

לְשָׁנָה הַבְּאֵה בְּיְרוּשָׁלַיִם

L'Shana Haba'ah B'Yerushalayim

“Next year in Jerusalem”

AMERICAN LITERATURE

(MA programs in Modern Languages and Literatures and Translation Studies 2024/2025)

“לשנה הבאה בירושלים” (L’Shana Haba’ah B’Yerushalayim): The Promised Lands of American Jews.

Part 2: A land promised to others: Israel in Jewish American fiction

The module will focus on the role the state of Israel plays in Jewish American literature of the second half of the 20th century. We will read three novels published between 1947 and 2017, authored by Meyer Levin, Philip Roth, and Nathan Englander, in which the Jewish state is either idealized or (sometimes fiercely) attacked.

Bibliography

1. Meyer Levin, *My Father’s House* (1947)
2. Philip Roth, *The Counterlife* (1986) or *Operation Shylock. A Confession* (1993)
3. Andrew Furman, *Israel Through the Jewish-American Imagination. A Survey of Jewish-American Literature on Israel, 1928-1995*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1997: chapters 1 (“Introduction. Israel, the Foremost Preoccupation of the American Jew”); 2 (“Meyer Levin Against the Grain. A Zionist Writer Takes on America’s Pre-Zionist Zeitgeist”); 7 (“Philip Roth’s Nerve in *The Counterlife* and *Operation Shylock: A Confession*. ‘Jewish Mischief’ and the Post-Colonial Critique”).
4. Paule Levy, “The Text as Homeland: A Reading of Philip Roths *The Counterlife* and *Operation Shylock*, *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, 21, 2002, pp. 61-71.
5. Leona Toker, “Israel”, in Maggie McKinley, ed., *Philip Roth in Context*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2021, pp. 150-159.

TIMELINE

1882-1903

The First **Aliyah** (the immigration of Jews to the Land of Israel or to the State of Israel)

1897

The First **Zionist** Congress in Basel under the aegis of Binyamin Ze'ev Herzl

1901

Jewish National Fund: an organization for purchasing land for Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel

16 May 1916

The **Sykes-Picot Agreement** between France and Britain, which delineated the two powers' Middle Eastern areas of rule in the Ottoman Empire once the First World War had ended

2 November **1917**

The **Balfour Declaration**: a document signed by British foreign minister Lord Arthur James Balfour, which champions a national home for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel

25 April 1920

The San Remo Agreement – that gave **Britain rule over the Land of Israel** after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, and ratified the creation of the national home for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel under the aegis of the British power

1-7 May 1921

Arab riots in Jaffa, Petah Tikva, Rehovot, Hadera, and elsewhere, against the Balfour Declaration

July 7, 1937

The **partition** resolution (Peel Commission) is accepted by the British administration, Ben-Gurion, and the Zionist institutions, and is rejected by the Arabs

1934-1948

Aliyah Bet – “illegal immigration to Israel” – the bringing of Holocaust survivors to the Land of Israel

1936 through 1939

The disorders of the Arab Revolt and suppression by the British

22 March 1945

The establishment of the Arab League with Cairo as its hub

29 November **1947**

Approval of the partition plan by the General Assembly of the United Nations – **Resolution 181**

14 May 1948

Declaration of statehood by David Ben-Gurion, chairman of the Jewish Agency, before the Provisional State Council

15 May – 11 June 11 **1948: 1st Arab-Israeli war**

The regular Arab armies' invasion of the Land of Israel. 6000 Jews were killed during the war

1948 (until 1967)

Jerusalem is divided between Israel and Jordan along the armistice lines: Jordan holds the eastern part of the city, Israel the western and southern parts. Jews are denied access to the Old City and the holy places in contravention of the armistice agreement

1949

Armistice (Rhodes agreements).

Massive aliyah to Israel from Arab states and North Africa, and of displaced Jews from Europe. The Jewish population doubles from 650,000 to 1,300,000. Israel is accepted as the 59th member of the United Nations. Jerusalem is declared the capital of Israel by David Ben-Gurion.

29 October 1956 through 5 November 1956

Sinai Campaign by France, Britain, and Israel against Egypt: **conquest of the Sinai Peninsula**

2 June **1964**

The **PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization)** is founded to represent the Palestinian people and to wage armed struggle against Israel

5 June 1967 through 10 June **1967: 2nd Arab-Israeli war**

The **Six-Day War** between Israel and Arab states: Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq

Summer 1967

The Arab League in Khartoum laid down the “three no’s”: no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with Israel

5-6 September 1972

Massacre of 11 Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics by Palestinian terrorists of the Black September organization

6-24 October **1973: 3rd Arab-Israeli war**

The **Yom Kippur War** between Syria and Egypt and Israel. 2,222 Israelis are killed (Yom Kippur is the holiest day in Judaism, the Day of Atonement, focused on fasting, prayer, and seeking forgiveness for sins before the new year starts)

22 October, 1973

UN Security Council Resolution 338 for a ceasefire in the Yom Kippur War and the launching of negotiations

September **1978**

The **Camp David Accords**

26 March 1979

Signing of the Israeli-Egyptian Peace Treaty

1 April 1982

Completion of Israel’s withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula as stipulated by the peace treaty with Egypt

6 June 1982

The First **Lebanon War**

7-10 October 1985

Palestinian militants from the PLO faction PLF hijacked the Italian cruise ship “Achille Lauro” and they murdered Leon Klinghoffer, a wheelchair-bound American Jewish passenger, and threw his body overboard.

9 December **1987**

First Intifada begins: stone-throwing, strikes, boycotts, and limited armed attack (Intifada is an Arabic word meaning “uprising”; it refers to Palestinian uprisings against Israeli rule)

November **1988**

Yasser Arafat declares Palestinian independence

30 October 1991 and **13 September 1993**

The Madrid Conference → The **Israeli-PLO Declaration of Principles (Oslo I)** and exchange of letters of recognition between the PLO and Israel

4 November 1995

Israeli Prime minister Yitzhak Rabin is assassinated by a Jewish extremist who opposed the Oslo Accords

2000 July

The second Camp David Conference, held by President Clinton with the participation of Barak and Arafat. Ended without results

28 September **2000**

The **Second Intifada** begins (more violent than the first)

April 2002

The beginning of the building of the separation fence to prevent the entry of terrorists from the West Bank

15 August 2005

The disengagement from Gaza and the northern West Bank by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon

12 July through 14 August 2006

The Second **Lebanon War**

27 December 2008 through 18 January 2009

Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip in response to the firing of thousands of rockets from Gaza at Israeli communities

4 May 2011

Reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas in Cairo

8 July 2014

Following an escalation of rocket attacks by Hamas, Israel started an operation in the Gaza Strip, which included a ground incursion aimed at destroying the cross-border tunnels.

7 October **2023**

The **Gaza war** begins between Israel and Hamas-led Palestinian militant groups in the Gaza Strip

1947

UN Partition Plan (Resolution 181)

- Arab State | 45%
- Jewish State | 55%
- Jerusalem under international control

Following the end of WWII, the newly formed United Nations proposed a plan that would grant **55 percent of historic Palestine to a Jewish state and 45 percent to a non-contiguous Arab one.**

This plan was never implemented on the ground.



- Voted For (33)**
- Australia
 - Belgium
 - Bolivia
 - Brazil
 - Byelorussian SSR
 - Canada
 - Costa Rica
 - Czechoslovakia
 - Denmark
 - Dominican Republic
 - Ecuador
 - France
 - Guatemala
 - Haiti
 - Iceland
 - Liberia
 - Luxemburg
 - Netherlands
 - New Zealand
 - Nicaragua
 - Norway
 - Panama
 - Paraguay
 - Peru
 - Philippines
 - Poland
 - Sweden
 - Ukrainian SSR
 - Union of South Africa
 - US
 - USSR
 - Uruguay
 - Venezuela
- Voted Against (13)**
- Afghanistan
 - Cuba
 - Egypt
 - Greece
 - India
 - Iran
 - Iraq
 - Lebanon
 - Pakistan
 - Saudi Arabia
 - Syria
 - Turkey
 - Yemen
- Abstained (10)**
- Argentina
 - Chile
 - China
 - Colombia
 - El Salvador
 - Ethiopia
 - Honduras
 - Mexico
 - United Kingdom
 - Yugoslavia

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ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

Jerusalem - the divided city

West Jerusalem has been Israeli territory since 1948 with Jews forming the majority. East Jerusalem was occupied by Israel in 1967 but Palestinians remain the majority.

WEST JERUSALEM

- Israelis 354,000
- Palestinians 5,000



EAST JERUSALEM

- Israeli settlers 236,600
- Palestinians 370,000



West Jerusalem



Although Israel claims Jerusalem as its undivided capital, the realities for those who live there cannot be more different

East Jerusalem



More than 140,000 Palestinian residents of Jerusalem have been physically separated from the city by a 700km (435 mile) concrete wall, which Israel started building in 2002



Source: Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research (2023)

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1967

Israel occupies Gaza and the West Bank

- Palestinian (under Israeli occupation)
- Israeli
- Egyptian and Syrian land occupied by Israel

During the June 1967 War, Israel occupied all of historic Palestine and expelled a further **300,000 Palestinians** from their homes.

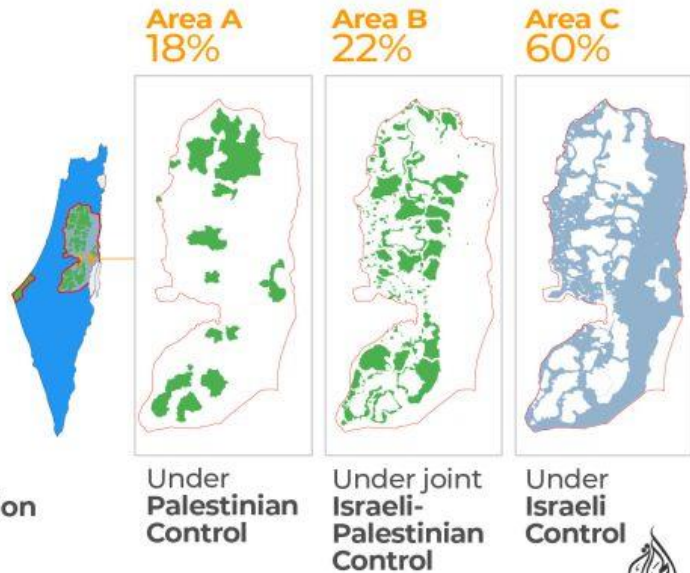


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1993 & 1995 Oslo accords

- Palestinian (under Israeli occupation)
- Israeli
- Area C - (Palestinian under Israeli control)

The occupied West Bank was **divided into three areas** - A, B and C - as part of the Oslo Accords, signed by the **Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)** and Israel.



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ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

Gaza: 16 years of living under blockade

Israel's **land, air and sea blockade** has trapped more than two million people inside the Gaza Strip since 2007. No portion of Gaza's society or economy has been left untouched.

