that the earlier one ("The Gerer Family"), explores the hero's growing dissatisfaction with the shtetl's traditional values, while this story teller is no less aware of the process of dissolution of Jewish shtetl life, than of the consequences of the break with it.

As the story continues, much attention is given to the protagonist's self doubt and frustrations, in a word, to his

persistent difficulties of separating himself from the shtetl world. This continues until he learns of Henye's decision to leave Zahorye. At that moment, he too makes a decision. Snatching off the symbols of his orthodoxy, he runs to the river where her boat is docked. When it departs, he, now naked, says:

> I sat there for a long time probably thinking of something. Then I dressed without having entered the water.[9]

The "water" clearly recalls the early posed lure to modernity, but in the above context, it indicates that a decision has been made. Not surprisingly, the narrator subsequently bids Tzirl good-bye, and buys a ticket up the river. What is surprising is the sentence which ends the story: "And now let me think". This sentence concludes a paragraph in which a full view of the water is given by the story teller, now on a moving boat. The image of the river, as it was developed throughout the story, presented a huge outward contrast to the shuttered shtetl. While it still retains its attractive associations with modernity and change, it is also now tinged: the water is "as yellow as oil". The water is seen by the protagonist to "stretch on and on, from one end of the world to another", like "fat, thick, endless hosts." The additional poetic similes now evoke distinct intimations of fear. This may simply reflect

the protagonist's understandable apprehension of the yet unknown outside world. Yet, while this may be so, the entire story, though told as a recollected memory, concludes with a condition in the present. From the latter, we may infer that the narrator is still aware of a present and similar state of insecurity. The end of the story would seem to suggest that, despite the recognition of shtetl decay, there is as yet a no more wholly satisfying alternative. The river, in its last image, sustains the conflicting claims of stasis and change, and by inference contains the conflict between the past and the future. This image may be said to reflect the question raised by this story, namely, is there a possibility for self definition when one leaves the past behind? Since the story clearly opposes the decayed past with the not yet clearly defined future, or more to the point, with a threatening one at best, one notes a lack of viable alternatives. The real pathos of the story lies in the storyteller who, despite the retrospective glance at his more naive past, also seems to mock his own efforts to define himself as a modern man.

In conclusion, this story shows Shapiro making clear observations on the process of decay in the traditional shtetl

world, but at the same time, the ironic cast to the narrative, the narrator's irony about the outside world, and his own possibilities of "making it", makes equally clear a personal awareness of its loss.

Footnotes to Chapter Three

1. This story was published and the quotations may be found in Lamed Shapiro, Nyu Yorkish (New York, 1931), pp. 82-126. The translated version used here may be found in Curt Leviant, The Jewish Government and Other Stories (New York, 1971), pp. 85-111.

2. Ibid., p. 85.

3. Ibid., p. 87.

4. Ibid., p. 91.

5. Ibid., p. 93.

6. Ibid., p. 95.

7. Ibid., p. 97.

8. This quotation may be found in Lamed Shapiro, Der shrayber geyt in khayder (New York, 1945), p. 1.

9. Leviant, The Jewish Government and Other Stories, p. 110.

Chapter Four

AN EXAMINATION OF "DOC"

In the earlier chapters, I attempted to show how Lamed Shapiro used the narrator to reveal a design in large part intended to explore various modalities for Jewish survival in a dissolving European world. In their often painful search for new definitions, the stories reveal an effort aimed as much at finding new vocabularies for self definition in a splintered world, as at exposing the barrenness of modern European society at large. Nor was Shapiro's view of the consequences of social disruption limited to the stories which were set in Europe.

