

Monologues and Dialogues

Without the reference to the Jew who is corroding the social fabric, the social fabric itself would be dissolved.

—Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*

Merely a concrete test of the underlying principles of the great republic is the Negro problem.

—W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

The question of color, especially in this country, operates to hide the graver questions of the self.

—James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*

The narrative of Black and Jewish relations in America encompasses dramatic political alliances and conflicts, dilemmas of identity and assimilation, and persistent questions of ethnic division and economic inequality. Despite radically differing experiences in this country, the two groups share powerful memories, religious identifications, and historical traumas. The catastrophes inflicted upon Jews in Europe, centuries of pogroms followed by the Holocaust, provide a rough analogy to the Black experience of Middle Passage, slavery, and lynching. However, the shape and meaning of these events is evolving and contested. As with all historical analogies, comparisons between Jewish and African American experiences acquire meaning through the perspective of the beholder. Both Black and Jewish thinkers have described a mutual sympathy, at times a common global status or mission, through memories of oppression. Nevertheless, economic and social divergence in the United States threatens such connections.

Religion provides an originary narrative common to Blacks and Jews. The tale of a people escaping from slavery, finding their way to the Promised Land, is remembered by diaspora Jews for whom redemption is always just over the horizon: “Next year in Jerusalem.” A similar hope is held by African Americans, evident as long ago as slavery’s appropriation of “Go Down, Moses” as a parable of the Black struggle for freedom. As happened to European Jews for centuries, for African Americans this tantalizing

promise has been endlessly deferred; full social acceptance and economic equality have repeatedly seemed imminent and repeatedly been withheld, most prominently after Emancipation and, a hundred years later, following the Civil Rights era. American Jews, in contrast, have finally seen millennia-old religious and historical promises fulfilled in the creation of Israel and, for many, in the attainment of affluence. In America, then, Blacks have suffered the mythic-historic Jewish role of hope incessantly deferred. The experience of trauma may be memorialized as an important part of historical identity; as easily it can be reified as an event beyond meaning. Trauma and the recovery from trauma, the attempt to repair and reconstitute an identity, link the Jewish and African diasporas. Conversely the memorialization of trauma may become a site of contestation, of rivalry, as is occurring in debates about which people's experience constitutes the "true" Holocaust.¹

Relations between African and Jewish Americans have been shaped by each group's struggle to define its status, to balance group identity with Americanization. African American reactions to the Jewish presence mix identification, admiration, and resentment. Religious identification is fundamental, with Jews conceived as a people whose suffering has a special meaning, a redemptive quality often transposed to the Black experience in America. This framework often yields a sympathetic view of American Jewry, yet it may also produce hostility. While some Blacks see America's Jews as hypocritical usurpers, often they are regarded as positive role models, a minority group that has succeeded despite oppression. These perceptions are inextricably mixed, though to greatly varying degrees depending upon time, place, and individual experience.

Jewish perceptions of Blacks are torn between identification with majority culture and an awareness of past Jewish marginalization. To further define themselves as Americans, Jews may adopt conventional racial stereotypes. Yet the Black presence may fissure the mythic American (w)hole into which assimilationist Jews seek to disappear. Given their stake in the ideal of a society that accepts all ethnic groups, Jews have long had a special interest in an America free from historical injustices and divisions. So a Jewish playwright, Israel Zangwill, coined the term "melting pot," and a Jewish woman, Emma Lazarus, wrote the poem engraved on the Statue of Liberty, "Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." Such a harmonious vision is difficult to sustain, given the presence of an exploited minority who remind Jewish Americans of their own past and of the shortcomings of their adopted country. Struggling to eradicate their stigma as the Other, a status

inflicted in Europe and lingering in America, Jews have been a strong presence in movements toward a universal society, notably socialism and civil rights (often to the point of effacing their own traditions).

Black and Jewish representations enact a multilayered history of identification and estrangement. A minority group tends to view another based on (at least) three elements: actual cultural traits, dominant stereotypes, and reflections of the perceiving group's own status and needs. This last is crucial; Jews and Blacks define their status within American society, their social and cultural identity, partly through their relationship with each other. African Americans may thus measure themselves against another marginalized group, one that nevertheless seems closer to the American center, while Jewish Americans often compare their status to groups positioned farther from the center. Negative stereotypes, for instance of Blacks by Jews, reflect an acceptance of dominant cultural values. Sympathetic portrayals, on the other hand, are an indirect means of narrating one's own struggle, of identifying with one's people. How Black and Jewish writers represent each other tells at least as much about the perceiving subject position as about the group being represented. As Emily Miller Budick puts it, "For a significant number of African and Jewish American writers, the other group becomes a vehicle by which to think through their own ethnic identities" (1998, 1). This dialogue, then, often resembles two simultaneous monologues in which each group holds up a mirror to the other and perceives: Itself. The process is one of "missteps and trespasses, as, losing the distinctions between self and other, one constructs the other as oneself and causes the other similarly to misconstrue and misconstruct oneself" (8). If misunderstandings are pervasive here, though, so too is constructing something new, a multivocal identity, one marked by constant change, but an identity nevertheless. Such racial and ethnic tensions and paradoxical identifications are part of an American dialogue, a continual self-invention narrated at least partly through the medium of literature.

