ABRAHAM MOSES KLEIN

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I. Some Biographical Facts

A comparatively detailed biographical sketch of Klein is given by Desmond Pacey in his article in *Ten Canadian Poets*. It seems of little use to go over the biography again when one cannot improve on Pacey's description, but I will give a brief outline of those biographical facts which have most to do with Klein's works, with some additional comments if any are possible.

Abraham Moses Klein was born in Montreal on February 14, 1909, as the son of Colman and Yetta Klein who emigrated, or rather fled, from Eastern Europe (presumably the Ukraine) in the late nineteenth century. The elder Kleins were both orthodox Jews and brought up their children in the orthodox faith. Abraham received a thorough private training in Judaism besides the ordinary secular public education. His private education covered such subjects as Hebrew, Yiddish, the Torah, and the Talmud. In short, he received the kind of training which one had to go through to enter the rabbinate. However, instead of going to New York to study—a prerequisite to becoming a rabbi—he remained in Montreal, and in September 1926 entered McGill University.

At McGill he seems to have had some contact with the now defunct *McGill Fortnightly Review* and its editors F. R. Scott, A. J. M. Smith, and others. Klein's first published poem ' Haunted House ' appeared in the second number of the *Mercury*, which succeeded the *Fortnightly Review*, in January, 1929. In that year alone he published a total of thirty poems in various periodicals such as the *Menorah Journal*, *The Canadian Forum*, *Poetry* (Chicago) and others.

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Klein was also deeply involved in the Jewish cause. In 1929 he was appointed Educational Director of Canadian Young Judaea, and later its president.

In 1930 he received his B.A. from McGill and proceeded to the Faculty of Law at the Université de Montréal. In 1933 he received his B.C.L. and began to practise law in his native city.

He was first associated with the law firm of Chait and Wasserman. In the autumn of 1934 he entered into partnership with Max Garmaise. (The following year he married Bessie Koslov.) In 1936 a branch office was opened in Rouyn, Québec, with Garmaise in charge, while Klein remained at the Montreal head office. In October, 1937, Klein joined Garmaise in Rouyn (which was perhaps the first and only time he was away from Montreal for a considerable time), but after thirteen months he came back to join his aged mother, and resumed the practice of law on his own.

The years following his graduation seem to have been, economically, a difficult period in Klein's life. The economic depression was at its worst, Hitler had come to power in Germany, and the threat of another world war loomed ominously on the horizon.

In addition to the task of making a living for his family (he had three children), he had to devote a considerable part of his time and energies to the cause of promoting Zionism. From 1936 to 1937 he was director of education for the Zionist Organization of Canada, and edited the *Canadian Zionist* published monthly by the organization. He began to travel extensively throughout Canada and the U.S. as a speaker in behalf of the Zionist cause.

Klein did not fight in World War II, but he led a very active life during the war and also in the post-war years. He was editor of the weekly *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* (published in Montreal) and contributed to its editorials, book reviews, translations from both Yiddish and Hebrew, and many other articles. It should also be added that Klein was Special Lecturer in Poetry at McGill University for a short period after the war.

His political interests which had always been strong throughout the 1930's found practical expression in 1948 when he ran as a

C.C.F. (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, a left-wing party) candidate in the Federal General Election. However, he was literally buried under the Liberal Party landslide in that election, and since then seems to have lost interest in taking part in politics.

He kept up his practice of law in association with Chait and Aronovich until 1954 when he suffered a breakdown in health. (What he is doing at present I could not find out. One conspicuous feature of the Canadian literary landscape is that so little is known about the country's literary figures. No one seems to care.)

Klein's literary honours are as follows:

1947 Edward Bland Fellowship Prize for a group of seven poems on French Canada (published in *Poetry*, July 1947),
1949 Governor-General's Medal for the best book of poetry published in the preceding year,
1952 Literary prize awarded by the Government of the Province of Québec,
1957 Lorne Pierce Gold Medal from the Royal Society of Canada.

So, in Klein's case, one may perhaps say that 'he is not without honour', even in his own country Canada. However, the 'honour' always seem to be merely official or academic.

So much for the biographical outline. As one notices, the important factors in Klein's life are 1) that he is a Jew, 2) that the formative and struggling years of his life were led in the 1930's, 3) that he has almost all his life lived in Montreal, and 4) that he studied and practised law. The last factor is obvious in his works where court-room techniques and rhetorics are abundantly used.

II. Aspects of Klein

— The Judaic World —

Leon Edel, in perhaps the earliest article ever written on Klein (*The Canadian Forum*, May 1932), begins with the following remark:

"Abraham Moses Klein—need we say it?—is a Jew. This means

> that in the Dominion of Canada, whether he remain true to his race, or try to emulate his Christian brethren, most doors will be shut against him. Let him carry twenty degrees (honorary included), and our universities would as little consider him fit to teach as they would an insurance agent; they would invariably prefer a man with an Oxford third. Let him try to do any of the menial tasks of our beautiful and harmonious industrial world. A glance at his name would soon move him into the ranks of the jobless. Canada as a whole does not accept Jews, for the simple reason that they are Jews."