"Doc", the story under discussion here, is one of several stories set in America. This story was written in 1930 at a time when L. Shapiro was experimenting with other literary forms: the essay, but more importantly, the novel. The intended novel, "Der amerikaner shed" ["The American Devil"], was to present a panoramic view of American life, and had as its central subject matter a depiction of Jewish life during the early decades of the twentieth century. From his own

writings, it would appear that in the creation of "Doc" Shapiro felt himself to be moving closer to the possible completion of his novel. In a rare outburst of optimism, Shapiro writes:

> The story is bringing me closer to the novel. It is as long as 'Di yidishe melukhe', or a bit longer. . . . But in mentioning the latter, it is not to remind you of an earlier L. Shapiro, but rather [to let you know] that L. Shapiro is a new writer, who will now begin his literary career.[1]

In the story of "Doc", we can see evidence of Shapiro's struggle for new forms. If we look at the essays which deal similarly with various aspects of Jewish life in America, the subject matter seems to be literally taken from them and placed into "Doc". The same material which is handled with a measure of ease and assurance in the essays, is overtly obtrusive in this story. One of the main problems with "Doc" has to do with the writer's inability to suppress his own bias, and we feel as though he has weighed the characters by different scales. The major fault springs from a method successfully achieved in other stories, but attempted here in a new way, is as yet not wholly successful. In the stories already discussed, Shapiro deployed his narrator so that he could reflect both the events of the story and the inner thoughts of the characters, the

narrator being the sole reflector of the story's view of the world. In "Doc", however, the narrational posture is split. On the one hand, he is the observer of the events and, on the other, he intrudes on the vision of the central character. As observer, the narrator is sufficiently distanced from the values of the author to permit the creation of a variety of characters, each speaking in his own voice, and each projecting an aspect of immigrant life in America from his own perspective. However, Shapiro exerts excessive control over the kind of reality he wishes to reflect, and the narrator becomes too intrusive upon the vision of the central character. This forces the character into a predetermined slot and prevents the necessary tension which the earlier stories achieved. It would seem that, in the attempt to dramatize his own theories about life in America, Shapiro does not achieve sufficient distance to make it dramatically convincing and the narrator's role often seems designed to force the reader into the various attitudes the writer wishes to evoke. While this method provides for an exploration of the American milieu, the character's development is too bound to the environment to make us believe that he can learn anything from his experiences. Yet, in spite of its problems, this story differs from all the others in one important respect: it shows Shapiro's efforts to create an authentic modern individualized self.

As the title suggests, "Doc" centres upon the adventures of Benny Milgroym, a recent immigrant to New York, who decides to become a doctor. From the very beginning, Shapiro lets us know that Milgroym is a most unsympathetic character. A petty bourgeois, he is utterly ignorant of the values he supports, and persistently equates his search for happiness with the quest for material success. The story devotes considerable space to his efforts to adapt to the American culture through his desire for upward social mobility.

The first part of the story deals with Milgroym's struggles through medical school and describes his relationships with Sadie, the working girl who agrees to finance his tuition, and her brother Joe, who undertakes to introduce them to the "American way of life". Together they partake of various forms of American entertainment, the most important of which is a trip to Coney Island. This and other American phenomena become the modes through which all three seek to become Americanized. In time, Milgroym becomes a doctor and feels obliged to marry Sadie. Together they aspire to untold dreams of success. For Sadie, marriage to Milgroym presents an opportunity to become a "lady", and for Milgroym it is a chance to work together towards riches. As the story continues, it is made very clear

that neither can realize their bourgeois goals; on the contrary, the very futility of their aspirations dooms them to a most boring and barren existence.

By contrast, Issie Fishler, a Yiddish writer and fellow immigrant, is a sympathetic character. Although he appears only twice in the entire story, once at the beginning and once again when the story nears its end, it is clear that he is the most aware of all the characters. He is involved with Yiddish activities in New York, and the most concerned with the survival of Yiddish creativity in America. Fishler re-enters into the story only after Milgroym, who does not understand his own unhappy plight, goes to seek him out for some explanations.