I

A Jew is a nigger turned inside out

—Joke

In America it is we who are the Jews. . . . [The] star of David is all over us.

—Julius Lester, *Lovesong: Becoming a Jew*

Eurocentric hegemony lingers in the postcolonial mind. African and Jewish Americans, educated (both formally and informally) into dominant culture, are among those whose minds have historically been “colonized,” who must fight off a psychological “invasion” (though one ultimately capable of symbiotic behavior). European racial hierarchies, albeit in varied forms, extend around the earth, structuring relations between various ethnic groups. Edward Said describes a world totally transfigured by colonialism: “The great imperial experience of the past two hundred years is global and universal; it has implicated every corner of the globe, the colonizer and the colonized together” (1993, 259). Beyond actual geographic alterations, humanity’s mental terrain has been reconfigured in the image(s) of the colonizer. European ideology has been exported to faraway colonies as part of a “civilizing” mission, an attempt to replace barbarism and anarchy with, in the words of Matthew Arnold, “sweetness and light” (1950, 54). Since this civilization’s definitive character is a fiction, it has failed to eradicate the (purportedly nonexistent) native culture except in those cases in which it physically eliminates the natives. Instead—as Homi Bhabha describes—it generates a hybrid through which native cultures adapt European culture and technology to local conditions. Center and periphery engage in a dialectic, but an unequal one; periphery must engage in indirect, subversive cultural building.

Western Europe has codified a set of beliefs about the peoples outside its borders. Incessant scrutiny and classification are principles of the rationalism that justified colonialism, especially in its later phases. Mary Louise Pratt discusses “the totalizing classificatory schemas that coalesced in the mid-eighteenth century into the discipline of ‘natural history’” (1992, 28), through which “one by one the planet’s life forms were to be drawn out of the tangled threads of their life surroundings and rewoven into European-based patterns of global unity and order” (31). So Linnaeus, a founder of natural science, progressed from classifying plants and animals to humans. He grouped humans into five basic types: Wild Man, described as “mute”; American, “Regulated by customs”; European, “Governed by laws”; Asiatic, “Governed by opinions”; and African, “Governed by caprice” (Pratt 1992, 32). Although such schemes began with physical characteristics, these were quickly linked to social and moral values. As part of the rationalist project, the external was to be scrutinized, characterized, mapped out, explored, and explained by scientific means. Rationalism, as Pratt describes it, documents racial traits in unprecedented and excruciating detail, providing a pseudoscientific justification for colonial domination.

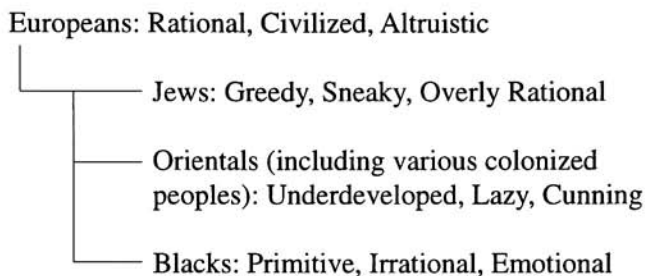
These schemes classify non-Europeans (including Jews and Gypsies) as either subhuman or extrahuman, the first incapable of rational development, the second only pseudointelligent, clever perhaps but lacking the power and originality of the European intellect. Morally, too, these outsiders are considered inferior to the blend of Hellenic and Christian principles that typifies Europe and defines the White race. The two peoples who most clearly represent these (seemingly) bipolar groupings of inferior humans are Blacks and Jews, the first representing emotional and mental primitivism, the second hyperrational detachment. Frantz Fanon describes this bipolar differentiation, which categorizes Blacks as physical and sexual and Jews as abstract, greedy presences: “[T]he Negro symbolizes the biological danger, the Jew, the intellectual danger” (1967, 165). In the New World, Leslie Fiedler outlines a similar division:

The Negro . . . has always represented for the American imagination the primitive and the instinctive, the life of impulse whether directed toward good or ill. The Jew, on the other hand, stands symbolically for the uses and abuses of intelligence, for icy legalism or equally cold vengefulness. (1960, 237)

Two monumental racial myths represent all that “enlightened” humanity wishes not to be, all the deepest psychic terrors.

The bipolar construction of Blacks and Jews forms convenient poles for a hierarchical table of racial traits. Other groups, often classified under the broad rubric of “oriental,” are considered to fall between these main poles, combining qualities of Black primitivism with Jewish slyness. So Edward Said describes the stereotype of the Oriental as “gullible, ‘devoid of energy and initiative,’ much given to ‘fulsome flattery,’ intrigue, [and] cunning . . . Orientals are inveterate liars, they are ‘lethargic and suspicious,’ and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race” (1979, 39). Traits ascribed to Blacks and Jews are mixed as needed: laziness, confused thought, shrewdness, amorality. Besides the obvious economic advantage of such stereotypes in justifying colonialism, they also serve a psychological need, an image against which the European—and American—self is defined.