This was written more than thirty years ago, and it is needless to say that the description here is out-dated. However, in Klein's case, the fact that he is a Jew is of prime importance. Klein never turned his back to the fact. He fully realized and accepted the implications of being a Jew. His mind is full of his race's memories, its joys and sorrows, its pride and humiliation.

To be a Jew means first to be a member of the Hebrew race, and secondly in most cases to be a follower of Judaism. The racial and the religious aspects are inextricably related. This inextricable relation between race and religion is what makes the Jewish people different from most of the other minority groups, or groups which are not fully integrated. In the case of American negroes the religious aspect hardly matters. To take my own case I am a Japanese by race and a Buddhist by faith, but the two sides are not related in the way Klein's race and faith are. A close parallel to Judaism may be found in the French-Canadians' Catholic faith. Hence Klein's sense of affinity with the French-Canadians.

Let us take as an example "Ave Atque Vale ", the very first poem in Klein's *Hath Not a Jew* . . . It is, in a sense, a demonstration or eulogy of the sages and scholars the Jews had over the ages. The impressive list of names includes such figures as Abbaya, Kahana, Shammai, Hillel, Reb Meir, Resh Lakish, Reb Paupa, Bar Huna, Akiva, Jochanan, and others. Towards the end Klein gives us the following lines :

> When he (: Klein) forsakes you, Shakespeare, for a space,
> Or you Kit Marlowe of the four good lines

Or Jonson, you, your sack, your muscadine, your wines,
This Jew
Betakes him to no parisaic crew. . . .

There is no artificial patriotism here. Nor is the poem a projection of any inferiority complex. It is bubbling and overflowing with true racial pride. When I first read it I reacted in my own way by recalling the names of ancient Japanese scholars and Buddhist saints. I even thought a parody of this poem could be composed, but found it impossible. My list would lack the cohesive strength that binds the members of Klein's procession, the strength born of the long centuries of suffering, born of the Jews' dualistic (i.e. Jews *versus* Gentiles) approach to life.

Klein is also fully aware of the humiliation his people had to suffer. "Chi[illegible] Harold's Pilgrimage" which comes next and which is one of Klein's best works offers us an example. A Jew is trying to appease a Gentile:

Is it my wealth you envy, my wine-goblet,
My candlesticks, my spattered gaberdine?
Why take them; all my goods and chattels—yours.
Take them, I shall not so much as say O,
And let there be an end.
The scowl persists.
It is my thoughts, then, that you do begrudge me?
Good; I'll expunge them!
. . . . . .
I am too forward; wherever you seek me not
There you do find me, always, big in your sight.
That too, good brother, is no difficult matter—
For I will dwarf myself, and live in a hut
Upon the outskirts of nowhere, receive no mail,
And speak so low that only God shall hear me!
. . . .
on occasion and in divers lands
I have sojourned, set up abode with you,
Drank the same drinks, partook of the same food,
Applauded the same music, uttered the

Very same language, thought a similar thought, —
And still you have sneered *foreigner*, and still
Your hate was great, as reasonless hatred is.
. . . . . .

His deep and vivid sense of the past is perhaps best expressed in "Psalm XXXVI" (included in *Poems*, 1944):

A Psalm touching genealogy

Not sole was I born, but entire genesis:
For to the fathers that begat me, this
Body is residence. Corpuscular,
They dwell in my veins, they eavesdrop at my ear,
They circle, as with Torahs, round my skull,
In exit and in entrance all day pull
The latches of my heart, descend, and ri[illegible]
And there look generations through my eyes.

The pride, the humiliation, and the deep sense of the past are all integral parts of the Hebrew mentality, and as shown above are fully, beautifully, and impressively presented in Klein's works.

Though it perhaps has nothing to do with the intrinsic value of the work we sometimes feel that there is something esoteric that excludes, or makes his poems hard of access to, a Gentile reader. To take a rather accessible poem:

. . . . . .
On Ninth of Ab, who aided
The youngsters in their game
Of throwing burrs, as they did,
In wailing beards? The same.

And who on Purim came in
To help the urchins, when
They rattled at foul Haman?
Reb Abraham again.

("Portraits of a Minyan: Reb Abraham")

In order to understand these verses we would have to know at

least that the Ninth of Ab (:the eleventh month) is the day of *Tishah b'ab* (or *bov*), a fast day and one of the Jewish holidays, that the 'wailing beards' refers to the bearded Jewish patriarchs lamenting and praying, that 'Purim' is another Jewish holiday—the Feast of Lots, the Fourteenth of Adar, and that 'Haman' is an enemy of the Jews who was hanged on the gallows prepared for Mordecai. We should also know that 'Purim' and 'Hamam' are inseparable. Still that would not be enough. The 'Ninth of Ab' or 'Purim' must evoke in us a specific and vivid image before we can lay claim to any understanding of the poem. Or take the case of "Reb Levi Yitschock Talks to God" (also in *Hath Not a Jew . . .*) The poem itself is by no means abstruse. A man is complaining childishly to God, so it seems. But does a Gentile reader know that Rabbi Levi Yitschock is a very familiar figure in Jewish folklores—a household word for Jews? And that his *Kaddish* (:mourner's prayer) with its stirring strains are sung by Jews the world over? Perhaps I am just showing my ignorance.