Population	Area	Unemployment rate	Food insecure households
2.3m	365 km ²	45%	64%
One of the most densely populated areas in the world		Among the highest in the world	Especially affecting rural households

Israel has launched five military assaults on Gaza

- 1 **2008-09**
Lasted 23 days
- 2 **2012**
Lasted 8 days
- 3 **2014**
Lasted 50 days
- 4 **2021**
Lasted 11 days
- 5 **2023**
October 7 - ongoing



Source: UN | October 9, 2023

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USA

7,5 million Jews (*but* about 15,000,000 with Jewish ancestry)

Israel

7,2, million Jews

Israel and Jewish American literature

Israel has remained a relatively minor topic in their imaginative writing. [...] while not a favored theme among major writers, Israel has featured prominently in mysteries and detective fiction, suspense thrillers, family sagas, popular historical novels, and comix. These works have contributed to widespread public perceptions. (Naomi Sokoloff, "Israel in the Jewish American Imagination," in Hana Wirth-Nesher, ed., *The Cambridge History of Jewish American Literature*, Cambridge UP, 2016)

I feel myself more hopelessly a foreigner in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and the Holy City of Safad than I do in Rome or Bologna or Florence [...] Israel remains for me, even when I walk its streets, somehow an abstraction, a metaphor from a dull, half-forgotten sermon. (Leslie Fiedler)

Andrew Furman, *Israel Through the Jewish-American Imagination* (1997)

Pre-Zionism: American Jews and Israel before 1947

Zionism: from the founding of the State of Israel to the Six-Day War

Post-Zionism: from the 1960s on, especially in the 1990s (after the first Oslo accord in 1993)

Israel

THROUGH THE

Jewish-American Imagination

A Survey of Jewish-American
Literature on Israel
1928–1995

ANDREW FURMAN

American Jewish affinity for Israeli Jews [...] was based largely (though not wholly) upon a sentimental vision of the heroic Israeli kibbutznik or soldier. After the Holocaust, Jews were eager to embrace the image of the strong and courageous Israeli soldier -- no matter how accurate that image was -- to replace the image of the nebbisheh (weak) Diaspora Jew, the victim of Hitler's Holocaust. (Furman, *Israel Through the Jewish-American Imagination*, p. 11)

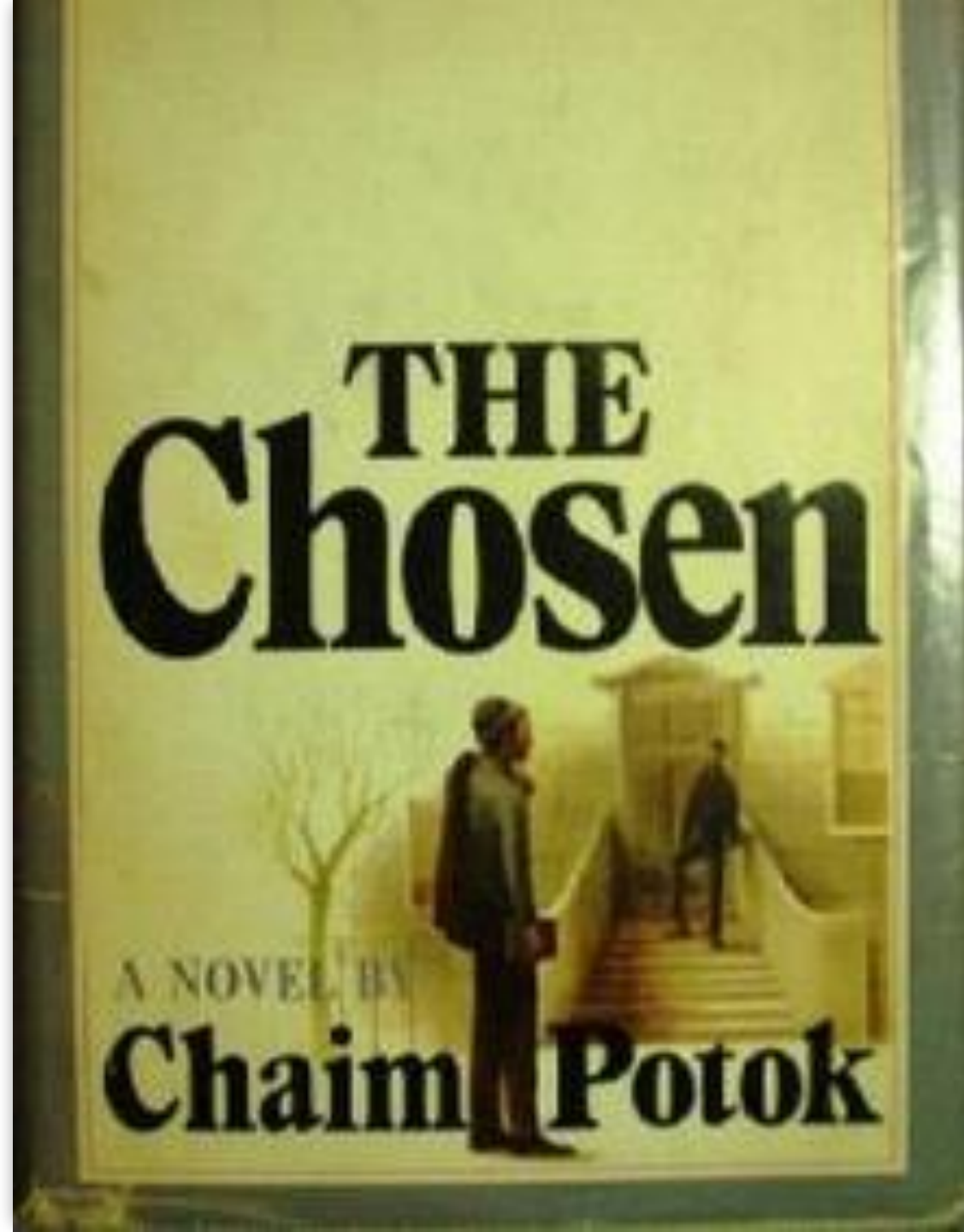
Israel is the only country in the world that refuses to recognize definitive borders. [...] Like the United States of the nineteenth century, the Jewish state believes it has the 'right' to conquer new lands [...] and to treat the peoples who have lived there for more than a thousand years as "redskins." (Samir Amin, "Geopolitica dell'impero," *la rivista del manifesto*, 51, June 2004, p. 26)

In the decades following World War II, a century after Jewish thought first took root in America, [...] the State of Israel gradually came to be seen less as a source of political redemption than as a place of civil turmoil and incessant threats of war. (Susannah Heschel, "Imagining Judaism in America," in Hana Wirth-Nesher and Michael P. Kramer, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature*, Cambridge UP, 2003, p. 47)

“I’m talking about my father. Just don’t talk about a Jewish state anymore. My father takes God and Torah very seriously, Reuven. He would die for them both quite gladly. A secular Jewish state in my father’s eyes is a sacrilege, a violation of the Torah. You touched a raw nerve. Please don’t do it again.”

“In the lunchroom one day, one of the Hasidim accused a member of the Revisionist youth group of being worse than Hitler. Hitler had only succeeded in destroying the Jewish body, he shouted in Yiddish, but the Revisionists were trying to destroy the Jewish soul. There was almost a fistfight, and the two students were kept apart with difficulty by members of their respective sides. The incident left a bitter taste in everyone’s mouth and succeeded only in increasing the tension between the pro-Zionist and anti-Zionist students.”

Chaim Potok, *The Chosen*, 1967 (set in Brooklyn in the 1940s)





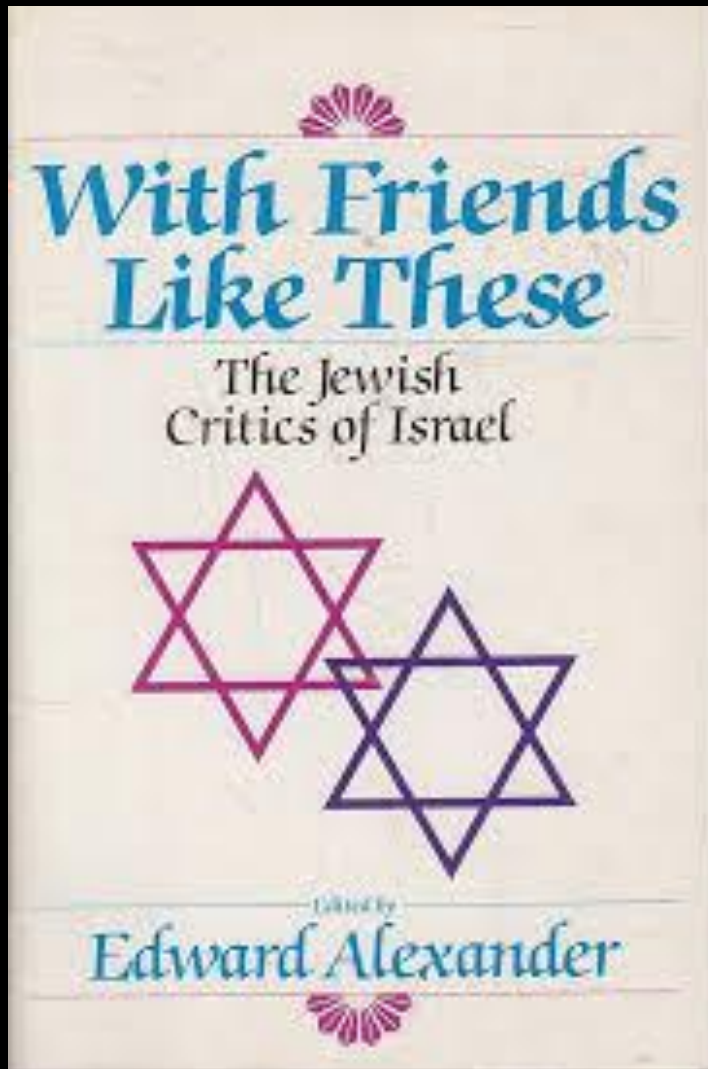
After 1967

“The pioneering and patriotic Israeli served as one model for a new kind of Jew” (Tresa Grauer, “Identity Matter,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature*, p. 271)

Emboldened by Israel’s 1967 victory, American Jews began speaking publicly about the Shoah. By 1973, triumph gave way to disillusionment, as the occupation, Palestinian calls for independence, and the Yom Kippur War shattered Israel’s moral image.

1968: Meir Kahane founded the **Jewish Defense League**, drawing on Black Power to call for assertive Jewish self-defense and dominance, especially over Palestinians. Rejecting liberal, universalist Judaism, he promoted a nationalist, theocratic vision rooted in religious law and biblical borders. His ideas influenced American Jews who later supported West Bank settlements and the rise of Israel’s right-wing Likud party.

A growing number of leftist Jewish-Americans and intellectuals becoming increasingly critical of Israel



Edward Alexander, ed.,
*With Friends Like
These: The Jewish
Critics of Israel*,
S.P.I. Books, 1992

Judith Butler, *Parting
ways: Jewishness and
the critique of Zionism*,
Columbia UP, 2012

PARTING WAYS

*Jewishness
and the
Critique of
Zionism*



JUDITH BUTLER

Meyer Levin (1905-1981)

Born in Chicago, he graduated from the University of Chicago and worked as a journalist and film critic (*Esquire*)

War correspondent in the Spanish Civil War and the World War II

Settled in Israel in 1958

Yehuda (1931)

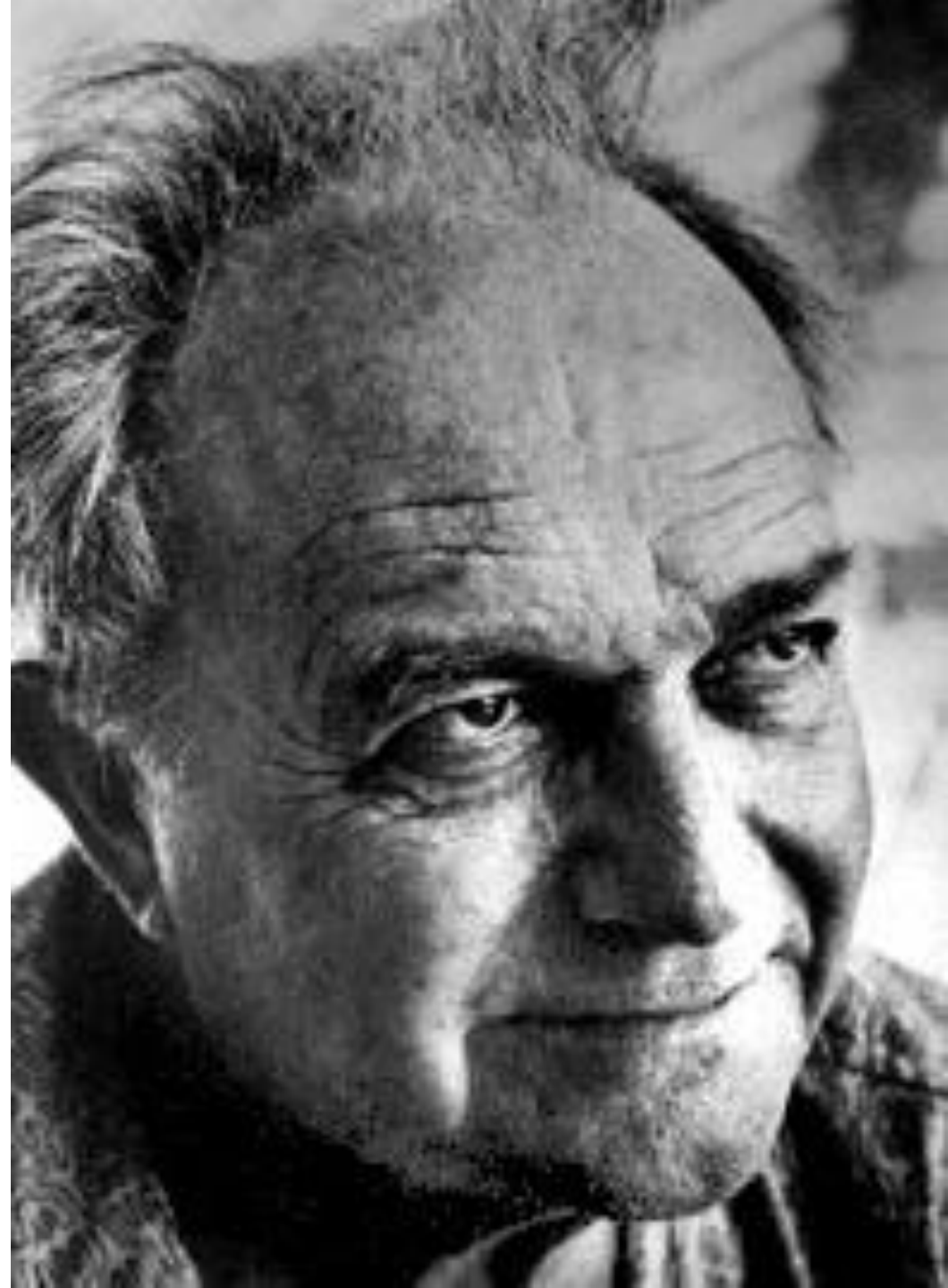
The Old Bunch (1937)