European rationalism, often under the rubric of natural science, codified a system of racial ideology largely drawn from older belief systems embedded deep within the European collective consciousness. Blacks and Jews formed the poles in this system, which can be diagrammed as follows:



This hierarchy, while varied depending upon time, place, and circumstance, is remarkably consistent as a general scheme dating before Shakespeare's Shylock and the biblical exegesis of Ham as the progenitor of the excluded Black races.² Such beliefs were incorporated in allegedly scientific classification schemes, which actually served as maps of the European psyche as it defined itself against Otherness. If Blacks represent suppressed emotions, particularly sexuality, Jews represent an excess, a kind of hyperrationalism lacking emotional and communitarian impulses, rationalism's archetype of its own excesses. Both stereotypes fulfill larger social needs: Blacks are constructed to justify exploitation of those outside Europe's borders, while Jews provide a scapegoat within Europe, particularly for capitalist exploitation. The key point is the classification of people according to type rather than as individuals; more specifically, within a European iconography Black and Jewish stereotypes are at opposite ends of the diagram, poles of categorization representing distinguishable Othernesses.

Or are they? Both are submerged beneath the European, the term representing a positive definition of humanity that defines itself against the various "lower" races. Michael Rogin explains stereotypes of Jews and Blacks as only apparently opposite, as connected organs of a single system: "If the patriarchal Jew of racist fantasy was the superego mirror of the hypermasculine, sexually rampaging, black id, the hysterical or trickster Jewish man blended into the feminized blackface black" (1996, 70). The determining dichotomy is not Jewish/Black, but European/Other. As the young Frantz Fanon was warned, "Whenever you hear anyone abuse the Jews, pay attention, because he is talking about you" (1967, 122). Jews are a term associated with blackness to the point of literalness: "The Jews are black, according to nineteenth-century racial science, because they are not a pure race, because they are a race which has come from Africa" (Gilman 1991, 99). Furthermore, the stereotypes attributed to various "races" change depending on local needs. As the European self-

definition evolved from religious to rational, the stereotype of Jews shifted from Christ-killers to capitalists. Concordantly the justification for colonization shifted from converting the heathen to civilizing the uncivilized or, finally, to excising those deemed metaphysically beyond the reach of civilization. Throughout, representations of Jews and Blacks had in common the image of the dark Other, rational at best in a debased, nonlinear manner, incapable of higher forms of thought and nobility.

II

I remember that I am invisible and walk softly so as not to awaken the sleeping ones.

—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

What have I in common with the Jews? I scarcely have anything in common with myself.

—Franz Kafka

The Enlightenment, which posited a rational, universal subject, both codified racial hierarchies and eventually, through assimilationism, offered a method of escaping them. Assimilation is a recurring process of the modern state, an entity that has been characterized by ruthless incorporation to a single vision of conformity. As Zygmunt Bauman explains, the word “assimilation” dates back to a scientific term meaning “the conversion by an animal or plant of extraneous material into fluids and tissues identical with its own” (1991, 103). Traditional assimilation thus demands the renunciation of old forms to conform to a standardized culture: “The meaning of the liberal offer in general, and the ‘cultural assimilation’ programme in particular, is the affirmation of that site in the society from which the offer has been made” (71). Acceptance of this offer usually means denial of one’s own history.

The shift from national and racial exclusion toward the promise of assimilation is gradual and ambiguous, following a general evolution from biological toward environmental notions of human capabilities. At the point(s) where Enlightenment reaches beyond the confines of the European subject, declaring its secrets and benefits available to Jews, Asians, Blacks, and other excluded groups, it would seem to dissolve racial barriers. Yet the continued dominance of a European standard of civilization maintains a de facto cultural exclusion; the ideal of universal culture is, in practice, far from universal. The promise of assimilation mandates shedding

traditional cultures in favor of a European standard. For Jews and Blacks, and for other marginalized groups, the attempt to assimilate leads to a divided consciousness, a self-image reflected through racial hierarchy, often a self-hatred. The relationship of colonized to colonizer plays itself out on the battlefield of the individual psyche.

Albert Memmi provides one description of the fragmentation and self-hatred generated by European hegemony, showing how the colonized emulates, imitates, envies, and finally rebels against the colonizer. Internalizing colonial stereotypes means that the colonized must reject their own traditions. In the subservient aspect of their being, the colonized gasp in awe at colonial achievements, struggling to join the colonizer, “to become equal to that splendid model and to resemble him to the point of disappearing in him” (Memmi 1967, 120). Such an approach is doomed to failure for, met with scorn by representatives of the civilization he so admires, the colonial subject is torn from his own tradition: “In the name of what he hopes to become, he sets his mind on impoverishing himself, tearing himself away from his true self” (121). The dominant culture through which the colonized has attempted to understand herself gives back an ugly, distorted image. To counteract this stereotype the colonial subject, both individually and collectively, undergoes a period of national pride giving birth to a countermyth, a reconfigured past often transforming the hated stereotype into a utopian image, for instance of “Yiddishkeit” or of “Black pride,” of warmth, humanity, and creativity. This utopian reaction, an image of an idyllic, unchanging precolonial society, becomes mythologized as eternal and unitary, an essential Irishness or Africanness or Jewishness or Indianness.³ Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized* moves from myth to countermyth, yet suggests no synthesis or transcendence.