However it must be admitted that there are a good number of allusions and references in Klein's works that completely baffle the uninitiated Gentiles and, I would suspect, even the Jewish readers. We find that a book-reviewer in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* (June 16, 1940) has this to say concerning *Hath Not a Jew . . .*: "I don't know whether or not Klein made a mistake by not adding a glossary of the hundreds of Hebrew and Talmudic words, proper nouns and allusions, that abound so bountifully throughout his book of poems" and advises the reader to consult a Jewish reference book. The world of Klein's poetry, or for that matter the Jewish world itself, is a self-contained world, inaccessible especially to outsiders. (In passing, I would urge a Gentile reader to read through N. Ausbel's edition of *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*, Crown, New York, 1948, before confronting himself with the predominantly Jewish *Hath Not a Jew . . .*)

Ludwig Lewisohn, in his foreword to *Hath Not a Jew . . .*, acclaimed Klein as "the first Jew to contribute authentic poetry to the literature of English speech" and goes on as follows:

> ". . . .until his appearance all or nearly all Jews writing verse in English had sought to make themselves more or less indistinguishable from the non-Jewish poets. . . He is a far better English poet than the Jewish poets who tried to be non-Jewish English poets."

This is no paradox. Only by digging deep into one's particular core can one hope to become universal. Another quotation, this time by E. K. Brown:

> " His (:Klein's) constant use of Jewish material has not been a limiting but rather an enlarging influence: he has made for himself a world of characters, images, actions, and ideas which give a solidity and an intensity to his poetry very rare in our literature."
>
> (" Development of Poetry in Canada ", *Poetry*, LVIII, April 1941)

One is tempted to agree with Lewisohn and Brown. However, when R. E. Rashley goes in the opposite direction to declare that " Klein's content is neither new nor original, and his Jewish material is a limitation rather than an enrichment of the Canadian tradition" (*Poetry in Canada, The First Three Steps*, Ryerson, Toronto, 1958. p. 128), one feels that Rashley is more or less justified in saying so. The obvious ' advantage ' Klein has as a Jewish writer can also become a ' disadvantage '. An over-emphasis or over-consciousness of one's particularity and uniqueness can sometimes become unappealing and even repelling. No writer belonging to a minority group is totally free from this danger. Klein is no exception.

Perhaps we can come to some kind of conclusion by comparing the merits and demerits of Klein's Jewish and non-Jewish works. How, for example, does his strongly Jewish work *Hath Not a Jew* . . . (1940) compare with his non-Jewish—or shall we say French-Canadian?—work *The Rocking Chair* (1948)? I personally feel the earlier Jewish poems to be more intense, more impressive, and more evocative than the light, versatile, mature, and felicitous non-Jewish poems of the later period. However this is a matter of opinion, or rather of taste. We might also find ourselves asking

which phase of Klein's poetry is more ' Canadian '. Does it necessarily follow that a poet is more ' Canadian ' when he deals specifically with Canadian landscapes? The answer is not as easy as it seems.

Another point in connection. If one looks at Klein's publications, one notices that *Hath Not a Jew* . . . was published in New York at Behrman's Jewish Book House, *Hitleriad* also in New York, and *Poems* in Philadelphia at the Jewish Publication Society of America. In a society like Canada where literary publication is still in its infancy, this may not be a matter to raise an eyebrow over. But then, can Canadians fully claim Klein as one of *their* poets? Does he not belong more to the North American Jewish community than to that particular country called Canada? A North American poet? Yes. A Montreal poet? Yes. A Canadian poet?—Wait a minute. (Well, at least, that is how I feel. After all, Canada belongs to the vast literary community including England and the United States. To identify Canada as a distinct entity is an extremely difficult task. And do Canadians have more distinct identity than, say, Texans? I am not sure.)

Malcolm Ross in his article on Canadian Literature in the new edition of *Encyclopaedia Americana* has referred to Klein as ' a man alive in this age and in whom all ages are alive '. The Judaic world of Klein shows, as it were, the poet wherein ' all ages are alive '. In the next chapter we shall proceed to his political world and look at the poet who is ' alive in this age.'

III. Aspects of Klein

— The Political Side —

In the already quoted article by Leon Edel ("Abraham M. Klein ", *The Canadian Forum*, May 1932) there is another highly interesting passage:

> " Mr. Klein has just entered a new phase and that one will take him, I think very far, into new roads of thought and experience. He has

> become a poet of the proletariat. The Marxian influence is beginning to show itslf. No one livint through the present crisis, given that he is sufficiently curious intellectually, can avoid asking our present system to give an account of itself. Mr. Klein does."