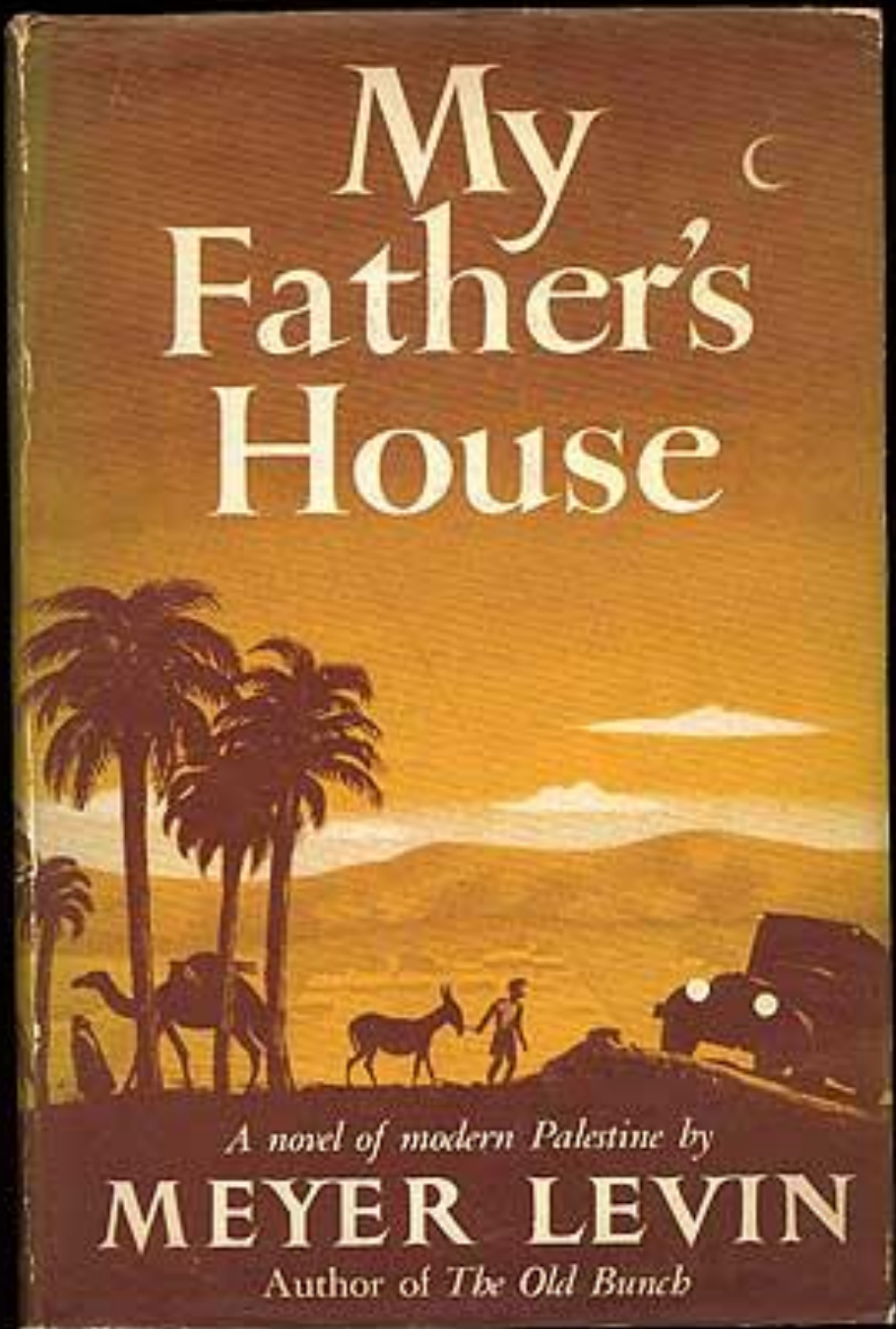
My Father's House (1947)

Compulsion (1956), about the Leopold-Loeb murder case (Chicago, 1924)

Eva (1959), about a Jewish girl's escape from a concentration camp to Israel

The Fanatic (1964) and *The Obsession* (1973): Anne Frank's story and the controversies about the publication of her diary





***My Father's House* (1947)**

Based on the script of the first movie released by the British Mandate for Palestine, **before** the founding of Israel
Novels about Israel and the relocation of European Jews to Israel (e.g. Leon Uris's *Exodus*, 1958)

Similarities with *Call It Sleep*:

- the name of the protagonist
- the ship at the beginning of the novel (Hannah Szenesch: a young Hungarian woman who enlisted in the British army and was parachuted into German occupied territories, imprisoned by the Germans and sentenced to death in 1944)
- the conclusion of the novel

The role of the British: had advocated a Jewish state but prohibited Jewish migrants to reach Palestine (p. 18) in order not to provoke Arab authorities (see bombing of King David Hotel in Jerusalem in 1946 by the Irgun and the Stern Gang)

Characters

David Haalevi: the protagonist, a teenage Holocaust survivor who escapes from Europe and is brought to Palestine. He embodies the trauma of the Holocaust and the hope of rebuilding life in a new land. His journey is emotional and symbolic.

Avram: a Zionist living in Palestine, who tries to help David adjust to his new life and represents the ideological framework of the Zionist dream.

Miriam: a young woman who works at the children's village in Palestine.

Yehuda Haalevi: a man who works near the Dead Sea and whom David thinks is his father.

Chapter One

Next year in Jerusalem

David's father in the camps ("My father told me he would meet me in Palestine" p. 16) → individual, private story, that functions as a metaphor for the nation

Role of the memory: pp. 7-8 and 20. "[...] it was the ancient torpor of Belsen and Buchenwald which they had assumed again" → memory of the mind and memory of the flesh

The land ("Like it is waiting for us in the dark," p. 11)

The Arabs: "You can't trust an Arab" (p. 25)

Chapter Two

The community of Jewish settlers

Reference to the Bible, pp. 36-37: “a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8)

Hindrances at the beginning: the English and Haganah (p. 28)

The rhetoric of the nation: Israel \approx United States (p. 38)

From diaspora’s multicultural Jewry to the emerging nationalistic state (p.31)

The question of language (pp. 40-41 and 44); children who had no chance to learn a language will learn Hebrew (ch. 3, p. 46)

The rise of modern Hebrew as a spoken language is tied to the Zionist movement and the effort to revive Jewish culture in Palestine. **Eliezer Ben-Yehuda**, who moved to Jerusalem from Belarus in 1881 at the age of 23, transformed Hebrew from a liturgical and literary language into the everyday language of Jewish settlers, by adopting words from ancient Hebrew and coining new words. He established the Hebrew Language Council, which later became the Academy of Hebrew Language (1953).

Mendele Moykher Sforim (real name: Sholem Yakov Abramovich), the Russian-Jewish author who modernized written Hebrew.

Chapter Three

Memory and naming

“In a place where they were slaves, Shulamith, bad people took away their names and put numbers on their arms instead of names.”

“Is that why we are giving them new names?” the little girl asked. (p. 56)

David’s father has no name (p. 52)

Memories from the camps (pp. 54) and the survivors’ sense of guilt (p. 55)

People are given new names, mostly from the Bible (pp. 48-51) → implicit contradiction: was not Israel supposed to be a secular state?

Marta/Miriam: “A new name doesn’t change anything” (p. 51) and her refusal to work with children (p. 59)

Miriam was the older sister of Moses (the one who led the Israelites out of Egypt). When baby Moses was placed in a basket on the Nile River, Miriam watched over him (Exodus 2). After the crossing of the Red Sea, Miriam is called a prophetess. Miriam is also the original Hebrew name of **Mary**, the mother of Jesus. In Hebrew it was Miriam (מִרְיָם); in Aramaic, Maryam; in Greek, used in the New Testament, Maria (Μαρία) or Mariam (Μαριάμ).

Chapter Four

The land

The “bed of death” (pp. 61, 67) where Arabs did not want to live (p. 67)

Buying and selling the land (pp. 63-64, 84)

“the place where you want to be when you die” (p. 67)

Arabs never lived there (p. 79)

Miriam

The death of David’s parents (p. 71) and the acceptance of their mortality (p. 69)

Nationalist propaganda: Israel as the nation of hope (p. 81)

Chapter Five

A society of orphans

The novel as a quest (David looking for his father)

Different stories and histories emerge in the children's village (which David mistakes for a concentration camp, p. 101):

- Yaakov, "Schmutz" (p. 103)
- Aryay, Arab pogrom (p. 103)
- Baruch and his role in the crematorium (p. 104).

"This place is only for orphans", Aryay shouted (p. 106).

The role of Miriam (p. 100): there are many other losses besides the ones suffered in the camps

Chapter Six

The land of deception and contradictions

David's escape from the orphanage

The story of Mary and Joseph going away from Betlehem (p. 109)

Tel Aviv: the modern city soldiers had told him about (p. 112) vs. Jerusalem (“a scattering of houses on a stony mountain”, p. 119)

Deception: people lied to him about his family and Israel lied to former prisoners as the promised land (“they kept you out with warboats and tommy guns”, p. 120)

Deception unveiled (to the reader): pp. 127-128.

“My brother's name was Yisroel” (p. 126): David's story and the story of Israel have to be written from scratch

Chapter Seven

David suspects they lied to him (p. 137)

Israel as a modern state: “On the other side of the potash factory there was a settlement, and there was something special to see at this place, Reuven promised. It was more important than historic legends of women turned into **pillars of salt**—though history was important too. In this settlement, he promised, Daavid would see how the salt was soaked out of the soil.” (p. 144)

It’s not the land that matters, but the chemicals you can extract out of it.

“Can people be born again?” (p. 146): reference to the creation of the world

Sarah, Abraham’s wife, who after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah looked back at the city and was turned into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19)

Chapter Eight

Jerusalem

Opposition between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem with regard to tradition: people from Tel Aviv as the enemies of Judaism

David's quest, personal and collective: "Here we have the names in the Torah, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Seth, Noah, and all of our father's fathers. Is this what you seek?" (p. 157)

Purim (פורים) and David's involvement

Asahureus / Xerxes: the Bible and the wandering Jew

David's discovers the truth about his family (p. 165) and passes out

Book of Esther: Esther becomes the Queen of Persia and saves her people from extermination. She had always hidden her Jewish identity and risked her life by revealing it to her husband, King Xerxes/Ahasuerus, and exposing Haman's (the king's advisor) plot to kill the Jews. The king could not revoke his previous decree ordering the Jews' destruction, but he issued a new one that allowed the Jews to defend themselves.