If Memmi provides a general model of psychological colonization, W. E. B. DuBois delineates how this condition affects a specific people, showing how African Americans scrutinize themselves through the assumptions of European ideology. DuBois defines the resulting internal struggle as “double consciousness,”

this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the standards of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (1989, 3)

In the long term this doubleness generates a rich, complex cultural mix, yet the immediate psychological effect is often confusion, dissonance, and self-hatred. African Americans are born into a society that ensures they will live the postcolonial dilemma of existing as a doubly interpellated subject. The conflict that the European colonizers won physically is refought eternally in the psyche of a defeated people, with European ideology having a terrifying advantage. Black Americans speak a language originally European, live in a political system set up by Whites, attend schools with White teachers, work largely for White bosses, and, at least until recently, have had European culture everywhere upheld as the singular ideal.

The pattern of European dominance and psychic fissuring frames Frantz Fanon's work, which argues that in Martinique the inhabitants view themselves through European social and psychological systems. His *Black Skin, White Masks* shows in great social and psychological detail the self-hatred generated by European hegemony. Fanon's training as a psychiatrist leads him to examine the relationship between social and individual psychosis, particularly in the psyches of young Africans whose identity formation is based on a negative appraisal of blackness. He reinterprets Jungian archetypes as being not biologically ingrained but deeply embedded cultural constructs. In this analysis both Freudian and Jungian psychology are based not upon a universal human condition but upon a specific time and place, nineteenth-century Europe, for "the collective unconscious, without our having to fall back on genes, is purely and simply the sum of prejudices, myths, collective attitudes of a given group" (1967, 188). Psychological problems do not originate in the individual consciousness but have a social basis, one so powerfully engraved that, regardless of conscious belief systems, the adult psyche is incapable of changing basic emotional reactions, including a hatred of one's own blackness.

Racism, then, is pervasive in the psychological terrain of every individual inhabiting a society shaped by colonialism. European cultural hegemony is impressed upon both African and Jewish Americans. Historically Blacks have suffered a deliberate obliteration of African heritage, while European Jews have faced ghettoization and cultural isolation. As assimilation became a real possibility for Europe's Jews, so too did the pressure to shed religious and cultural traditions. The phenomenon of double consciousness, with its attendant self-hatred, occurred in Jews as they played out the colonial dilemma within the boundaries of Europe. Describing one such figure, Sigmund Freud, Daniel Boyarin points out a Jewish "sense of inferiority vis-à-vis the gentile . . . closely allied to the

‘inferiority complex’ that Frantz Fanon identifies in the colonial subject” (1997, 239). If the European ideal is naturalized as the universal norm, the Jew, by contrast, is perceived as an oddity with a specific history and odd physiology, with a large nose and an excess of speech and gesture. This image creates a psychological crisis for Jews attempting to assimilate. As with psychologically colonized Africans, Jews have struggled to participate in a culture that disavows them. To achieve emancipation, Jews have been asked to obliterate their pasts, to make themselves anew. Sartre describes the Jew who

considers himself the same as others. He speaks the same language, he has the same class interests, the same national interests; he reads the newspapers that the others read, he votes as they do, he understands and shares their opinions. Yet they give him to understand that he does not belong, that he has a “Jewish way” of speaking, of reading, of voting. (1976, 78)

An elusive otherness clings to the assimilating individual, in physical features, odor, gestures, speech patterns; he or she can never be entirely secure. Europeanized Jews are torn between ideals of universal self and internalized images of their own Jewishness as physically and emotionally repulsive. A Jew’s self-image is divided; he or she is subject “to endless self-examination and finally [to] assuming a phantom personality, at once strange and familiar, that haunts him and which is nothing but himself—himself as others see him” (78). Double consciousness, incessant self-perception through the assumptions of a hostile society, is a recurring postcolonial and assimilationist trope. Struggling to assimilate, both Jews and African Americans project dominant cultural ideals upon themselves. Sander Gilman points out that assimilating Jews cannot avoid a self-conception as “inherently different,” as “the essence of Otherness,” and that “the fragmentation of identity that results is the essence of self-hatred” (1986, 3).

The Enlightenment era, together with the rise of capitalism, meant a change in anti-Semitism. If earlier stereotypes derived from Christian perspectives, capitalism intensified portrayals of conspiratorial Jews, figures useful to deflect blame for the suffering caused by early capitalism. The most important analyst of capitalist dislocation, Karl Marx, internalized such stereotypes; alienation from his Jewish heritage was one factor driving his conceptual breakthroughs. Struggling to be considered a universal human among humans he developed a vision devoid of Jewish

tradition, one that rid society of that Otherness which disrupted his social/psychological stability. Marx's "On the Jewish Question" defines Jewishness as identical with the capitalist state. When this withered away, Jewishness would vanish with it. Marx went so far as to identify the Jewish spirit as integral to capitalism:

The Jew has emancipated himself in a Jewish manner, not only by acquiring the power of money, but also because *money* has become, through him and also apart from him, a world power, while the practical Jewish spirit has become the practical spirit of the Christian nations. (1978, 49)

Rather than understanding anti-Semitism as an escape valve for capitalism, Marx identified Jewishness with capitalism, a definition making inevitable the disappearance of Judaism when capitalism disappeared. If Jewishness was a key factor in Marx's social alienation, he now proposed it as the essence of alienation, making an effect into a cause and neatly circumventing psychological problems of assimilation.