In the same number of *The Canadian Forum* we have Klein's " Diary of Abraham Segal, Poet " and in the August number we have his " Soirée of Velvel Kleinburger " to justify more or less Edel's declaration. More 'political' poems are to come in the later thirties, culminating as it were in the bitterly political hatred-literature *The Hitleriad* (1944). How Klein fulfilled, or failed to fulfill, the rather naive expectation of Leon Edel seems to be, or should be, one of the most interesting chapters in Klein's life. I have given a list of his predominantly 'political' works in the bibliography. True, Klein chose to exclude these poems from his later published works (with the exception of " Soirée of Velvel Kleinburger " which was included in *New Provinces*, edited by F. R. Scott and A. J. M. Smith in 1936), which may show to some extent his own evaluation of them. Desmond Pacey refers to the political period (the late thirties) of Klein as the 'dark night of the soul' (*The Canadian Poets*, p. 273) wherein the poet seems to have become bitter and even lost faith in poetry. Louis Dudek in his article "A. M. Klein " (*The Canadian Forum*, April 1950) refers to Klein's works in the 1930's as 'anti-poetry'—an unpoetic phase Klein had to pass through in order to 'break out of the hermetic glass' of the Jewish world. In short, a necessary evil—something like the measles which one should not take too seriously. We should perhaps pay respect to Klein's own evaluation and leave the works of this period as they are without adding any further comment. However, fortunately or unfortunately, the political poems of Klein happen to be too interesting to be left alone to fade into oblivion. They not only shed light on one aspect of our poet. They are eloquent testimonies (or shall we say remnants) of one aspect of the Canadian literary scene in the 1930's. Before generalizing, I should perhaps for the readers' sake give a brief

account of these poems in order.

(1) "Diary of Abraham Segal, Poet" describes the kind of life an educated Jewish man of poetical bent who has to make a living in this capitalistic society of ours is confronted with. Life begins at 7 : 15 when *He rises.* The poem follows Abraham Segal as *He travels on the street-car, and reads over a neighbour's shoulder* at 8 : 15, as *He considers the factory hands* (8 : 45), and as *He yawns, and regards the slogans on the office walls* (9 : 05) :

> Blessed the men this day,
> Whether at death or birth,
> Who own good sites, for they
> Shall inherit the earth.
> . . . . . .

At 11 : 30 *He receives a visitor.* It is Mrs. Schwartz, the boss's wife. She is 'cultivated' :

> . . . . Of course she loves art. She goes to lectures.
> But yesterday she heard a recitation
> About the patter of a babe's pink toes.

She is also charitable and benevolent :

> Why only last week she was overjoyed
> To go to the Grand Ball, Chez Madame Lloyd
> And dance all night for the poor unemployed.

He worships at the North-Eastern (referring to the lunch he takes at a coffee-shop) at 12 : 20, after which *He reads his pocket-edition of Shakespeare, and luxuriously thinks* (12 : 20–12 : 45) (the style used here is Shakespearean). At 6 : 30 *He eats at the family-board* with his father, sister, brother, uncle and cousin, and after supper (7 : 15) *He contemplates his contemporaries,* having nothing to do :

> With north as drab as south, and south as dull
> As the gray east, the west unbeautiful,
> Where shall I go? What pathway shall I choose?
> Where shall I point the nozzles of my shoes?

The poem ends as *He communes with Nature* (9 : 00) on a moon-lit mountain-top with his sweetheart. (This final part seems to be somewhat out of keeping with the rest.)

The whole poem is witty (in an Eliotian way), full of evocative descriptions, and is a skillful exposition of cynical, bitter, and 'Capitalistic' boredom. The poet's own attitude towards 'Abraham Segal, *Poet*' is rather ambivalent—both tender and critical. Klein is, of course, criticizing the society in which Abraham Segal, the poet, is forced to live. But his impatience with Segal's escapist attitude is also quite obvious. Of what use is the poet who 'thinks luxuriously' and 'communes with Nature'? The irony shows itself in the title.

(2) The second poem "Soirée of Velvel Kleinburger" is another Eliotian poem. Velvel Kleinburger (literally meaning 'small citizen') plays cards all night in an attempt to escape from the drab everyday world. Amidst the thick smoke he is dreaming of large gains and a bourgeois life:

> But I will yet achieve
> An easier living and less scrawny wife
> And not forever will the foreman have
> The aces up his sleeve,
> But some day I will place the lucky bet.
> . . . . . .
> Once more he cuts the cards, and dreams his dream:
> A Rolls-Royce hums within his brain;
> Before it stands a chauffeur, tipping his hat,
> 'You say that it will rain, Sir; it will rain!'
> Upon his fingers diamonds gleam,
> His wife wears gowns of ultra-Paris fashion,
> And she boasts jewels as large as wondrous eyes
> The eyes of Og, the giant-king of Bashan.

The echo of the early T. S. Eliot is apparent in such lines as:

> My days, they vanish into circular smokes,
> My life lies on a tray of cigarette-butts.

(Cf. 'I have measured out my life with coffee spoons' in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock".) To be sure, Klein's poem is not half as sophisticated as Eliot's. It lacks the harassing and tantalizing allusiveness of Prufrock's love song. Nevertheless, Klein's work can claim to be a highly independent one, with a peculiar haunting effect of its own.

(3) "Manuscript: Thirteenth Century" is a long ballad composed of twenty-nine stanzas of eight lines each. It is a story of an outlaw named Sir Roland who seduces and then abandons a maiden called Blanche. Blanche enters a convent, but later revenges herself by giving the outlaw a poisoned cup of wine on his way to the gallows at the gates of the convent. It is a skillfully composed piece of work, but by no means the kind to fulfill Edel's description of Klein as a 'poet of the proletariat'. Klein here seems to be turning his back to political and social reality, apparently in despair.