As the story continues, Sadie dies and Milgroym is left alone. Lonely and frustrated, he grows physically ill and begins to seek relief in doses of morphine. As he becomes more confused about the circumstances of his life, he embarks on various trips in search of Issie Fishler. Milgroym finds Fishler after years have passed since the time when they first met, and Fishler attempts to spell out to Milgroym what Jewish life in America is all about. Not surprisingly, Milgroym understands little of what he is told, and returns to his own

meaningless existence. Life for him becomes increasingly barren. He turns first to supernaturalism and then to increasing doses of morphine, but neither effects a change. In despair and utter resignation, Benny Milgroym ends his life with an overdose of morphine.

In this story, Shapiro uses the shifting narrator which I spoke of earlier to serve as an organizing principle. Since the author is no less concerned with a depiction of the American culture than with its effects upon immigrant Jewish life, the narrative manner becomes the technique through which he can record the American scene from two points of view. From Milgroym's perspective, bound as it is to the socio-cultural surrounding by the intrusive narrator, he can record the consequences of Americanization through upward social mobility upon the Eastern European Jew who seeks it. From Fishler's point of view, the prospects of Yiddish survival in America can be fully appreciated. Since Milgroym's vision is totally discredited, the narrator reveals his own severe indictment of America. Although extensive direct discourse is used here for the first time to free Fishler's presentation in his own voice, if we may compare much of what he says with the voice of the narrator, we may say that Fishler, like the narrator, is an ironist, a projection of one of the narrator's voices.

An ostentatiously selective narrator begins the story with a description of Benny Milgroym. In a single sentence, Milgroym's past is set forth. "Benny Milgroym began to cultivate baldness when he was still a student."[2] The shortness of introduction gives weight to Milgroym's physical appearance, and the concrete image of "baldness" quickly defines his possibilities to a lack of growth. This key metaphor is carried forward to a description of the socio-cultural setting, when in a quick shift to the present, the narrator presents a detailed description of Seward Park. The Park is as devoid of trees and water as Milgroym's head is of hair, to similarly depict the impoverished American milieu. The introduction connects Milgroym to the American environment and, at the same time, defines the temporal and spatial frame from which this story unfolds. Therefore, as the story proceeds, just as the reader understands Milgroym's lack of growth in terms of his spreading baldness, so do we comprehend the depleted possibilities for American Jewish life from its barren beginnings. Our expectations of the protagonist are not only placed in and bound to his surroundings, but Shapiro, in one of many similar passages, also shows Milgroym damning himself from his own mouth:

> Benny Milgroym was an externe in the Ukraine and therefore had a bit of a share in the

> Russian Revolution. In the Club of the Esern [Social Revolutionaries], he expressed his opinion: We do not have to participate in voting. We must not lend our prestige to a parliament which is 'damnit' not a parliament. . . . He also said: In Europe it is different. And with that he expressed his dissatisfaction in America.[3]

"Therefore", in the above context, shows to what extent Benny Milgroym is the follower of a blind cliché, and a "bit of a share" is a terribly bourgeois phrase, to show that Milgroym brings his small business instinct to the desire to influence the Russian Revolution. The very phrase "expressed his opinion", stands in most ironic contrast to what he says. Not only does Milgroym display ignorance, but the note of utter anti-climax on which he ends, shows both his ineffectiveness as an orator and a complete lack of understanding of the opinion he holds. The last two lines re-enforce his ignorance to discredit his views on all matters of life in America as well.

By contrast, much of what we know about Issie Fishler is presented in his own voice. We first meet Fishler parrying wits with Milgroym over a game of chess. The use of direct discourse clearly provides for an emphatic distinction between the values they support, but this time, the narrator makes clear that he favours Fishler's life style. It is not simply that the

the latter's apparent bohemianism and mild romanticism gain our sympathy over Milgroym's plodding penny pinching goals, but since Fishler is involved in matters of Yiddish life in New York, the scene between them effectively prepares the reader for Milgroym's stupidity in this respect as well. Once so briefly introduced, Fishler does not reappear until the story nears its end. In the interim, however, considerable space is given to Milgroym's quest to Americanize.