Marx's self-hating anti-Semitism is a paradigmatic version of an incessant European phenomenon, a manifestation of double consciousness geographically distant from the circumstances that motivated DuBois's theory. In America, too, Jews moving from ghettos into mainstream society suffered alienation similar to that encountered by the Black bourgeoisie. So the young Adrienne Rich was encouraged to deny her Jewishness, to associate "scorn and contempt with the word 'Jew'" in a culture in which "'Ideals' and 'manners' included not hurting someone's feelings by calling her or him a Negro or Jew—naming the hated identity" (1986, 104). The urge to disavow their heritage, to create a generic universalism, affected also Jewish activists, heirs of Marx, who, "yearned to bleach away their past and become men without, or above, a country" (Howe 1976, 291). Jewish heritage was effaced, unspeakable thoughts unspoken (in Toni Morrison's phrasing). Qualities of Otherness, embedded in the social psyche, were simultaneously invisible and omnipresent.

The Jewish double consciousness, manifested as self-hatred, unfolds in an American context in Philip Roth's fiction. In *Portnoy's Complaint* Alexander Portnoy enacts Jewish neurosis through his simultaneous contempt for both Jewish and gentile worlds. Jewish alienation in the diaspora, an unremitting sense of dis-ease, is displayed in his family's paranoia. Portnoy asks what in this Jewish world "was not charged with danger, dripping with germs, fraught with peril?" (1967, 35). Although Portnoy's fear may be of the Jewish world, his family's is of the alien, gentile society.

Yet Portnoy feels only disgust at his family's Jewish qualities—his mother's excessive nurturing, his parents' incessant protectiveness, their physical attributes, particularly the large nose which, as he grows older, he finds sprouting on himself: "J-E-W written right across the middle of that face" (15). Dominant society's hatred is literally engraved upon his face and psychically engraved in his consciousness. Conversely he suffers from a disgust with the gentile world, the goyim, whom he views with a mixture of awe and contempt; the awe for the (perceived) physical perfection and order of the White world, the contempt due to their history of brutality and to his perceived intellectual superiority. Alienated from both Jewish and mainstream American societies, he nevertheless aches to conquer the gentile world through career success and sexual conquests. Indeed, *Portnoy's Complaint* presents such an exaggerated view of Jewish neurosis, such transparent self-awareness, as to make explicit what for most people is unconscious:

The coincidences of dreams, the symbols, the terrifyingly laughable situations, the oddly ominous banalities, the accidents and humiliation, the bizarrely appropriate strokes of luck or misfortune that other people experience with their eyes shut, I get with mine open! (257)

This is parody with a terribly real basis, alienation made blatantly visible. A Jewish version of Fanon's collective unconscious shapes Portnoy's psyche, which inhabits a tragicomic position torn between two cultures that demonize each other.

The assimilationist Jew and the bourgeois Black, then, are replaying largely the same drama. Assimilationist zeal means rewriting values and history to conform to the ideals of a scornful society. Amiri Baraka's "Black Bourgeois," who "does not hate ofays / hates instead, him self / him black self" (1979a, 103), bluntly displays this dilemma. Through transferring such self-hatred onto the body of another, Blacks and Jews may perceive each other with heightened suspicion.

III

Just as a society must have a scapegoat, so hatred must have a symbol. Georgia has the Negro and Harlem has the Jew.

—James Baldwin

Why, why should it have been so different as between the Negroes and us? . . . Why did we hate one another so?

—Norman Podhoretz

As my father's son, as my uncle's nephew, as a Black person in this world, I say to you, that there was one band of honor and decency in America and it was Jews and blacks.

—Roger Wilkins

As historical victims of racial hatred, Blacks and Jews have long occupied an uncertain position. An intricate archaeology of hatred and identification is apparent in the ways the two groups represent each other; layers of emotion, a great psychic undercurrent, are given form in image. In times of despair and upheaval they may behold in each other hated stereotypes that they long to shed, or may feel solidarity in a mutual struggle for self-worth. In each other, beyond the veil of stereotypes, Blacks and Jews reconstruct their own struggle.

Paul Gilroy explains that the Black diaspora has long relied upon Jewish narratives to define itself: “[I]t was Exodus which provided the primary semantic resource in the elaboration of slave identity, slave historicity, and a distinctive sense of time” (1993, 207). Stuart Hall, too, comments upon this, describing the Bible as “the story of a people in exile dominated by a foreign power, far from ‘home’ and the symbolic power of the redemptive myth. So the whole narrative of coloniality, slavery and colonization is re-inscribed in the Jewish one” (1996, 491). Blacks in exile conceive of themselves in and through the Old Testament narrative of slavery and redemption, an originary text of identification with the Jewish people. While often silenced, this identification may erupt in intense perceptions of betrayal when American Jews take the side of “the enemy,” metaphorically of the Egyptian masters rather than the oppressed slaves.