(4) "Blue-Print For a Monument of War" is an extremely bitter and trenchant satire on war and capitalism. Those who profit by wars—the so-called 'merchants of death', militant clergymen, self-righteous journalists and others of that ilk are all mercilessly lambasted. It seems to be one of the most blistering and effective exposures of the falsity and hypocrisy of war and warmongers ever written in Canada.

Klein quotes effectively from Horace and others (e.g. *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*) but there are also many cutting remarks of his own. Take for example:

> (This is the man who sold the soldiers' shoes—
> Aye, what a host of feet there marched then, wet!
> Now is he rated pillar of the town,
> Sits with his footwear—first-class—on the desk,
> Puffs at his pipe, is sad about the war,
> And plans great honour for the boots that walk no more. . . .)

or

> Behold my brother, sans both legs

A military loss
However, now he ambulates
On a Victoria Cross.

The final part of the poem entitled 'Appendix for the Pious—Isaiah, Chapter sixty-seven' forms, as it were, a modern supplement to the original sixty-six chapters of Isaiah. It is by no means a mere parody. The tone is more serious. It is overflowing with passion and deep anger. The poet, or rather the Lord on behalf of the poet, is speaking in a pathetic tone to the soldiers who are to be sent abroad:

You shall journey long distances to lands in a picture-book.
Your farewells shall be full of glory; paid speakers will laud you.
The manufactories of bunting shall do much trade; the writers of martial musick shall win them renown.
The speeches shall be uttered, the bugles shall be blown, and the kisses wafted
And you shall go the long way over many seas.
This also I know, that the high-counsellor and his brother the swordsmith will rub their hands, warm at the prospect of seven fat years
And will hasten to their secret chambers, there to calculate calculations.
And you shall journey great distances to lands in a picture-book,
. . . . . .
For many days you shall rest in the watery pit
Until your feet shall be swollen, and you shall remember with great longing a pair of slippers and a chair.
Vermin shall crawl about you, the louse shall move in on you
And you shall curse your fingers because they are few.
Worse than the great noise of the instruments of war shall be the terrible silence
When you shall bethink yourself of kith and kin,
. . . . . .
The generals shall be bathed in lotions, the captains shall be perfumed with myrrh
And you, son of man, shall own mud as your breastplate, and mire as your armour.

The battle shall rage, and men with strange devices shall signal to one another
Signals of victory, honour, and inches of land.
Until both you and the alien shall be weary, and the counsellors weary of profit.

Peace shall be heard in the land, but who shall hear it?
Truce shall be called in the land, who shall hearken unto it?
For your brothers shall lie in foreign fields, where the crow may bring them the tiding, and the worm whisper the news.

Perhaps I have quoted too many lines, but the whole work, whether it be 'anti-poetry' or not, seems to deserve quoting, and surely deserves attention.

(5) His next work "Of Daumiers A Portfolio" (*New Frontier*, Sept. 1937) is a sequence of nine poems, namely, 'His Lordship', 'Sentence', 'A Song of Three Degrees', 'Prosecutor', 'Public Utility', 'La Glorieuse Incertitude', 'Sleuth', 'Guardian of the Law' and 'Corrigendum'. This work is abstruse in the sense that the specific target of Klein's satire is not too clear to the readers. It may be that all we have to do is to think of Honoré Daumiers and his relentless political cartoons and hunt no further. However Klein must have had in mind the so-called 'guardians of the law' in our capitalistic society, he may also have had in mind specifically the German People's Court (cf. "Ballad of the Thwarted Axe" included in his *Poems*). He may even have had in mind the notorious Moscow trials. Note particularly the third poem:

The prisoner confessed most willingly.
Of his own free will he confessed, my lord.
There were no threats, no, nor cajolery.
. . . . . .
Behold you, too, how penitence doth stare
Out of a black eye, coloured with remorse.
I swear there was no use of physical force.

It is true the editorial policy and political bias of the leftist *New Frontier* would not have tolerated any criticism or satire of the

Moscow trials. The editors apparently found nothing 'destructive' in Klein's work. The reference was too vague to arouse any suspicion. However the occasional references made by Klein to the Moscow trials in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* (e.g. Dec. 9, 1938; Jan. 6, 1939) shows that he was, as far as the Moscow trials were concerned, diametrically opposed to the almost ridiculously self-justifying *New Frontier* line (for which see its Editorial in the October 1936 number). It may be going too far to say that Klein was satirizing specifically and exclusively the Moscow trials, but there is ground enough to suspect some connection.

(6) "Of Castles in Spain" is a group of three poems—namely, 'To One Gone to the Wars', 'Toreador', and 'Sonnet Without Music', all paying tribute to those who are fighting in Spain against Franco. In the first poem, the poet expresses his shame for not being able to take arms himself:

> How you have shamed me, me the noble talker,
> The polisher of phrases, stainer of verbs,
> Who daily for a price serve hind and hawker,
> Earning my sabbath meat, my daily herbs.
>
> 'Tis you who do confound the lupine jaw
> And stand protective of my days and works,
> As in the street-fight you maintain the law
> And I in an armchair—weigh and measure Marx.