As the story develops, the first of such attempts is embodied in the trip to Coney Island, where Benny, together now with Sadie and Joe, goes to seek some pleasure. In a long and scathing exposé, the narrator describes the amusement park both to show the kind of cultural life America offers, but more importantly at this point, to severely mock its values for the Jew who seeks it. This will be summarized by the following passage:

> No sooner did they arrive on Stillwell Ave., when they fell into a steaming sweat bath. People like flies. All kinds of sounds, about the best candies in the world, about the best salamies in the world. . . . People were shown a live head without a horse--an animal half woman half fish, a wild African with one eye in the middle of his forehead. . . .
>
> Milgroym munched popcorn, sucked ices and hung around all evening. They flew up and down the roller coaster, they lost their way in the

> labyrinth. . . and finally they feasted on 'a ride in the desert'. A couple of hunched and beaten camels--Moses and Aaron, offered tourists rides for 10 cents a head, in a circular area, which ultimately returned the tourists to their original starting point. . . . Milgroym mounted the camel-Moses, but Moses became high spirited and took off. . . Milgroym sat high on the camel's back, his hands clutched the hump. . . . until finally the camel was returned to the station.[4]

In the above passage, ironic intention is made evident by the clear emphasis upon the grotesque and ugly aspects of the park. Moreover, overt irony is underscored by the not so subtle treatment of Milgroym's last ride 'in the desert'. In the above context, the ride significantly ends where it began, and shows how utterly futile this kind of entertainment proves to be as a mode of adaptation to America. In addition, the above scene presents the subsequent social and thematic interests of the story. Firstly, it introduces the reader to the way in which Milgroym's other trips ultimately end, and more importantly, it sets forth the "desert" image of America. This becomes the key metaphor for the American milieu, and is recalled throughout the story. Lastly, it shows Milgroym to be tightly bound to the surrounding culture, and widens the theme of Americanization to include the concomitant theme of escape. As the story continues, the narrator intrudes more

often on Milgroym's perspective, and all of his trips occasion a full and mocking commentary upon the American world, to show that no escape seems possible.

"Doc", as Shapiro has chosen to tell it, is the story of a man who can't find any point of entry into society, so he continuously seeks to conform to the surrounding American culture. But, though he attempts to define himself in a variety of ways, he simply cannot find the mechanism, or the pattern to conform to, so he embarks on a variety of quest journeys through the streets of New York. Although Lamed Shapiro has chosen to focus upon the experiences of Benny Milgroym, he is no less concerned with the dramatization of what he elsewhere called the ruinous attributes of haste and waste in America. As it unfolds, the story's central images "desert", "ride", and "station" are recalled in all of Milgroym's trips, to show the utter futility of the quest for Americanization for the East European Jew who seeks it. And more importantly, since Milgroym's perspective is bound to the environment itself, it allows for a full depiction of the sterility of the American milieu. In no other story does Shapiro attempt to capture the indifference of modern urbanization that he does here, and though he is not wholly successful,

Shapiro does give us a view of the destructive pulse of New York.

This is made evident as the story continues; when Milgroym becomes a doctor, he takes the first of three excursions through the streets of New York. While each of the trips is undertaken to indicate Milgroym's search for "happiness", ultimately they afford the narrator the occasion for a full depiction of American life. His first journey, presumably in search of a future location for his not yet successful practice, begins with Milgroym's dream of untold potential riches, and ends with a depiction of a most dehumanizing American milieu. This is successfully achieved through a detailed catalogue of the streets of New York, which by their geographic distinctions clearly imply the process of upward social mobility. But, instead of seeing the hoped for "new lands . . . new skies . . . and a new world", Milgroym sees "the earth covered with sardine cans, a sky the colour of Sadie's apron" and streets in which "roads cut through deserts without houses." Since the same voice who shows us the American milieu through Milgroym's eyes, also provides his editorial comment, the search for upward social mobility is no less discredited than the American environment itself.