This led to their survival and the establishment of פורים (Purim), a holiday that celebrates the salvation of the people, during which children dress up in costumes and recall the biblical episode.

Chapters Nine and Ten

David's sleep and his rebirth as the new Israeli citizen

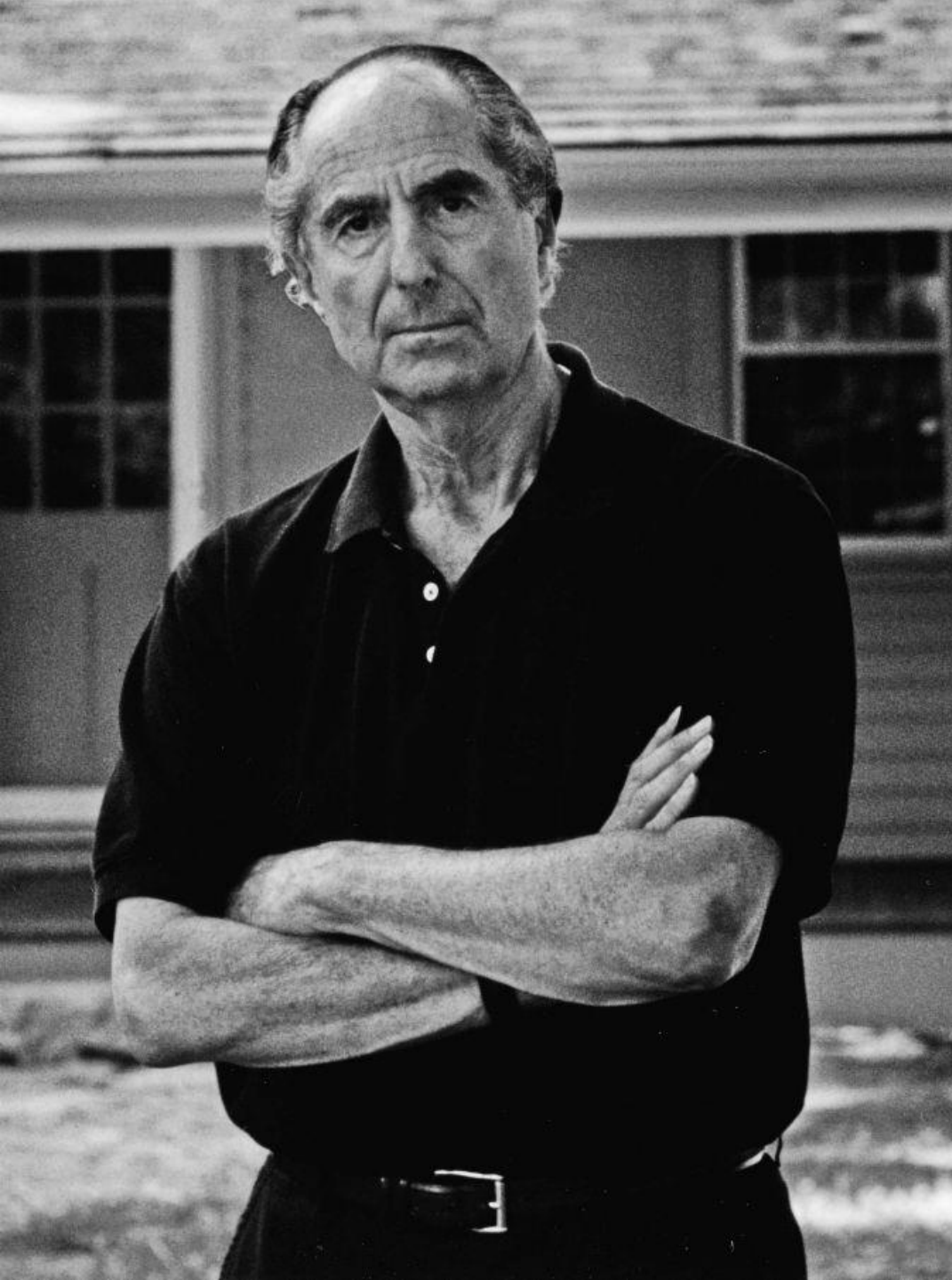
"Sleep, sleep, my darling" (p 172)

"He can grow up like a newborn child" (p. 173)

"He did not seem to comprehend a word of Yiddish or Polish, but only Hebrew"
(p. 181)

The role of Miriam: "she never makes me feel that she is one of us" (p. 182) → "I was in the ward for biological experiment. [...] I can have no more children (p. 176).

David and Israel: a nation with many fathers and no mother



Philip Roth (1933-2018)

1933. Born on March 19 in Newark to Hermann Roth, an agent with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, and Bess Finkel Roth. The Roths live in the Weequahic, a lower-middle-class neighborhood.

1955. Receives MA, University of Chicago.

1956. Hospitalized for two months due to spinal injury. Receives honorable discharge. Returns to University of Chicago to enroll in Ph.D. program but quits after one semester. Continues as an instructor teaching freshman composition.

1963. Visits Israel.

1965. Teaches comparative literature at University of Pennsylvania. Does this intermittently for ten years.

1966. Protests Vietnam War.

1969. *Portnoy's Complaint*: the novel causes a sensation and becomes bestseller.

1979. Publishes his first Nathan Zuckerman novel, *The Ghost Writer*.

2005. Roth is the third living American author to be included in the Library of America.

2018. Dies in New York on May 22.

Zuckerman novels

Zuckerman Bound

- *The Ghost Writer* (1979)
- *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981)
- *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983)
- *The Prague Orgy* (1985)

***The Counterlife* (1986)**

***American Pastoral* (1997)**

I Married a Communist (1998)

The Human Stain (2000)

Exit Ghost (2007)

Roth novels

***Operation Shylock: A Confession* (1993)**

The Plot Against America (2004)

Kepesh novels

The Breast (1972)

The Professor of Desire (1977)

The Dying Animal (2001)

Nemesis novels

Everyman (2006)

Indignation (2008)

The Humbling (2009)

Nemesis (2010)

Fiction with other protagonists

Goodbye, Columbus and Five Short Stories (1959)

When She Was Good (1967)

***Portnoy's Complaint* (1969)**

The Great American Novel (1973)

My Life as a Man (1974)

Sabbath's Theater (1995)

PHILIP ROTH OPERATION SHYLOCK A CONFESSION

Operation Shylock (1993)

Philip Roth, the protagonist (real)

Claire, his wife (real)

Moishe Pipik, his Doppelgänger, claims to be a former private detective from the Midwest, specializing in missing persons cases

Apter, Roth's cousin living in Israel

Aharon Applefeld, Israeli writer (real)

John Demjanjuk / Ivan the Terrible of Treblinka (real)

Wanda Jane "Jinx" Possesski, Pipik's lover (former nurse, former antisemite)

Smilesburger, a retired New York jeweler who gives Roth a check for \$1 million to support Diasporism. He pleads with Roth to say that the work is fiction or to remove the chapter about his intelligence mission

George Ziad, an Arab friend of Roth from the mid-1950's, when they were in college together

David Supposnik, an Israeli secret policeman disguised as an antiquarian book dealer

Chumak, a lawyer who works in Demjanjuk's defense

Operation Shylock as a postmodern novel

Modernity	Postmodernism
Belief in objective truth	Skepticism about truth
Progress through reason	Irony and distrust of progress
Universal narratives	Fragmentation, pastiche
Structure and order	Chaos, playfulness

Postmodern Themes

- Incredulity toward metanarratives → Lyotard
- Deconstruction of meaning → Derrida
- Power/knowledge dynamics → Foucault
- Cultural logic of capitalism → Jameson

Jean-François Lyotard

The Postmodern Condition (1979)

Key idea: **"Incredulity toward metanarratives"**

Metanarratives = big stories (e.g., science, religion, progress)

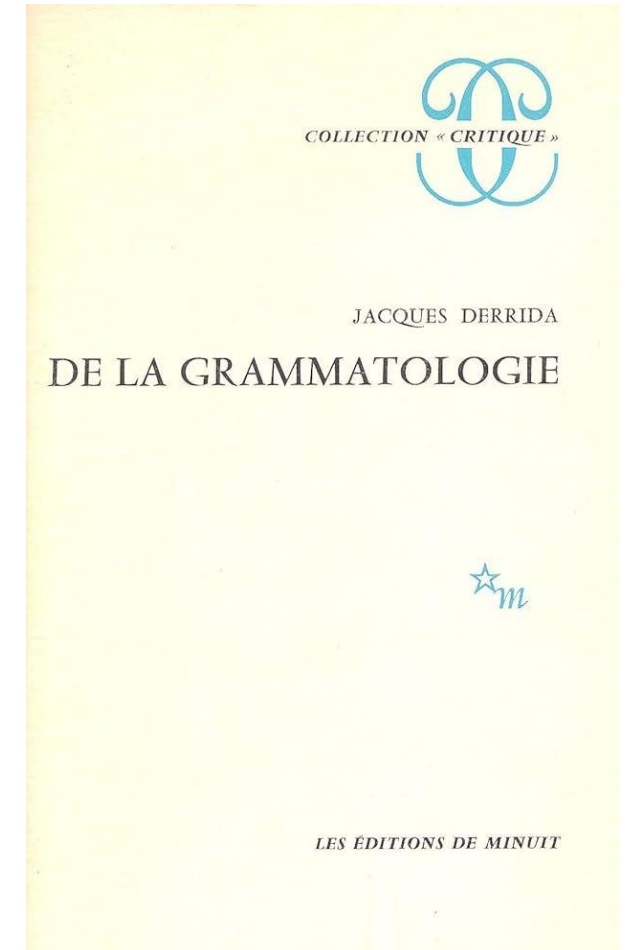
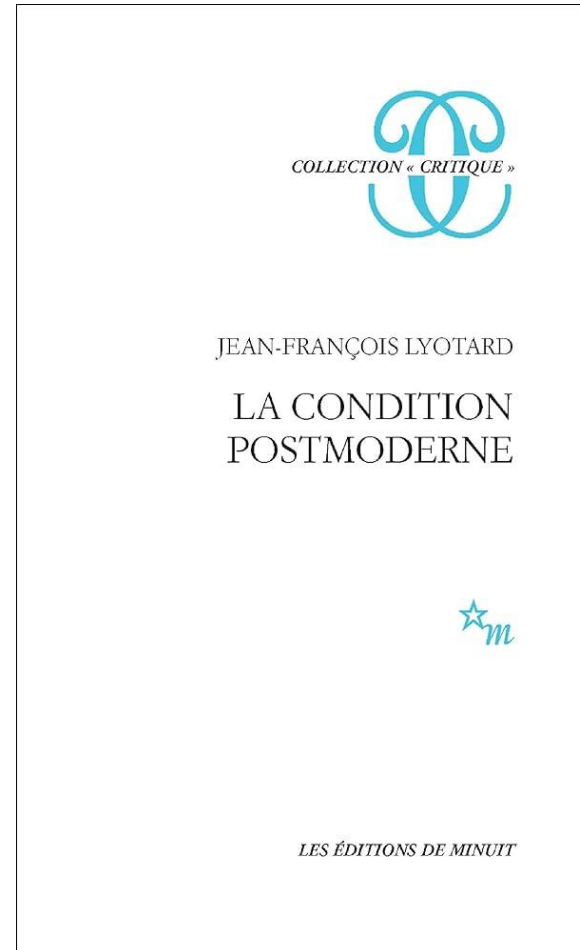
Postmodernism = suspicion of these stories

Jacques Derrida

Developed **deconstruction**: meaning is unstable

"There is nothing outside the text"