Extending biblical identification to the modern world, at least one Black declaration of sympathy with international Jewry predated Jewish involvement in African American affairs. In 1887 Edward Wilson Blyden, a Liberian intellectual born in the Caribbean, described a common Black and Jewish “mission to act as ‘the spiritual saviors or regenerators of humanity’” (Gilroy 1993, 211). Suffering and exile, if integrated into a national narrative, may acquire a transhistorical sense of purpose. Beyond biblical redemption, secular redemption includes notions of a cultural gift and of a special role as conscience of a nation, or even as global conscience. Gilroy points out three basic similarities in the Jewish and Black situation:

“the notion of a return to the point of origin,” “the condition of exile,” and “the idea that the suffering of both blacks and Jews has a special redemptive power” (208). This last is actually a result of the first two; the notion of a fall, of suffering and redemption as marking a special purpose, is an archetypal religious and nationalist trope.

In twentieth-century America such identifications have proceeded from Jews to Blacks. Until the Black nationalist movement of the late 1960s, the tone and direction of political relations between the two peoples was largely set by Jewish Americans. With physical features and cultural background similar to other Whites, Jews have long spoken for assimilation, assuming a linking position between White and Black America. This accords with a broader historical Jewish role, described by Michael Rogin as that of “cultural and economic middlemen, disproportionately important not only in trade but also in the liberal professions and image-making businesses” (1996, 64). Economically this middleman role has occurred through Jewish ownership of businesses and housing in the Black ghettos; culturally Jews have been managers and consumers of African American music and literature; while politically Jewish activists have expounded civil rights positions. Hasia Diner explains Black-Jewish political alliances as characterized by Jewish action and Black reaction, a pattern that reinstates the colonizer/colonized relationship on a smaller, more benevolent, scale. It was Jews who first emphasized common features between the two groups, Jews who initiated the alliance.⁴ Two factors directly influenced this undertaking. First, the surge of East European Jewish immigrants to America, beginning in the 1880s, provided a group sympathetic to spurned outsiders. Second, the rise of anti-Semitism in American society following World War I, including such measures as quotas and restricted social access, revealed assimilation as precarious and provoked a common legal agenda with African Americans.

Spurred by the lynching of a Southern Jew, the Yiddish press began an intense period of identification with Blacks in 1915. Coinciding with Nazism in Europe and rising anti-Semitism in the United States, the period from 1915 to 1935 was one of extreme vulnerability and anxiety for Jews, who shared with Blacks a fear of the ascendant Ku Klux Klan. Hasia Diner describes how the Yiddish press fervently emphasized parallels between the two groups, portraying Blacks as what Jews had been in Europe: “the most oppressed, the most despised, and the most victimized segment of the population. Blacks seemed, in the eyes of the Yiddish writers, America’s Jews” (Diner 1977, 74). Alongside sympathy and identification, Jewish self-interest also spurred an interest in the African American

situation. On the one hand, hatred directed against Blacks was hatred not directed at Jews: "The more prejudice exists in this country against the blacks, the safer we Jews will be. *They* are a lightning rod for our protection" (quoted in Katz 1967, 43). On the other hand, if Blacks as the most marginalized group could integrate into America, then surely the less precarious Jewish position would be safe. In either case, Blacks acted as a buffer protecting Jews. Uncertain of their status, Jews viewed their efforts to recruit Blacks into the cultural center as part of their effort to create an America safe for themselves. A multiethnic definition of America validates the Jewish stance of simultaneously participating in their own tradition and contributing to a larger culture. A secure African American role within a society free of racial and ethnic discrimination ensures a secure Jewish role.

That racial boundaries, quotas, and other discriminatory mechanisms affected not just Blacks but, to a lesser extent, Jews mandated a common political agenda. A strong Jewish involvement in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and later in the Civil Rights movement, has been critical in transforming the American political landscape to one relatively inclusive and encompassing. The overtures, the initial connections, the expressions of commonality, came largely from one side, from Jews who offered expertise that, in their relative powerlessness, African American leaders could not refuse. Daniel Levering Lewis goes so far as argue that the early "NAACP had something of the aspect of an adjunct of B'Nai B'rith and the American Jewish Committee." He describes how "Marcus Garvey stormed out of NAACP headquarters in 1917, muttering that it was a white organization" (1984, 85), probably the first instance of Black nationalist protest at Jewish usurpation of Black organizations.

Despite parallel historical oppression, Blacks and Jews in America have not had similar destinies. Lewis believes that "theirs was a politically determined kinship, a defensive alliance cemented more from the outside than from within" (84). This is probably true regarding the immediate alliance, but it neglects biblical and historical affinities that linger on (even when inverted into divisive rhetorical tools). Although Jews have overtly articulated common suffering, Black biblical identifications may be more powerful, even if unspoken. Yet for African Americans immediate comparisons are tenuous, due to the generally higher economic and social status of Jewish Americans. Economic and cultural neglect suffered by African Americans has created a long-term power imbalance, an instability. Diner describes how "the Jewish-black alliance had emerged

from the almost total weakness of one party” (1977, 240). However, by the 1960s African Americans became more forceful in articulating their own circumstances and in developing the tactics of the Civil Rights movement: “Starting with Rosa Parks’ historic refusal to move to the back of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, in December 1955, local blacks took matters into their own hands” (Friedman 1995, 157). Propelled by a dynamic religious and rhetorical tradition, the initiative was shifting toward African American empowerment. Nevertheless, an imbalance remained in economic circumstances and social influence, creating resentment that would one day surface to surprise Jewish liberals. What Jewish Americans assumed was a dialogue initiating African Americans into mainstream society could appear to Blacks as an extension of their powerlessness.⁵