The reader is aware that Milgroym has no viable mechanism for adaptation to America, but Milgroym himself is not, and as he is not yet resigned to his barren existence, he continues to seek relief from his unhappy state. But the reader is also aware of how utterly incapable Milgroym is of learning from his own experiences, and is therefore not surprised that this leads to the need to find Issie Fishler.

Since the ruinous effects of time are crucial to this story's central concerns, and since considerable space is given to discrediting Milgroym's efforts to americanize, the reader is made to feel that there is something else he needs to know about the potential of Jewish survival in America. This effectively creates a background against which Fishler's subsequent explanations must be heard. Therefore, the reader is invited to share in the first of two excursions in the search of Fishler. With Milgroym we return to Seward Park, where an evaluation of the effects of time on Jewish life in America is made evident.

At this point in the story, a considerable span of time has passed, and as the narrator moves in and out of Milgroym's mind to provide for a fuller depiction of the change that has occurred, Milgroym's vision is once again discredited. Just

as the technique of a shifting narrator was used to mock the American milieu and the Jew who seeks to adapt to it in the earlier part of the story, this same technique is deployed to depict the depleted possibilities for a viable Yiddish culture in America, and to mock Milgroym's inability to understand it. As the narrator intrudes on Milgroym's vision, the return to Seward Park intentionally recalls its earlier description, but this time the emphasis upon its vast bareness frames the lengthy description which follows. Furthermore, the device of naming the various streets which surround it evokes the effects of a simulated tour of the Lower East Side of New York, with the narrator acting as our guide:

> On E. Broadway, a doctor lives behind every door . . . and this is where Milgroym wished to have an office, even with his own black steward at the door. The Russian language is not to be heard . . . but the 'jargon' has become very special: they call it Yiddish . . . The huge 'Forverts' building [lights] the sky at night [with] a gigantic neon sign . . . Yiddish . . . what is it all about?[5]

Looking at the above passage, one notes the narrator moving in and out of Milgroym's mind to show his bourgeois aspirations, and by implication, of how little he understands of the Yiddish activities in New York. As the tour continues, the technique is used similarly to render a full depiction of the coffee houses, where debates among competing Yiddish writers are

intentionally recorded. This provides the occasion for a commentary upon the arguments then dominating the American literary scene. Entire passages are devoted to debates between "Di Yunge" [The Young] and the more traditional writers, to show how a once eager group of Yiddish writers came to hope for the survival of Yiddish culture in America. The entire passage often sounds like a deliberate vehicle for Shapiro's own polemics, but another of its uses is to locate a particular point in time and build up a setting against which Fishler's subsequent interpretations will be introduced.

One of the great problems in "Doc" has to do with the length of the passages devoted to a depiction of the effects of American pathology upon the Yiddish world. It is interesting to note, in an essay on the changing Jewish world since 1906, Shapiro clearly utilizes similar landmarks and passages to decry the consequences of rapid upward social mobility upon the immigrant Jewish population. In the essay, Shapiro devotes pages of detailed information to an effort to understand how the dynamic pulse of New York, which was first a catalyst to the growth of Yiddish creativity, later swept it aside by the process of acceleration itself. The essay is less bitter in tone than the story, but similarly attributes the decay of

Yiddish creativity to the extraordinary tempo of American life, the kind of haste which seemed to Shapiro to leave only ruins behind.

With similar intention, the story continues to focus on the life of Benny Milgroym. In time his medical ability, such as it was, becomes even more mediocre, and his life predictably duller. As he becomes physically ill, he becomes literally and symbolically more and more myopic. Overt and extensive play on perception and blindness, filters all the opinions he holds of socialism, Zionism, and other wordly events.