He offers to him who is really fighting

> . . . . meek sacrifice, unvaliant gift,
> My non-liturgic prayer:
> For that your aim be sure,
> Your bullet swift
> Unperilous your air, your trenches dry,
> Your victory unattained by defeat,
> Your courage high.

An expression of the guilty conscience of the intellectuals who supported the Spanish Republic's cause—from afar, far from the battle-fields.

In ' Toreador ', the poet urges the toreador, symbol of the Republican fighters, to deliver death to the bull named Franco. The third poem ' Sonnet Without Music' lambastes the smug supporters of Franco and gives them a strong warning :

> The iron heel grows rusty in the nape
> of peasant feeding with the earthworm—but
> beware aristocrat, Don Pelph, beware!
> The peon soon will stir, will rise, will stand,
> breathe Hunger's foetid breath, lift arm, clench fist,
> and heil you to the fascist realm of death!

Perhaps one may be allowed here to digress and make some remarks on the Spanish Civil War and its impact on the Canadian literary landscape. We must remember that the usually self-effacing Canadians were responding in their own way to this almost universal political challenge, the challenge of the Spanish War. Take for example the December 1936 number of the *New Frontier*. In this special issue on Spain we have Morley Callaghan and E. J. Pratt among others declaring their stand on Spain. This is Callaghan :

> ". . . . All those who are heart and soul with the rebels (i.e. Franco's side) have made a clear-cut choice between the things that are Caesar's and the things that are God's. They are on the side of property-rights against human rights."

E. J. Pratt is also eloquent :

> " My sympathies in the Spanish situation are wholly with the Popular Front and are determined by the following reasons. . . ."

Among the number of reasons he gives, the fourth one is that " a genuine and heroic effort to establish a democracy has been smashed by a minority used as a spearhead of a Fascist invasion."

In *The Canadian Forum*, which was on the whole much more sedate and conservative than the *New Frontier*, we find Earle Birney

beginning his book-review of Fox's *The Novel and The People* in the following tone:

> " Ralph Fox and Tom Wintringham, co-founders of the LEFT REVIEW, are names now to be added to the list of British left-wing writers who have been killed fighting for the Spanish Government. All who strive against capitalism must, irrespective of party and creed, deeply regret their deaths."

Likewise he concludes his review by reminding the readers of

> " the fact that Auden and his comrade-artists must suspend poetry to fight where Fox and many other hopes for proletarian art have already perished."
>
> (" Proletarian Literature: Theory and Practice ", *The Canadian Forum*, May 1937)

The tone is typical of the Spanish Civil War period, though of course with our hindsight we can easily brand it as naive and sentimental. It is at least apparent that Canadian writers were not living in glorious isolation from the rest of the world in the vociferous late thirties. In a later issue of the *New Frontier* (July–August, 1937) there appears an advertisement calling for readers to donate to the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion (composed of five hundred Canadians) fighting in Spain. To this may be added Klein's welcome extended to the battalion on its return:

> " We regret that their return did not synchronize with a Loyalist victory, but defeat does not diminish from the glory of their enterprise. At a time when many contented themselves with mouthing the empty phrases of Democracy, these young men went across an ocean to fight for those ideals which their detractors so lukewarmly profess to admire. . . ."
>
> (" The Mac-Paps Arrive ", *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, Feb. 17, 1939)

The type of literary-political consciousness, or rather conscience, as may be seen in the above quotations seems to have disappeared for good from the Canadian literary scene. Should it be welcomed

as a sign of maturity or should it be regretted as a lapse into smugness? It is not a matter for an outsider to pontificate on.

Anyhow, our poet Klein was passionately committed to the Republican cause. He was, as it were, living up to Edel's expectations as 'the poet of the proletariat'. The proletarian and revolutionary side of Klein is bitterly strong in his next work.

(7) "Barricade Smith: His Speeches" is a long sequence of ten poems, the titles of which are I. Of Violence; II. Of Dawn and Its Breaking; III. Of the Clients of Barnum; IV. Of Psalmody in the Temple; V. Of Faith, Hope and Charity; VI. Of Beauty; VII. Of Poesy: VIII. Of Soporifics; IX. Of Shirts and Policies of State; X. Of the Lily Which Toils Not.

He begins by exposing non-violence for what it is:

> What does the word mean: *Violence?*
> Are we not content?
>
> Are we not all well-fed?
> Save for the twelve months of Lent?
> Is it not slander to aver the Boss absconds
> With all the embezzled dollars in his delicate hand?
> . . . . . .
> Who, then, would speak of violence, uncouth and impolite?
> Surely not we, the meek, the docile, the none-too-bright!
> . . . . . .
> violence is wicked;
> And worse than that—I shudder to say the word,
> That fell indictment—
> It simply is not cricket!
>
> Go therefore, tell your wives that the breadbox
> must stay breadless,
> The rent unpaid, the stove unheated, you enslaved;
> Because you *must* be above all things, well-behaved.
> And having uttered these heroic words, slink hence
> Into some unleased corner, and there vanish—
> But not with any violence.
>
> (I. Of Violence)

The second poem in the group, 'Of Dawn and Its Breaking', is a passionate glorification of revolution.