Eventual Black nationalist critiques of the Jewish role in the Civil Rights movement, then, were merely the visible rupture in an affiliation that, due largely to economic and social gaps, was never as close as some Jewish Americans maintained. Murray Friedman argues that “quite early in their relationship, it would appear, blacks held a view of Jews that mixed admiration and respect with suspicion and hostility” (1995, 34). Due to the urgency of immediate struggle, however, Black uneasiness remained inert until political circumstances changed. Ironically, the Black-Jewish alliance’s success is perhaps the single most important factor in leading to its demise. The victories of the 1960s greatly reduced common political interests. Hence political strategies have increasingly diverged, Blacks tending to favor a group-based approach bolstered by government intervention, Jews teetering uneasily between assimilationism and group rights, and between government intervention and free-market economics.

IV

I am, as far as I can judge, the most Western Jew of them all—which means (if I may overstate the case) that I have not been granted a single second of tranquility, nothing has been granted to me, everything has to be acquired, not only the present and future, but also the past.

—Franz Kafka

We have admitted the dregs of Europe until America has been orientalized, Europeanized, Africanized and mongrelized to that insidious degree that our genius, stability, greatness, and promise of advancement and achievement are actually menaced.

—American congressman, 1924

When the colonizer meets the colonized both are changed forever. If a European power mandates its culture for a subject people, the occupying power, too, is invariably altered. In a process of blending and adaptation, termed “cultural hybridity” by Homi Bhabha, the past is mythologized and reconstituted under a new set of circumstances. A colonized culture implants its own characteristics into forms imposed by the colonizer: “[H]ybridity is a *problematic* of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority” (Bhabha 1994, 175). Hegemony is subject to continual revision by local circumstance and resistance. The dialectic generated by colonialism, by unprecedented meetings of cultures worldwide, is characterized by incessant change, a continual process of centering, decentering, and (mutated) recentering. In response to the global experience of European hegemony, new strains and combinations have flowered everywhere. Society is reconfigured from the margins in figures at once oppositional and assimilationist, who so revise the culture that appropriates them as to query the very term “assimilation.” So European Jewry, in tumultuous contact with Enlightenment Europe, bred such transgressive individuals as Marx and Freud, while African America is notable for such figures as Louis Armstrong and Martin Luther King Jr. who revise and criticize a dominant society that in turn appropriates them.

Under severe ideological and psychological pressure, then, a marginalized group is forced to drastically alter its cultural patterns; yet dominant society, too, finds itself transformed. Generating endless cultural revision, Black and Jewish artistic expressions disturb Eurocentric certainty of being the singular arbitrator of civilization. When the margins begin to speak, they by definition erode conventional categories. The diasporic figure is the catalyst for cultural hybridity, intimating a transnational, postmodern culture.

One early trope for our current period of ceaseless cross-breeding is the mythologized figure of the wandering Jew in whom East meets West, a biblical cosmology meets a Hellenic one, boundary crossings and transgressions find a focal point. The African American, too, is a transgressive figure, ostensibly made blank for the role of slave, yet in whom African and European cultures cross and breed, a cultural miscegenation threatening to the social order. If conventional stereotypes of Blacks and Jews serve to contain dominant anxieties, cultural and biological mixtures threaten the framework of dominant hierarchy. Marginalized, diasporic cultures are transgressive in their very language (codified as “nonstan-

dard” or “broken”). Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatari describe a “minor” language, using Yiddish as their prototypical example, as “lacking a grammar and . . . filled with vocables that are fleeting, mobilized, emigrating, and turned into nomads” (1975, 25). Yiddish, in short, is an oppositional language, one embedded within another culture and hence simultaneously addressed to an internal community and reacting to an external one. Similarly, Henry Louis Gates Jr. describes how, “free of the white person’s gaze, black people created their own unique vernacular structures and relished in the double play that these forms bore to white forms. Repetition and revision are fundamental to black artistic forms” (1988, xxiv). “Minor” modes of expression are characterized by a double-voicedness, a simultaneous awareness of, and migration between, (at least) two societies, driving them to innovation and recombination, and to a sardonic awareness of language’s slippery, multiple nature. The dilemma of double consciousness is thus embedded in Black and Jewish expression. Satire, experimentation, and transgression are inherent in “minor” languages.