Challenges the idea of a single, fixed interpretation



Michel Foucault

Power and knowledge are intertwined

Institutions (schools, prisons, hospitals) shape knowledge

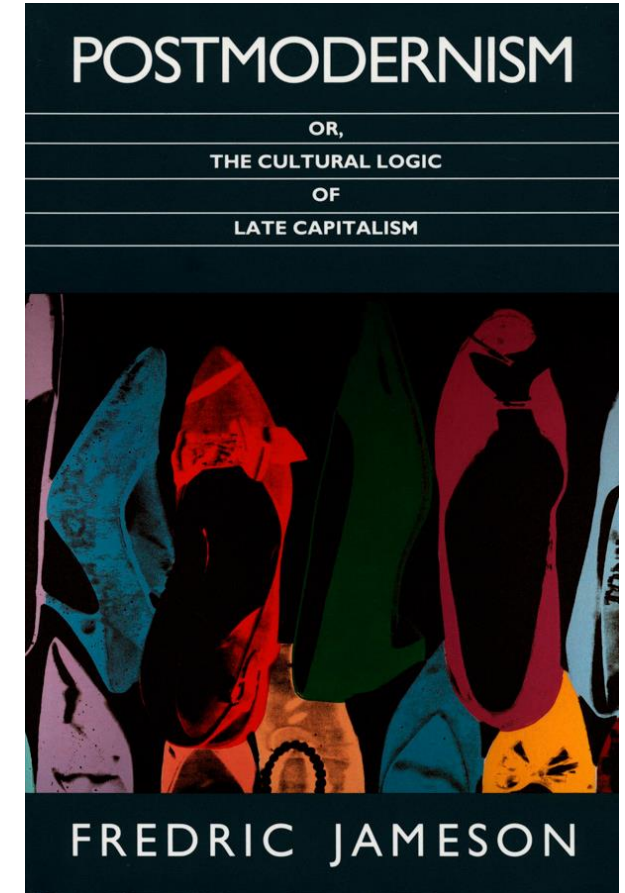
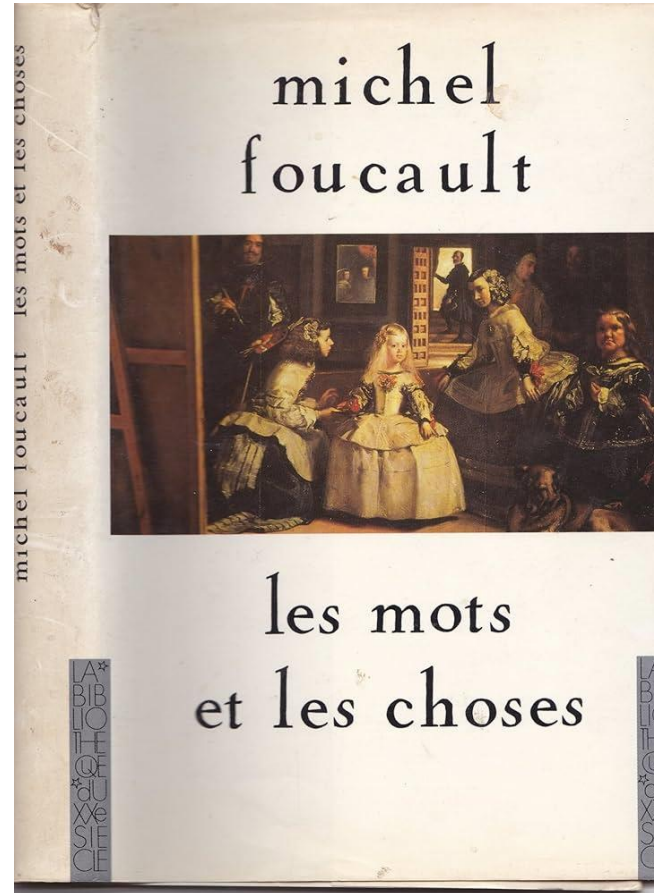
Truth is a product of discourse, not neutral

Fredric Jameson

Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism

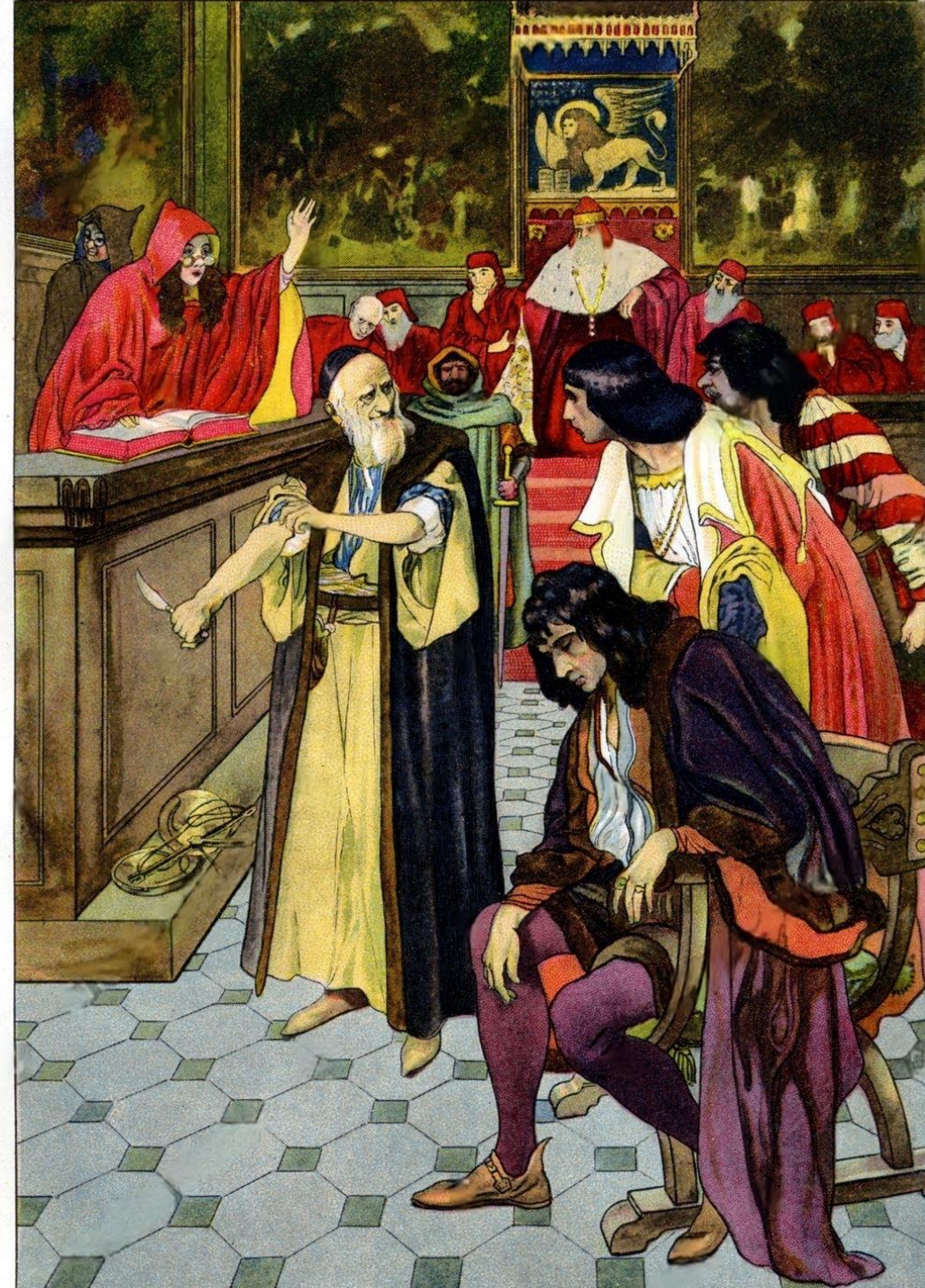
Argues postmodernism reflects our consumer society

Culture = commodified, surface-level, nostalgic



William Shakespeare
The Merchant of Venice
act 3, scene 1, vv. 1292-1307

Shylock: [...] I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villany you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.



Diasporism: “Diasporism plans to rebuild *everything*, not in an alien and menacing Middle East but in those very lands where everything once flourished, while, at the same time, it seeks to avert the catastrophe of a second Holocaust brought about by the exhaustion of Zionism as a political and ideological force. Zionism undertook to restore Jewish life and the Hebrew language to a place where neither had existed with any real vitality for nearly two millennia.” (p. 44)

John Demjanjuk was a Ukrainian former Nazi guard whose trial took place in Israel in 1986. He was accused of being **Ivan the Terrible**, a brutal guard at the Treblinka extermination camp during World War II. Extradited from the United States, Demjanjuk stood trial in Jerusalem, where survivor testimonies played a key role. In 1988, he was sentenced to death, but new evidence later suggested mistaken identity. In 1993, the Israeli Supreme Court overturned the conviction and he was released.

Solidarność (p. 31), Polish for “Solidarity”, was a Polish trade union and social movement that emerged in 1980 and played a crucial role in the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. It was founded in August 1980 by Lech Wałęsa, an electrician and activist who later became President of Poland. Thanks to the Gdańsk Agreement of August 31, 1980, the government agreed to some of the workers’ demands, including the right to form independent trade unions.

King David Hotel (see p . 19): the **King David Hotel bombing** occurred on July 22, 1946. The Irgun, a Zionist paramilitary group, bombed the hotel, at the time the British administrative headquarters, killing 91 people.

In 1985, **Leon Klinghoffer** (p. 279), a disabled American Jew, was murdered by Palestinian hijackers during the hijacking of the cruise ship Achille Lauro. The terrorists, members of the PLO, shot him and threw his body overboard in his wheelchair to pressure Israel for prisoner releases. (*see below*)

Leon Klinghoffer was a 69-year-old retired appliance manufacturer from New York City. He was wheelchair-bound due to complications from two strokes. In October 1985, he and his wife Marilyn were celebrating their 36th wedding anniversary aboard the **Achille Lauro**, an Italian cruise ship.

On **October 7, 1985**, the Achille Lauro was hijacked by **four Palestinian gunmen** from the **Palestine Liberation Front (PLF)**, a splinter group of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), while off the coast of Egypt. The hijackers demanded the release of 50 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. The ship's passengers and crew were taken hostage.

When their demands were not met, the hijackers singled out Leon Klinghoffer, possibly because he was American and Jewish, and **murdered him in cold blood**, shooting him in the head and chest. They then threw his body and wheelchair overboard.

The hijacking ended the next day after negotiations between the hijackers and Egyptian authorities. The attackers were promised safe passage out of Egypt but were intercepted by U.S. fighter jets that forced their plane to land in Italy. Legal and political complexities ensued regarding extradition and prosecution.

Leon Klinghoffer's death sparked **international outrage**, particularly in the United States. His murder highlighted the global threat of terrorism and became a rallying point for calls to combat extremist violence.

His widow, Marilyn Klinghoffer, became a vocal advocate against terrorism before passing away in 1986.

In 1991, composer **John Adams** and librettist **Alice Goodman** created an opera titled *The Death of Klinghoffer*, which stirred controversy for its portrayal of the hijackers and has been criticized for allegedly humanizing terrorists.

The **Klinghoffer daughters**, Lisa and Ilsa, have worked to preserve their father's memory and have spoken out strongly against depictions they feel equate victim and terrorist.

A world of Dopplegänger: the Double /the Doubles

Pipik (p. 69)

Philip Roth / Moishe Pipik

John Demjanjuk / Ivan the Terrible of Treblinka:
the **banality of evil** (p. 50 and 60-61)

Freud / Jung: **synchronicity** (p. 79) →

Paul Bunyan / Moishe Pipik (p. 117)

Yet, “history is what hurts”:
survivors from the camps: p. 67

Synchronicity, according to Carl Gustav Jung, is the meaningful coincidence of two or more events where something other than chance is involved. These events are not linked by direct causality but are connected through meaning.

1.Acausal Connection:

Synchronicity describes events that are not causally related but occur together in a meaningful way. For Jung, this challenges the traditional scientific view that everything must have a cause.

2.Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious:

Jung believed that synchronicities often involve archetypal patterns from the collective unconscious, the shared psychological heritage of humanity. These deeper patterns shape the meaning we perceive in coincidental events.

3.Psyche and Matter Are Interconnected:

Jung proposed that the inner world (psyche) and the outer world (matter) can reflect one another.

Jung: an archetype is a universal, primal symbol or image that derives from the collective unconscious, a part of the unconscious mind shared among all humans, containing inherited elements of human experience. Archetypes are forms without content: they are innate potentialities that structure how we perceive and respond to the world, which become filled with personal or cultural content through experience. Here are some of the most important archetypes: the Hero (courage, transformation, and sacrifice), the Great Mother (nurturing and/or destructive), the Wise Old Man / Woman (guidance, wisdom, and insight), the Trickster (a mischievous or subversive figure who disrupts order), the Child (potential, new beginnings, innocence, or vulnerability), the Maiden (purity, innocence, or desire).