> Where will you be
> When the password is said and the news is extra'd abroad,
> And the placard is raised, and the billboard lifted on high,
> And the radio network announces its improvised decree:
> You are free?
> Where will it find you, that great genesis?
> Preparing your lips for a kiss?
> Waiting the call of next in a barbershop?
> Rapt with the ticker's euphony?
> Or practising some negroid hop?
> Where will you be
> When the news is bruited by the auto horn?
> Holding a pair of aces back to back?
> Paring a toe-nail, cutting out a corn?
> Or reading, with de-trousered back,
> Hearst's tabloid, previously torn?
>
> Or will you be—O would that you should be!
> Among those valiant ones returning to their homes to tell
> Their daughters and their sons to tell posterity
> How they did on that day
> If not create new heaven, at least abolish hell.

The poet also exhorts people to wake up:

> Is it not time
> Before they shove you on an unemployment shelf,
> Or freeze you in a pension-frigidaire,
> That you do get
> Wise to yourself?
> (III. Of the Clients of Barnum)

He exposes the cheap commercialism of the movies (IV), and to borrow Desmond Pacey's expression, the poet himself is "standing on the very edge of the abyss of despair" (*Ten Canadian Poets*, p. 273) when he bombards 'humanistic' ideals as follows:

Beware,—spiritual humankind,—
Faith, contraceptive of the mind;
And hope, cheap aphrodisiac,
Supplying potency its lack;
And also that smug lechery
Barren and sterile charity.
(V. Of Faith, Hope and Charity)

Anger, bitterness and impatience seem to have deprived Klein of respectability. His idea of beauty also seems to have become materialistic (or shall we say proletarian?):

. . . . .there is one beauty; put it on a table!
A loaf of bread, some salt, a vegetable.
(VI. Of Beauty)

He urges the Bard to

Descend the winding staircase; and let your
Speech be, not of the thrush's note, long sour,
But of the Real, alive upon a floor.
(VII. Of Poesy)

Keats, Wordsworth and Tennyson are disposed of:

Let Keats forget his father's stables, smelling
The mythical odour of the asphodel;
Let Wordsworth clutch his sensitive bosom, leaping
When he beholds a rainbow he can sell;
Let butler Tennyson pour out old vintage
For the good knights at Arthur's King Hotel.
(*ibid.*)

Klein also lays bare the soporific quality of popular entertainment (VIII), the foolish fad of shirts (e.g. the Fascists' black shirt) (IX), and in his last poem he gives vent to his hatred for the rich represented here by a certain 'Lily Which Toils Not'. Lily is a debutante:

Photo of limousine, and background slums,
Lily dispensing to the poor unmentioned sums,
Already titled for the typesetter:
Deb and debtor.
Isn't that cute?

Some years pass. Lily is no longer a 'deb':

. . . .Barricade Smith did love her from afar,
Watched her, in due time, go upon a cruise
And come back, headlined in the nation's news,
As wife of the tenth cousin of the Czar.

Whom, in due time, she buried. No one needs
To be reminded of that tragic cut
Of her Paris widow's weeds.

That season over, with the coming of the spring
And dividends blossoming on many a bank,
She wedded, being now a lady of rank,
A closer relative of a deposed king,
Whom, in due course,
She did divorce,
And sent him packing, with a little tip
Two million dollars, and a discarded ship.
. . . . . .

(X. Of The Lily Which Toils Not)

Klein's attitude towards the rich has changed little from what we have seen in "Abraham Segal". It is hard to feel that our poet has matured. One just feels the bitterness and despair of the age. An age which would even force some poets to 'suspend poetry to fight' (E. Birney), and all in vain.

When Klein had his first book of poetry published in 1940, he significantly left out every one of the non-Jewish political poems we have been looking at. However, when we consider the colour or tone of *Hath Not a Jew* . . . , we can perhaps say that Klein left them out not because they were political or revolutionary but simply because they were non-Jewish. And unfortunately (for the readers), Klein never had the chance to publish these non-

Jewish poems. The Canadian reading market is never that demanding.

Leon Edel who in 1932 had hailed Klein as a 'poet of the proletariat' was understandably disappointed with *Hath Not a Jew* . . . :

> "The collection does Klein a distinct disservice in that it is not sufficiently representative of his remarkable gifts, the gifts above all of eloquent rebellion."
>
> ("Poetry and The Jewish Tradition", *Poetry*, LVIII, April 1941)

However, the publication of *Hath Not a Jew,* unpolitical and unrevolutionary as it is, by no means signifies that Klein turned his back to social reality. Far from it. The relentless persecution of the Jews by Hitler led Klein to write another political poem—a blistering satire on Hitler, *The Hitleriad* (1944).