The impulse to experiment, of course, is not unique to “minor” literature, but is a recurring feature of twentieth-century literature. The diasporic nature of Black and Jewish life is paradigmatic of the twentieth century. If Enlightenment thought is defined as the search for stable systems regarding nature and society, and of the individual self, literary modernism has been described as a period of increasing fragmentation, as “the breaking up and progressive disintegration of those meticulously constructed ‘systems’ and ‘types’ and ‘absolutes’” (McFarlane 1978, 80). Mikhail Bakhtin describes modern literature as inherently transgressive, with the novel paradigmatic in absorbing, juxtaposing, and transforming older, more static forms. In contrast to closed stylistic and imagistic systems, the novel provokes a plethora of styles and voices: “Literary language is not represented in the novel as a unitary, completely finished-off and indisputable language—it is represented precisely as a living mix of varied and opposing voices . . . developing and renewing itself” (Bakhtin 1981, 49). The novel imitates, and often parodies, not only a variety of older literary forms but the voices of multiple social classes and, at times, ethnic and national groups. Authorial voice is infiltrated by external voices that disrupt unitary linguistic and ideological systems. Thus African and Jewish diaspora literature are paradigmatic of modernist fragmentation and alienation.⁶

Yet modern literature has long been claimed as part of the dominant establishment and used to enforce the status quo. Understood as an icon

of the Great Tradition, literature has been fetishized to enshrine an elite group as caretakers of a mysterious knowledge. One contemporary example is Allan Bloom's claim that "men may live more fully in reading Plato and Shakespeare than at any other time, because they are participating in essential being and are forgetting their accidental life" (1987, 380). Bloom metaphorically places Plato and Shakespeare outside of time and history; yet their works are only enriched by a study of historical context. The aestheticization of a literary tradition may lead to a tame, contained approach to reading, disrupting its social and political nature (although the reverse may lead to a flat, reductive view of literature). Literature originating in a White, patriarchal Europe has long been enshrined in an educational establishment that uses notions of "liberal humanism" in a myopic, exclusionary fashion.

Claims to a monolithic literary canon are undermined by a proliferation of texts from an increasing variety of perspectives. Twentieth-century literary bricolage constitutes a clamorous assemblage of cross-connected linguistic systems (often generated from the framework of specific class and cultural needs). Burdened with excess meanings, these systems are replete with contradictions and surprising connotations. Society writes its texts on the mind of the author who, in an inextricable mixture of conscious and unconscious production, organizes, prioritizes, and symbolically encodes them. The author, of course, is not a mere mechanism for encoding social text; his or her individual situation, idiosyncratic view of life, and artistic sense all coalesce in a work of literature. The interplay between society and author, indeed, accounts for a text's richness and multiple interpretability; based as it is on a complex of implicit meanings that are themselves contested, the text threatens to overwhelm its boundaries in an overdetermined eruption. Yet if literature is overdetermined, society is even more so; the ideological structures holding it together are unstable, vulnerable to interrogation from within and without. Literature, among its many uses and pleasures, provides a vehicle for investigating this shifting amalgam, and is perhaps the vehicle best suited for illuminating the contradictions and instability that beset society and, through society, the individual psyche.

Bakhtin's theory of modernist heterogeneity describes, in an idealistic way, the multiple cultures that have inhabited both Jews and Blacks. Twentieth-century literature occurs in a terrain of unprecedented cultural and linguistic exchange: "The world becomes polyglot, once and for all and irreversibly. The period of national languages, coexisting but closed

and deaf to each other, comes to an end. Languages throw light on each other" (Bakhtin 1981, 12). Language is "nomadic" and so, necessarily, is literature. Embedded within overlapping language-systems, modern literature acts as an intermediary force, undermining the hegemony of any single system. By revealing worlds of otherness, twentieth-century literature undermines claims of the academy as the sole arbiter of culture.

Beyond its dialogic function, modern literature has developed intense interior explorations of a variety of consciousnesses. Geoffrey Hartman describes romanticism—an early stage of modernism—as facilitating a widening "ability to feel for others," which allows representation of "a mad mother, an infanticide, an idiot boy, a homeless woman, a destitute shepherd, an old and disabled servant" (1997, 141). Besides broadening its subject matter, modern literature has increasingly dwelt upon subtleties of the human psyche. Milan Kundera explains how "the novel, in its quest for the self, was forced to turn away from the visible world of action and examine instead the invisible interior life" (1988, 24). Between action and interiorization, between Homer's *Odyssey* and Joyce's *Ulysses*, however, come dialogue, varieties of dialects, heterogenous linguistic layers, and an increasing focus on private worlds. To Richard Rorty the novel is the best means for the "process of coming to see other human beings as 'one of us' rather than as 'them'" (1989, xvi). Humanistic literary tradition traces a broad arc toward an understanding of others, of those outside the reader's isolated community. Paradoxically, it does so through an increasing interiorization in which individual self is somewhat illusory, entangled as it is with social and political selves. Written into consciousness is an intricate blend of social forces; dialogism invades the social interior.

Literary evolution, then, is inherently social and contradictory. In being so, it subverts attempts to use literature as an unchanging fixture of a preordained social structure by encouraging an experimentalism that incorporates "another's voice in another's language" (Bakhtin 1981, 324). This revolutionary quality is enhanced in literature by an expanding variety of authors, including women and a widening class, national, ethnic, and racial spectrum. The individual consciousness emphasized in Western literature becomes a tool of liberation. Intense explorations of the self, of various selves, counteract ethnocentrism, breaking down suppositions and stereotypes, generating a widening sympathy. Literature is one forum for society's multiplicitous clash of ideologies, a dialogue by which identity is demarcated, defined, refined, and redefined. Literature gives expression to a Babel of voices, becoming a tool of confusion, yes, but also the beginnings of understanding.