Where is Shylock?

The ghost of Jewishness haunting the lives of the protagonists:

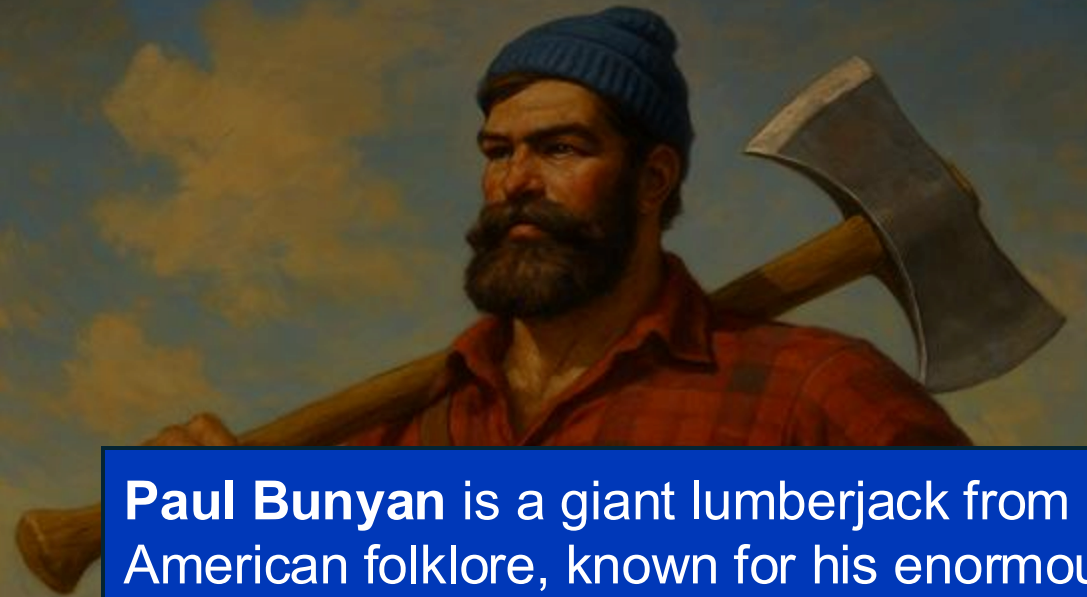
“I owed my transformation—my deformation—not to any pharmaceutical agent but to something concealed, obscured, masked, suppressed, or maybe simply uncreated in me until I was fifty-four but as much me and mine as my prose style, my childhood, or my intestines” (p. 27).

“We came in contact with archaic mythical forces, a kind of dark subconscious the meaning of which we did not know, nor do we know it to this day.” (p. 84)





Fagin is the antagonist in Charles Dickens's 1838 novel *Oliver Twist*. Dickens wrote that he had made Fagin Jewish because "it unfortunately was true, of the time to which the story refers, that the class of criminal almost invariably was a Jew".



Paul Bunyan is a giant lumberjack from American folklore, known for his enormous size and strength. He's often accompanied by his giant blue ox, **Babe**. Together, they perform legendary feats like shaping landscapes and clearing vast forests. His stories originated from 19th-century logging camps and were later popularized in early 20th-century print. Paul Bunyan symbolizes the spirit of American frontier life—big, bold, and exaggerated.



Form postmodernism to distopia

Kafka: horrors against Jews and
“transfigurations concocted by Frank
Kafka” (p. 29) → reality as more
monstrous than imagination (p. 56)

Diasporism: pp. 18, 31-34, 41-44, 158,
160



Hannah Arendt

(Jewish American philosopher, 1906-1975)

Eichmann in Jerusalem (1963) is a report on the 1961 trial of Nazi official Adolf Eichmann, in which Arendt argues that Eichmann was not a fanatic but a thoughtless bureaucrat, leading her to develop the concept of “**the banality of evil**” — the idea that ordinary people can commit atrocities by conforming to authority and norms without critical reflection. Arendt’s central theme is that great evil can be committed not only by fanatics or sociopaths, but by ordinary individuals who fail to think critically about their actions. In Eichmann’s case, she observed a man who spoke in clichés, followed orders, and prioritized career advancement over moral responsibility. He did not appear driven by hatred or ideology but by a disturbing obedience to authority and a refusal to think for himself. This led Arendt to warn that such “thoughtlessness” can make people dangerously complicit in systems of oppression, even without overt malicious intent.



pp. 103-106: recap

Who is Pipik? What is Pipik?

“What’s so hilarious?” asked Aharon, smiling at my laughter. “His mischief or yours? That he pretends to be you or that you now pretend to be him?”

[...]

“Aharon, who is this man?” I asked, and waited and waited for the laughter to subside. “What is he?” I went on when I could speak again. “He gives off none of the aura of a real person, none of the coherence of a real person. Or even the incoherence of a real person. Oh, it’s all plenty incoherent, but incoherent in some wholly artificial way: he emanates the aura of something absolutely spurious, almost the way that Nixon did. He didn’t even strike me as Jewish—that seemed as false as everything else and that’s supposed to be at the heart of it all. It isn’t just that what he calls by my name has no connection to me; it doesn’t seem to have any to him, either. A mismade artifact. No, even that puts it too positively.” “A vacuum,” said Aharon. (pp. 106-107)

Israel as the double: *Operation Shylock* as a spy story

Smilesburger knows that George Ziad, himself a Palestinian agent, had after his harangue against Israel asked his old friend Roth to fly in secret to Athens. There he is supposed to meet with the exiled Yasir Arafat and to speak at the same time with a cadre of American Jews who, in an awful extension of the Jewish appetite for justice, are funding Palestinian terrorism, even keeping the PLO's accounts. Smilesburger asks Roth to be a double agent, to go to Athens as Ziad wishes, but to report back to the Mossad, not so much about the PLO as about its Jewish supporters—a group that Smilesburger himself only half believes in, wondering whether it is not just a hallucination of Israeli paranoia. (The code name for the mission will be “Operation Shylock”; the password is “Three thousand ducats.”)

Kenneth Gross, *Shylock Is Shakespeare*, University of Chicago Press, 2006, p. 168

The postmodern final twist: what is *Operation Shylock*?

Smilesburger as Shylock

Why do you persist in maintaining that you undertook this operation as a writer only, when in your heart you know as well as I now do, having only recently enjoyed all your books, that you undertook and carried it out as a loyal Jew? Why are you so determined to deny the Jewish patriotism, you in whom I realize, from your writings, the Jew is lodged like nothing else except, perhaps, for the male libido? (p. 388)

Jewishness is the problem they have set for you—without the Jews driving you crazy with that problem there would be no writer at all. Show some gratitude. You're almost sixty—best to give while your hand is still warm. I remind you that tithing was once a widespread custom among the Jews as well as the Christians. One tenth of their earnings to support their religion. Can you not cede to the Jews, who have given you everything, one eleventh of this book? A mere one fiftieth, probably, of one percent of all the pages you have ever published, thanks to them? Cede to them chapter 11 and then go overboard and, whether it is true or not, call what remains a work of art. When the newspapers ask, tell them, 'Smilesburger? That blabbering cripple with the comical accent an Israeli intelligence officer? Figment of my fecund imagination. Moishe Pipik? Wanda Jane? Fooled you again. Could such walking dreams as those two have possibly crossed anyone's path? Hallucinatory projections, pure delirium—that's the book's whole point.' Say something to them along these lines and you will save yourself a lot of tsuras. I leave the exact wording to you." (p. 388)

I could even envision *Operation Shylock*, misleadingly presented as a novel, being understood by an ingenious few as a chronicle of the Halcion hallucination that, momentarily, even I, during one of the more astounding episodes in Jerusalem, almost supposed it might be. (p. 361)

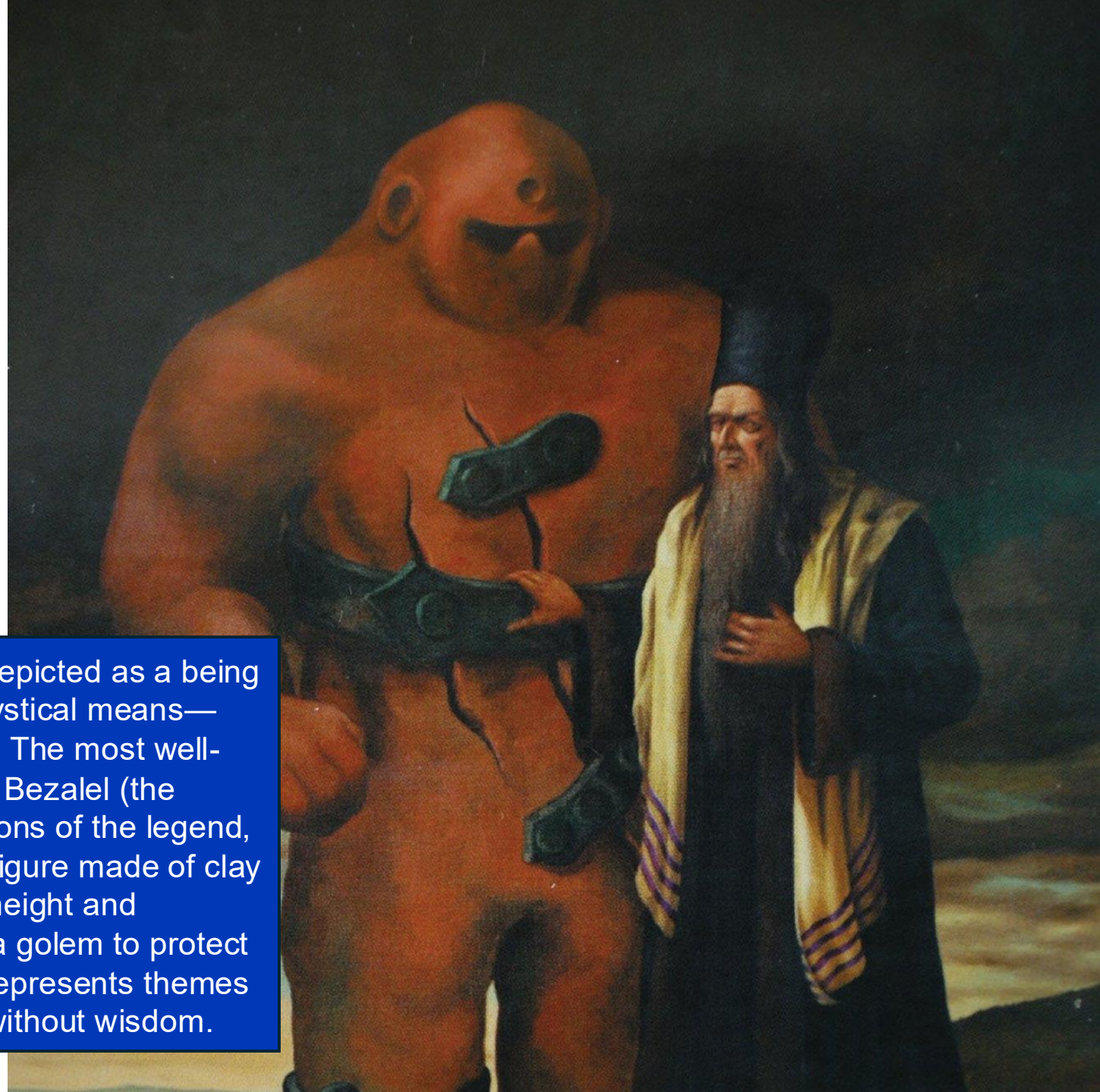
This is not a report of what happened, because, very simply, you haven't the slightest idea of what happened. (p. 390)

“I ought to recognize this thing for what it is and publish *Operation Shylock* as—as what? Subtitled ‘A Fable’?” (p. 391)

Jewish folklore as a key to read *Operation Shylock*

“Our final solution to the Ukrainian Christianity problem. Not Zionism, not Diasporism, but Gigantism -- Golemism” (p.306)

The Golem is a figure from Jewish folklore, typically depicted as a being made from clay or mud and brought to life through mystical means—usually involving Hebrew incantations or sacred texts. The most well-known golem legend involves Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel (the Maharal of Prague) in the 16th century. In many versions of the legend, the golem is depicted as a giant—a large, humanoid figure made of clay or earth, often towering over normal humans in both height and strength. According to the legend, the Rabbi created a golem to protect the Jewish community from persecution. The golem represents themes of protection, artificial life, and the dangers of power without wisdom.