Shapiro includes reference to vast historical changes to underscore the corrosive impact of political change in the world at large upon the Jewish milieu, but more specifically, it is built into this story to show its erosive effect upon Jewish immigrant life in America. This becomes more evident when Milgroym embarks on yet another tour of New York, this time in desperate search of Issie Fishler. The reader is invited to return to Seward Park for the last time, but Milgroym is shown to be so utterly unseeing that he isn't quite there. Therefore, the voice which describes the following scenes is the same voice with which the story began. Now, the

death of the past is clearly reflected through the voice of the narrator. His bitter and ironic commentaries upon the impoverished Jewish milieu will be compared to those made by Issie Fishler, to show that ultimately his, like the voice of the narrator, releases the projection of an authentic Yiddish self. In one of a host of similar passages, Shapiro shows the narrator's comments:

> Seward Square is dead. . . . E. Broadway is gone . . . It is like a fair which has become not only impoverished, but, entirely discarded . . . Only the 'Forverts' has remained, like a clumsy giant . . . America--the urban population wanders like sand in the desert. Districts die and do not have a chance to grow old . . . Everything here lives quickly and dies young. E. Broadway is worse than dead.[6]

The "desert" image, in the above context, confirms that no future seems possible. Milgroym, however, simply feels that "the world has played him a dirty trick", and continues to look for Fishler. This ends in a coffee house on Second Ave., the newer centre for Yiddish activities.

Fishler is presently occupied with publicity work, for the Yiddish press, and has therefore maintained his contacts with the Yiddish world. He begins a long monologue, ostensibly in answer to Milgroym's agitations, and speaks for the present state of Yiddish culture in America. Fishler starts the

monologue with bitterness, and comments first on the barrenness and haste in American life:

> So you were on E. Broadway? . . . it stinks like the corpse of a dead cat, which someone forgot to remove . . . And now Second Ave., it was built on the ruins of E. Broadway. . . . Perhaps something can be built up in time . . . in time . . . where is time in America? Time here is turned to money. . . . everything here is like sand and spreads out like sand, and pff it disappears.[7]

The "desert" image of America clearly connects Fishler with the narrator in their common and ironic conclusions with regard to possibilities for the future. Fishler continues, and when his bitterness turns to outrage, he mocks the state of Yiddish language and its literature:

> There is little use for a preoccupation with 'jargonesque' songs. . . . in fact the entire literature is a jargon, the language is a jargon, and our whole life here is like a kind of jargon.[8]

In due course, and like the narrator, he mocks the "Forverts" and its impact upon the Jewish American world:

> yes the Forverts, it lies across our whole life . . . and is so wide that wherever you look it blocks our horizons.[9]

Fishler then decries the impact of the entire Yiddish press upon the Jewish community, the competing debates among the writers themselves and, ultimately, a host of individual Yiddish writers including L. Shapiro:

> He [Shapiro] lives with the glory of the memory of 'Der tsaylem', which was always a false bombastic piece, written from the top of his lungs. Now he looks at us with modesty, which ought to make us understand that in essence he almost became the conscience of Yiddish literature, but we idiots did not recognize it.[10]

Fishler ends his long outburst with the necessity of faith:

> Yiddish is like socialism, not to believe in it, means not to want it.[11]

The length of the monologue is obviously to place sharp focus upon the speaker; nevertheless, its very length requires some justification. Since the monologue as a form gives the speaker sufficient force to engage the reader's allegiance despite feeble objective base, its intensity, presented here as intensity of feeling, comes as a welcome relief from the deliberate unimaginative boredom of Milgroym's life. Furthermore, Milgroym's vision has been so obviously discredited that we can form no emotional attachment to his sorry plight. Since we feel that Milgroym cannot make a discovery through a convincing outcome of experience, we can justify the monologue for its emotional impact on the reader. Moreover, it is placed in a strategic position. It occurs in a situation which requires no response, and seems suggestive of a speaker who cannot control his verbal urge. As an extended utterrance, it