Leon Klinghoffer as the opposite of Ivan the Terrible of Treblinka

As I would learn by the time he was done with me, two thousand words countenancing Kinghoffer's humanity was the *least* the situation demanded.

The terrific ordinariness of these entries. The very reasonable ordinariness of K. A wife he's proud of. Friends he loves to be with. A little money in his pocket to take a cruise. To do what he wants to do in his own artless way. The very embodiment, these diaries, of Jewish "normalization."

An ordinary person who purely by accident gets caught in the historical struggle. A life annotated by history in the last place you expect history to intervene. On a cruise, which is out of history in every way. (pp. 327-328)

The banality of good





Would Jews without enemies be just as boring as everybody else? These diaries suggest as much. What makes extraordinary all the harmless banality is the bullet in the head.

Without the Gestapo and the PLO, these two Jewish writers (A.F. and L.K.) would be unpublished and unknown; without the Gestapo and the PLO any number of Jewish writers would be, if not necessarily unknown, completely unlike the writers they are.

In idiom, interests, mental rhythms, diaries like K.'s and A.F.'s confirm the same glaring pathos: one, that Jews are ordinary; two, that they are denied ordinary lives. Ordinariness, blessed, humdrum, dazzling ordinariness, it's there in every observation, every sentiment, every thought. The center of the Jewish dream, what feeds the fervor both of Zionism and Diasporism: the way Jews would be people if they could forget they were Jews. (pp. 328-329)

The Counterlife

A NOVEL

Philip Roth

The Counterlife (1986)

Nathan Zuckerman, a Jewish writer based on the author. The supposed author of the novel as well as a character.

Henry Zuckerman, Nathan's 39-year-old brother, a dentist. In ch. 1 he is impotent as a side effect of drugs he takes for a coronary condition

Wendy, Henry's assistant; they have an affair

Maria, a 27-year-old Englishwoman. In ch. 1 she has an affair with Henry and then returns to her home in Switzerland. In ch. 2 she has an affair with Nathan after they have met in New York City

Shuki Elchanan, a friend of Nathan. They met on Nathan's previous trip to Israel, in 1960.

Mordecai Lippman, an Israeli settler who fought in the 1967 Six-Day War. Lippman hates Shuki Elchanan

Jimmy Ben-Joseph, a young Israeli who dreams of being a baseball player. He meets Nathan in Israel, at the Wailing Wall, and follows Nathan onto the plane as Nathan leaves the country. He tells Nathan that he intends to hijack the plane

**“the kind of stories that people turn life into,
the kind of lives that people turn stories into.” (p. 115)**

- 1. Basel**
- 2. Judea**
- 3. Aloft**
- 4. Gloucestershire**
- 5. Christendom**

1. Basel

The beginning and the end of Zionism

Henry and Nathan Zuckerman

Carol / Wendy / Maria

Henry could never have imagined that on the eve of her return to Basel ten months later, she would be saying to him, “I never thought I could love two men.” (p. 10)

Funeral Impotence vs. Death

Conclusion: Israel (pp. 42-44) and Maria, the non-Jew who reminded Henry that he was a Jew

The First Zionist Congress was held in **Basel**, Switzerland, in **1897**, and was organized by Theodor Herzl, the father of modern political Zionism. It brought together over 200 delegates from around the world to discuss the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The congress marked the formal beginning of the Zionist movement, adopting the Basel Program, which set out the goal of creating a “publicly and legally assured home for the Jewish people.” It also led to the founding of the World Zionist Organization.

2. Judea

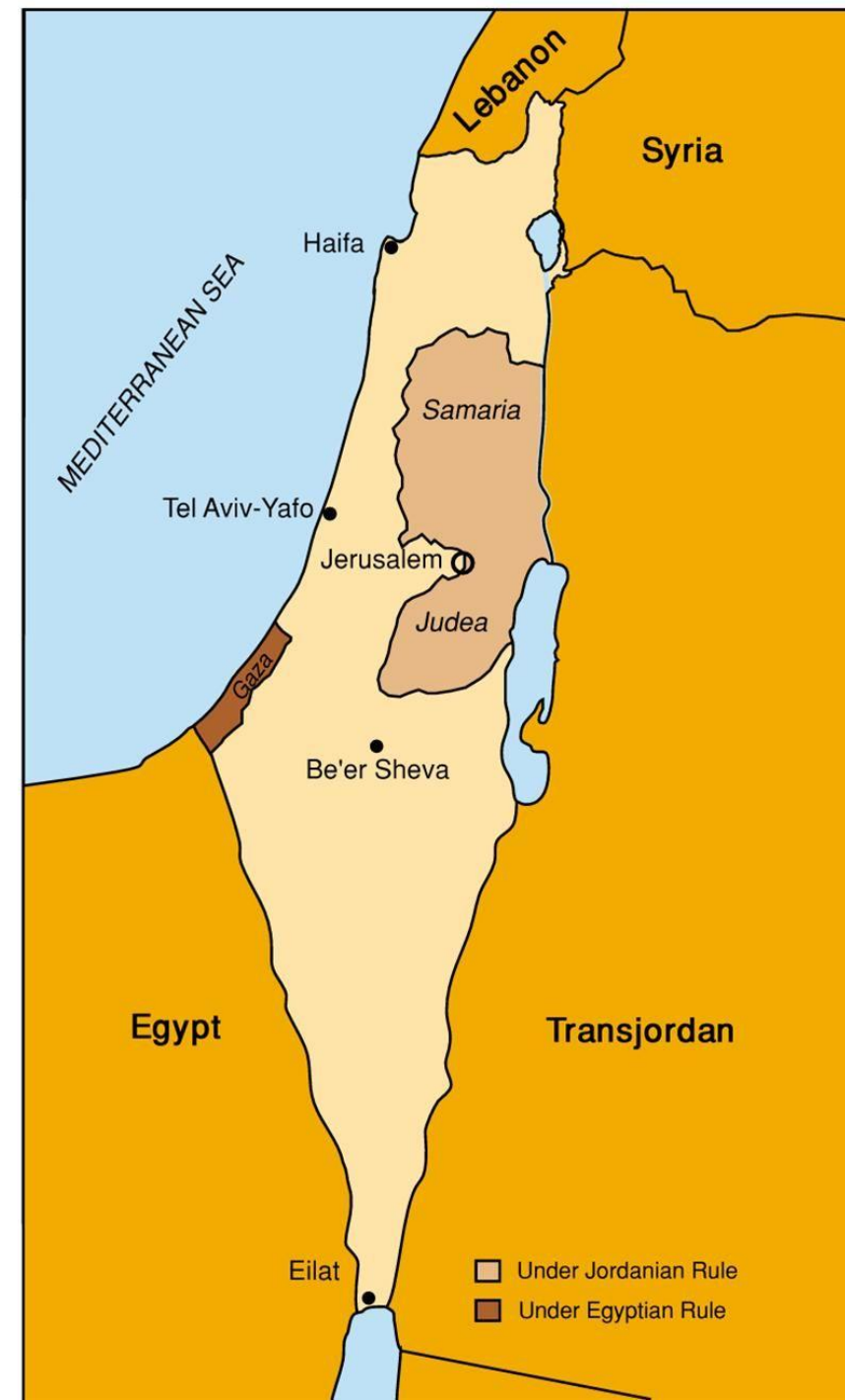
Henry the impotent vs. Henry the pioneer

p. 57: America vs. Israel

In Tel Aviv with Ben Gurion

Henry/Hanoch: “I have never been *anything*, the way that I am this Jew. [...] I am not *just* a Jew, I’m not *also* a Jew—I’m a Jew as deep as those Jews. Everything else *is* nothing. [...] The fact that that is the root of my life!”

p. 68: “The extremes are too great for a country so small.”



And nobody asked about Israel. Either Maria hadn't mentioned my being there or they weren't interested. And probably just as well: I wasn't sure how much Agor ideology I could manage to get across to Mrs. Freshfield. To Maria, however, I'd talked all afternoon about my trip. "Your journey," she'd called it, after hearing about Lippman and reading my letter to Henry, "to the Jewish heart of darkness." A good description, that, of my eastward progress and I delineated it further in my notes—from the Tel Aviv café and the acid dolefulness of disheartened Shuki, inland to the Jerusalem Wailing Wall and my prickly intermingling there with the pious Jews, and then on to the desert hills, **the plunge into the heart, if not of darkness, of demonic Jewish ardor**. The militant zealotry of Henry's settlement didn't, to my mind, make their obdurate leader the Kurtz of Judea, however; the book suggested to me by the settlers' fanatical pursuit of God-promised deliverance was **a Jewish *Moby-Dick*, with Lippman as the Zionist Ahab**. My brother, without realizing, could well have signed onto a ship destined for destruction, and there was nothing to be done about it, certainly not by me. (pp. 267-268)

David Ben-Gurion (1886–1973) was one of the founding fathers of the State of Israel and served as its first Prime Minister and Minister of Defense. He was one of the most important Zionist leaders of the 20th century. Born in Poland (then part of the Russian Empire) as David Grün, he emigrated to Ottoman Palestine in 1906 as part of the Second Aliyah (Jewish immigration). He became deeply involved in labor Zionism and became a leading figure in the Jewish Agency, the governing body of the Jewish community under British rule. On May 14, 1948, he proclaimed the independence of the State of Israel and became its first Prime Minister.



Mordecai Lippmann (p. 118)

Like Ahab: “Then there was the leg, mangled during the ‘67 war when, as a paratroop commander, he’d lost two-thirds of his company in the big battle to break into Jordanian Jerusalem” (p. 118)

The “*Judenrein* United States” and African Americans as the new Hitler (pp. 128-129)

Ahab was a king of Israel mentioned in the Bible. He married **Jezebel**, a Phoenician princess who promoted the worship of Baal, a pagan deity. Idolatry and injustice flourished in the kingdom. Ahab’s story is closely tied to the unjust seizure of Naboth’s vineyard (1 Kings 21). Naboth owned a vineyard near King Ahab’s palace. Ahab wanted to buy the vineyard to use it as a garden, but Naboth refused. Ahab became angry, and his wife Jezebel plotted to have Naboth falsely accused of blasphemy and treason. Naboth was stoned to death, and Ahab took possession of the vineyard. This act of injustice angered God, and the prophet Elijah confronted Ahab, who eventually died in battle, fulfilling a prophecy about his downfall.

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) is a novella that explores European colonialism in Africa through the journey of Marlow, a sailor who travels up the Congo River to find the ivory trader Kurtz. The story exposes the cruelty and moral decay of colonial rule, and it also critiques the hypocrisy of European imperialism, which claimed to bring "civilization" but often brought destruction. Kurtz, once an idealist, descended into madness and brutality in the Congo, embodying the corruption and savagery that European colonialism unleashed. Through final words – "**The horror! The horror!**" – he recognizes his own atrocities, the emptiness of imperial ideals, and the terrifying truth about human nature when stripped of law and conscience.



Israeli Jews vs. American Jews

This is the *homeland* of Jewish abnormality. Worse: **now we are the dependent Jews, on your money, your lobby, on our big allowance from Uncle Sam, while you are the Jews living interesting lives, comfortable lives, without apology, without shame, and perfectly *independent*.** As for the condemnation of Israel in London W11, it may upset your lovely wife, but, really, it shouldn't bother you out there. Left-wing virtue-hounds are nothing new. Feeling morally superior to Iraqis and Syrians isn't really much fun, so let them feel superior to the Jews, if that's all it takes to make life beautiful. Frankly I think the English distaste for Jews is nine-tenths snobbery anyway. The fact remains that in the Diaspora a Jew like you lives securely, without real fear of persecution or violence, while we are living just the kind of imperiled Jewish existence that we came here to replace. Whenever I meet you American-Jewish intellectuals with your non-Jewish wives and your good Jewish brains, well-bred, smooth, soft-spoken men, educated men who know how to order in a good restaurant, and to appreciate good wine, and to listen courteously to another point of view, I think exactly that: we are the excitable, ghettoized, jittery little Jews of the Diaspora, and you are the Jews with all the confidence and cultivation that comes of feeling at home where you are." (pp. 77-78)

“Of course. Henry must find it very romantic,” Shuki said. “The American Jews get a big thrill from the guns. They see Jews walking around with guns and they think they’re in paradise. Reasonable people with a civilized repugnance for violence and blood, they come on tour from America, and they see the guns and they see the beards, and they take leave of their senses. **The beards to remind them of saintly Yiddish weakness and the guns to reassure them of heroic Hebrew force. Jews ignorant of history, Hebrew, Bible, ignorant of Islam and the Middle East, they see the guns and they see the beards,** and out of them flows every sentimental emotion that wish fulfillment can produce. A regular pudding of emotions. ‘The fantasies about this place make me sick. And what about the beards? Is your brother as thrilled by the religion as by the explosives? These settlers, you know, are our great believing messianic Jews. **The Bible is their bible** — these idiots take it seriously. I tell you, all the madness of the human race is in the sanctification of that book. Everything going wrong with this country is in the first five books of the Old ‘Testament. Smite the enemy, sacrifice your son, the desert is yours and nobody else’s all the way to the Euphrates. A body count of dead Philistines on every other page—that’s the wisdom of their wonderful Torah. If you’re going out there, go tomorrow for the Friday night service and watch them sitting around kissing God’s ass, telling him how big and wonderful he is—telling the rest of us how wonderful they are, bravely doing his work as courageous pioneers in biblical Judea. **Pioneers!**” (p. 79)

Fundamentalism and fanaticism

“Look,” I said, “admittedly I’ve never had the right caste spirit—I take your point about people like me. I’m not unfamiliar with such fanaticism.” This brought him to his feet, furiously pointing a finger. **“Excuse me! What is *fanatical*? ‘To put egoism before Zionism is what is fanatical!’ ‘To put personal gain and personal pleasure before the survival of the Jewish people! *Who is fanatical?* **The Diaspora Jew!** All the evidence that the goyim give him and give him that the survival of the Jews couldn’t matter to them less, and the Diaspora Jew believes they are friends! Believes that in their country he is safe and secure—an equal! What is fanatical is the Jew who never learns! The Jew oblivious to the Jewish state and the Jewish land and the survival of the Jewish people! *That* is the fanatic—fanatically ignorant, fanatically self-deluded, fanatically full of shame!”** (p. 106)

“In Hebron Abraham pitched his tent. In the cave of Machpelah he and Sarah were buried, and after them Isaac, Jacob, and their wives. It’s here that King David reigned before he entered Jerusalem. What’s any of it got to do with you?”

“That’s where the claim rests,” he said. “That’s it. It’s no accident, you know, that we’re called Jews and this place is called Judea—there may even be some relation between those two things. We are Jews, this is Judea, and the heart of Judea is Abraham’s city, Hebron.”

“That still leaves unexplained the riddle of Henry Zuckerman’s identification with Abraham’s city.”

“You don’t get it—**this is where the Jews *began*, not in Tel Aviv but here.** If anything is territorialism, if anything is colonialism, it’s Tel Aviv, it’s Haifa. *This* is Judaism, *this* is Zionism, *right here* where we are eating our lunch!”

“In other words, it didn’t all begin up that outside flight of wooden stairs where Grandma and Grandpa lived on Hunterdon Street. It didn’t begin with Grandma on her knees washing the floors and Grandpa stinking of old cigars. **Jews didn’t begin in Newark, after all.**” (p. 113)

Fight for survival

The Jew is always blaming himself for what happens in Cairo. He is blaming himself for what happens in Baghdad. But in Baghdad, believe me, they do not blame themselves for what is happening in Jerusalem. Theirs is not a civilization of doubt—theirs is a civilization of *certainty*. Islam is not plagued by niceys and goodies who want to be sure they don't do the wrong thing. Islam wants one thing only: to *win*, to *triumph*, to obliterate the cancer of Israel from the body of the Islamic world. Mr. Shuki Elchanan is a man who lives in a Middle East that, most unfortunately, does not exist. Mr. Shuki Elchanan wants us to sign a piece of paper with the Arabs and give it *back*? No! History and reality will make the future and not pieces of paper! This is the Middle East, these are Arabs—paper is worthless. There is no paper deal to be made with the Arabs. Today in Bethlehem an Arab tells me that he dreams of Jaffa and how one day he will return. The Syrians have convinced him, just hang on, keep throwing stones at the Jewish school buses, and it'll *all* be yours someday—you'll go back to your village near Jaffa, and have everything else besides.

That's what this man was telling me—he will go back, even if it takes him the two thousand years that it took the Jews. **And you know what I tell *him*? I tell him, 'I respect the Arab who wants Jaffa.' I tell him, 'Don't give up your dream, dream of Jaffa, go ahead; and someday, if you have the power, even if there are a *hundred* pieces of paper, you will take it from me by force.'** Because he is not so humane, this Arab who throws stones in Bethlehem, as your Mr. Shuki Elchanan who writes his columns in Tel Aviv for Western consumption. The Arab waits until he thinks you're weak, and then he tears up his paper and attacks. I'm sorry if I disappoint you, but I do not have such nice thoughts as Mr. Shuki Elchanan and all the Hellenized Jews in Tel Aviv with their European ideas. Mr. Shuki Elchanan is afraid to rule and to be a master. Why? Because he wants the approval of the goy. But I'm not interested in the goy's approval—I am interested in Jewish survival. And if the price I pay is a bad name, fine. We pay that anyway, and it's better than the price we usually pay in addition." (pp. 121-122)

3. Aloft

The exceptional nation / exceptional conditions

“Look at the place that you now want to call home: a whole *country* imagining itself, asking itself, ‘What the hell is this business of being a Jew? [...] Another place famous for inventing (or reinventing) the Jew was Germany under Hitler. (p. 149)

Carol: “There will be no synagogues in this family! There will be no kosher kitchen in this house! I could not possibly live that life. Fuck him, let him stay there if it’s authentic Judaism he wants, let him stay there and find another authentic Jew to live with and the two of them can set up a house with a tabernacle where they can celebrate all their little feasts. But here it is absolutely out of the question—nobody is going around this house blowing the trumpet of Jewish redemption!” (pp. 158-159)

“Dear Shuki, Stop calling me a normal Jew. There’s no such animal, and why should there be? [...] I’m as abnormal as you are” (p. 166).



The Wailing Wall is a sacred Jewish site in the Old City of Jerusalem. It is the last remaining part of the Second Temple, destroyed in 70 CE, and is considered the holiest place where Jews can pray. The name "Wailing Wall" comes from the tradition of Jews mourning the Temple's destruction at the site. Today, it remains a powerful symbol of Jewish faith and heritage.



Forget remembering! (p. 169)

Jimmy from the Wailing Wall (p. 95)

“What happens to me doesn’t matter, Nathan. How can I care about myself when I have penetrated to the core of the last Jewish problem? We are torturing ourselves with memories! With masochism! And torturing goyisch mankind! The key to Israel’s survival is no more Yad Vashems! No more Remembrance Halls of the Holocaust! Now what we have to suffer is *the loss of our suffering*! Otherwise, Nathan—and here is my prophecy as written in the Five Books of Jimmy—otherwise they will annihilate the State of Israel in order to annihilate its Jewish conscience! We have reminded them enough, we have reminded ourselves enough—we must forget!”

He was no longer whispering, and it was I who had to tell him, “Not so loud, please.” Then I said, very clearly, “I really don’t want anything to do with this.”

“Israel is their prosecutor, the Jew is their judge! In his heart every goy knows—because every goy in his heart is a little Eichmann.” (p. 170)

Geographic counterlives: Judea/West Bank

“The West *what?* If that’s the West Bank, where’s the East Bank? Why do you speak in Arab political nomenclature about a ‘West Bank’?” (p. 178)

“And Judea?” I ask. “The preferred English term is West Bank.” [...]

“Judea, Judea.”

“Yes. Isn’t that strange?”

“The Promised Land versus the Green Tweed Suit.” (p. 200)

4. Gloucestershire

pp. 186-208: Nathan has recently met a woman seventeen years younger than him. She has recently had a baby, and she is ignored by her husband. Even though Nathan cannot have sex, they begin an affair.

pp. 209-223: Henry attends Nathan's funeral in New York and had been asked to write the eulogy, but he could not.

pp. 224-243: After the funeral, Henry goes to Nathan's apartment building and contacts the landlady. She says that she cannot let him in Nathan's apartment, but Henry bribes her and she let him inside. Henry goes through Nathan's papers and discovers that Nathan took detailed notes on every conversation he ever had with Henry, including those detailing Henry's extramarital affairs (Draft # 2.)

pp. 243-258: Q&A (questions in italics). The questions reveal that the interviewed person is Maria, (Nathan's lover). Maria had received a telephone call from Nathan's doctor informing her that the surgery had failed and that Nathan had died.

Sex / chastity as a metaphor for the promised land

“Do you have erotic fantasies about me?”

“Yes, I do, but I probably would have more had we had sex. As it is, I push them away. Because they would make me edgy and dissatisfied.”

“Is what we have at all exciting for you?”

“I told you—I think it’s unusual and strange. When I lie on the bed naked, when you touch me—some women are deeply satisfied by that.”

“Are you?”

“Not always. Look, you’re not a hopelessly unattractive man. We’ve had a few quite interesting conversations during the course of our acquaintance, we’ve talked so much, but I’m sure all this talk is quite secondary—one’s sexual perceptions are still the most important thing about someone, however things may turn out. Even if we never get to bed together, there’s some essential sexual tension that we’ve had. Whether at the moment you’re able to fuck or not is not the point. Virility hasn’t only to do with that. You’re very different from my husband, which is really the background I’ve always wanted to get away from anyway.” (p. 203)

5. Christendom

Identity politics

Maria: “Well, I object to people—this is a feeling only, this is not a thought-out position; I might have to discipline it if you insist on keeping us up much longer, after the chablis and all that champagne—I object to people clinging to an identity just for the sake of it. I don’t think there’s anything admirable about it at all. All this talk about ‘identities’—your ‘identity’ is just where you decide to stop thinking, as far as I can see. I think all these ethnic groups—whether they are Jewish, whether they’re West Indian and think they must keep this Caribbean thing going— simply make life more difficult in a society where we’re trying to just live amicably, like London, and where we are now very very diverse.”

“You know, true as some of that may sound, the ‘we-ness’ here is starting to get me down. These people with their dream of the perfect, undiluted, unpolluted, unsmelly ‘we.’ Talk about *Jewish* tribalism. What is this insistence on homogeneity but a not very subtle form of *English* tribalism? What’s so intolerable about tolerating a few differences? You cling to *your* ‘identity,’ ‘just for the sake of it’—from the sound of it, no less than your mother does!” (p. 305)

Antisemitism

“Of course resisting provocation is always an option, but can you really have your sister-in-law calling you a dirty Jew bastard, and someone else saying you’re stinking up the place, and then someone you love saying why do you make such a production of these things, without your head starting to explode, no matter what sort of peaceable person you’ve tried turning yourself into?” (pp. 311-312)

Conclusion: “A Jew among Gentiles and a Gentile among Jews”

Only a few hours ago, I went so far as to tell Shuki Elchanan that the custom of circumcision was probably irrelevant to my “I.” Well, it turns out to be easier to take that line on Dizengoff Street than sitting here beside the Thames. A Jew among Gentiles and a Gentile among Jews. Here it turns out, by my emotional logic, to be the number-one priority. Aided by your sister, your mother, and even by you, I find myself in a situation that has reactivated the strong sense of difference that had all but atrophied in New York, and, what’s more, that has drained the domestic idyll of its few remaining drops of fantasy. Circumcision confirms that there is an us, and an us that isn’t solely him and me. England’s made a Jew of me in only eight weeks, which, on reflection, might be the least painful method. A Jew without Jews, without Judaism, without Zionism, without Jewishness, without a temple or an army or even a pistol, a Jew clearly without a home, just the object itself, like a glass or an apple. (p. 328)