internalizes the events of the story, and since the speaker's voice is like the narrator's, it pulls the social themes of the story together, and asks Fishler's new kind of characterization to resolve what was earlier given to the narrator. By locating the important considerations of the story within the confines of an individual speaker, Shapiro makes us feel more deeply involved with Fishler's response than the combination of speech and action could have provided. This provides for the presentation of faith in Yiddish as the only spark of adaptive compensation in an otherwise barren culture. Furthermore, it underscores the precarious position in which the speaker finds himself, and permits the release of bitter subjective despair. At the same time, it also permits the writer to mock himself through the voice of a self mocking character who is himself a writer. This is done in order to show an utterly ironic view of art as a possible implement for reform. By presenting the ultimate self assault, Shapiro is suggesting how hopeless the belief in survival seems to be in the circumstances of America.

Indeed, despite the note of faith, Fishler's monologue ends in resignation. "What did you want? That we should have nothing at all?" Through the voice of Issie Fishler, Shapiro

lays bare the double edged agony of one who is aware that the new world which, in fact, he has joined, and the tumble down walls of the old, spell out a lack of alternatives. The story concludes with little comfort after Fishler's speech.

Milgroym, of course, does not understand any of Fishler's concerns, and continues to seek his own way out. He turns first to supernaturalism and the occult, and when this fails to satisfy his needs, he takes to increasing his intake of morphine. The story concludes with his death brought on by an overdose of morphine, which is the ultimate state of resigned escape.

The narrator's voice which began the story now ends it. He records street and media sounds, mixed with noises made by the combination of prostitutes, brawlers, and whiskey, to pronounce a pessimistic sentence upon the general American culture. Since these are noises which Milgroym no longer hears, the narrator's voice would seem to suggest that, though there is a spark of faith in the possibility of Yiddish survival in America, it is overwhelmingly extinguished by the barrenness of individual life.

This story is infinitely more painful than the others, for though it is ill formed, it shows Shapiro's despair more clearly. By releasing the voice of the narrator as an individualized self, he articulates the moral and psychic isolation of the impoverished American immigrant world, and embodies in his voice, the agonized cry of modern isolation.

Footnotes to "Doc"

1. Lamed Shapiro, Ksovim (Los Angeles, 1949), p. 30.

2. All the quotations used in this text are translated from the Yiddish by myself. They may be found in their original form in Lamed Shapiro, Nyu Yorkish un andere zakhn [In a New York Manner and Other Stories] (New York: Farlag Alein, 1931), pp. 127-196.

3. Ibid., pp. 128-129.

4. Ibid., pp. 136-139.

5. Ibid., p. 150.

6. Ibid., pp. 171-172.

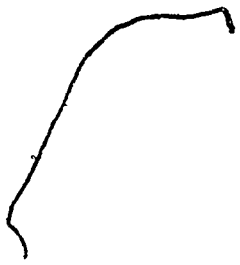
7. Ibid., pp. 174-180.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.



CONCLUSION

What strikes us most about Lamed Shapiro's short stories is the way in which the author shaped his concern with impulses of social destruction into fastidiously formal artistic patterns. In seeking an explanation of Shapiro's remarkable achievement, this paper suggested that it was largely due to his innovative use of a highly sophisticated omniscient spokesman. As has been noted, all the stories selected showed Shapiro's search to re-interpret the disintegration of Jewish unity, but despite their common thematic preoccupations, each story indicated that the author did not automatically use the same narrative technique that had been superbly effective in one story for another.

The discussion and analyses of the various narrational postures deployed revealed the creation of a highly selective reflector, but the degree and kind of selectivity, between what his consciousness revealed and what was dramatized through the inner minds of the characters varied. In every instance, this determined the narrative manner, and each story in its own

way evoked the kind of reality Shapiro wished to present. In his best stories, this technique established an interplay between the narrator and the restricted point of view, and while this method effectively provided for the double vision of reality to suit each story's needs, it was the narrator's view that gained our allegiance to evoke the required judgment. Hence, it is that by varying the selection of details filtered through the narrator and the restricted point of view, Shapiro established various arrangements of form, and this in turn yielded new kinds of patterns to evoke different kinds of judgments.

The reader will recall that, in the first pogrom story "Shfoykh khomoskho" [Pour Out Thy Wrath], control of the reader's judgment was achieved through the strong manipulation of time. The moral values of the story were clearly given to the narrator, and there was as yet, no effort made to create linguistic distinctions between his voice and the voices of the characters. Since this is an early story in the writer's canon, one can suspect that he had as yet not perfected his technical skills, but another possibility may have been related to the degree of closeness between the author and the issues of his subject matter. However, one of the most important effects

achieved in this early story was the justification of the need for Jewish revenge. The intentional use of symbolic overtones so loaded the values in the direction of the narrator, that the sharp contrast between the boy's naive hope for the future and the more horrifying "truth" of the past, clearly directed the reader to accept the rightness of this new response.

The same technique, used with less control in "Vayse khala" [White Chalah], allowed for a chronological and seemingly uncaring report of an even more destructive social environment. This time, the narrative tone employed achieved sufficient distance to permit dramatization of Vasil's inner thoughts, and showed Shapiro seeking to understand the evolution of a murderer. Once again, the use of poetic devices and symbolic overtones, plus additional adjustments of pace and timing, asked the reader to side with the values supported by the narrator. In this story, the kind of selectivity used to establish the interplay between what we were told by the narrator and what was revealed from Vasil's point of view, created a balance between the milieu and the character and, most powerfully, laid bare the utter madness inherent in evil. Here, the deft relationship between the two views of reality not only showed that, inherent in massive destruction, must lie the denial of an

earlier assumption of morality, but also that this kind of conclusion can only be countered with heavy ironic despair.

As we moved in the direction of "Gegesene teg" [Eating Days], it became clear that, as Shapiro was farther removed from his European past, he lessened his control over the voice of the narrator. This permitted for experimentation in a new direction, in the direction of interior modes of narration. Perhaps because of the greater distance, or perhaps because his vision softened, "Gegesene teg" could accomplish what the earlier stories could not. This story showed Shapiro connecting his spokesman to the "real" world, and the new use of the technique allowed for a more factual depiction of the process of dissolution in traditional shtetl life. In addition, the narrator was used in the first person. Since the autobiographic overtones lent authenticity to the pain involved in experiencing the difficult break with the past, it showed Shapiro experimenting with an individualized voice questing for self definition. At the same time, however, the narrator's ironic retrospective glance at his own decisions made clear that there was as yet no other viable set of alternatives.

"Doc", though perhaps not as wholly successful as "Gegesene teg" [Eating Days], showed Shapiro departing in the direction of the novel, where characters must be permitted voices of their own, and would suggest that Shapiro never stopped experimenting with his short story form. The creation of Issie Fishler reflected Shapiro's move in this direction and, though his voice was as yet not wholly differentiated from the voice of the narrator, it is on the way to becoming so. This story differed in style from the others and, more than all the rest, underscored the barrenness of individual life in a splintered world.

We can conclude that, as Lamed Shapiro drew away from the immediacy of the past, his challenge to and repudiation of traditional earlier ideals altered accordingly. Interestingly enough, he seemed caught in an irreconcilable crossfire of visions; between estrangement from and disapproval of the past on the one hand, and on the other, attachment and despairing love. Yet, Lamed Shapiro, unlike the older generation of Yiddish writers, does raise his eyes above his shtetl background to look at society at large. And if the harsh brutality he saw around first called for a denunciation of earlier traditional

ideals, it was later undercut by an unwelcome awareness of an irretrievable loss and an unattainable future.

So out of the necessary effort to straddle the border between the past and the present, Lamed Shapiro drew upon his problems as an immigrant, and as a man, to shape his short story forms. His confidence in the Yiddish language as a literary vehicle and the sophisticated techniques he developed through its use, permitted for experimentation with a new kind of subject matter, and brought some of the characteristics of his quest for a modern Yiddish identity into Yiddish prose.

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