This work has not been favorably received and is usually deemed a failure. One cause of its failure, or what gives the impression of failure, seems to be that Klein's anger, hatred and contempt for Hitler and his henchmen is too stark and obvious. If Klein had just pulled his punches a little, the whole work would have been more effective and moving. To give some examples. He depicts Hitler's face thus:

> A peasant's face, an agent's face, no face
> At all, no face but vegetarian blob!
> The skin's a skin on eggs and turnips fed,
> The forehead villainous low, the eyes deepset—
> The pervert big eyes of the thwarted bed—
> And that mustache, the symbol of the clown
> (II)

Note also the following descriptions:

> Where was he born? (Born is the word that I
> Use, seeing *littered* is not poesy.)
> . . . . . .
> Wherefore, uncouth, untutored, unconcerned,

He left his school most thoroughly unlearned,
Fit for the plough—before it, not behind!—
(IV)

or

(Though adept at the demagogic yell,
It is averred that Adolf could not spell.) (XI)

Hitler's henchmen also receive no better treatment:

Frustrated men, who tried all things, and failed,
And then determined to be jailed, or hailed!
Herr Goebbels such a one—
Club-footed, rat-faced, halitotic, the
Brave Nordic ideal, a contrario!
A kept man; eloquent, a Ph.D.;
. . . . . (XII)

Sometime the poem seems to forgo all claim to satire or burlesque. It indulges in sheer hate and contempt, not even trying to restrain itself. Nevertheless, in the final parts of the work, particularly in XXV and XXVI, *The Hitleriad* seems to rise to a moving and passionate height rarely attained elsewhere by the poet. Allow me to quote a few lines:

Summon them, bailiff of the dead, the ghosts
Who once were brave men stood against a wall,
Summon them, all the exsanguinated hosts,
Hero and martyr, liquidated; call,
Call forth the witnesses, the uninterred ghosts,
And let them speak. And let the dead attest
Their murder and its manner and its cause—
From shattered jaw, from perforated breast
Speak out their mauling at the bestial claws.
Speak out, or neither we, nor they, again know rest.
(XXVI)

The Jewish race is deeply involved in *The Hitleriad.* If the work

had succeeded (though I personally do not think it a failure), it would have turned out to be a monumental one combining the two aspects—the Judaic and the political—of Klein which we have been looking at.

It is time we came to some conclusion. What significance do the poems of the 1930's have for Klein? Do they just represent a passing phase, a kind of anti-poetry as Dudek suggests? Were they a fad of the age, or an integral part of the poet's sensibility?

It cannot be denied that Klein's political and radical poems reflect to a great degree the atmosphere of the politically-minded thirties. In such periodicals as *The Canadian Frontier* and the *New Frontier*, to mention only two of them, we come upon many Canadian poets writing in much the same vein. Dorothy Livesay's name is conspicuous, and one may also recall the sequence of witty, anti-capitalistic verses written by F. R. Scott in the early thirties. So, Klein was by no means unique in this respect. It would be wrong, however, to consider Klein, or the Klein of this period, as just one of the numerous politically-minded poets of the thirties. He makes it clear that he takes a rather dim view of such types:

> " The third decade of this century was one which was characterized in its literature by a too often indiscriminate worshipping of letters *of social singnificance*. Too often, indeed, the poets have been what Mr. Archibald MacLeish has so aptly called 'the camp-followers' of an ideology. The war, and the alignment of war has wrought havoc with the cut-and-dried intellectual compartments of the red robins, piping social significance."
>
> (" The Decencies had Perished with the Stukas ", *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, Dec. 19, 1941)

Though there may be a tinge of hindsight here, it is evident that Klein does not consider himself one of 'the red robins, piping social significance'.

Klein's political poems were motivated by something deeper, an inner necessity one might say. He was not a mere 'red robin'.

The fact that he belonged to a persecuted race made it easier for him to identify himself with the underdogs of society. But this not lead to the conclusion that a Jew is bound to be a Marxist. The problem of Judaism *versus* Maxism, or for that matter Klein *versus* Marxism, is much more complicated and is beyond the scope of this paper. In this respect, however, the spiritual wanderings of Uncle Melech in *The Second Scroll*—namely, from Judaism to Marxism and then back again to Judaism—seems to give us a clue of a sort. The pattern of Uncle Melech's and, potentially, Klein's own wanderings would come to something like this:

i) Inherited innocent faith;
ii) Doubts arising (—If God is almighty and just, why do the Jews always have to suffer?);
iii) Religious faith eclipsed by political faith; acceptance of communism;
iv) Disillusionment with political faith;
v) Return to the Judaic faith, with politics sublimated and absorbed in it.

The five phases can all be illustrated to some extent by Klein's own works. For the first phase we have "Heirloom" (in *Hath Not a Jaw . . .*), "Psalm XXXVI" (*Poems*), "Autobiographical" (*The Second Scroll*) and many other examples. For the second phase we have "Reb Levi Yitschok Talks to God" (*Hath Not a Jew . . .*):

> How long wilt thou ordain it, Lord, how long
> Will Satan fill his mickle-mouth with mirth,
> Beholding him free, the knave who earned the thong,
> And Israel made the buttocks of the earth?
> . . . . . .
> Good men groaned: Hunger; bad men belched of food,
> Wherefore? And why?

These rather 'childish' arguments of Levi Yitschok are not Klein's own, but the sincerity of the feeling belongs to Klein. In

The Second Scroll Uncle Melech loses faith and joins the Communist party after going through the bitterest of experiences—the pogrom. Pogrom this murderous assault on Jewish communities, is totally unjustified and unexplainable in terms of God's justice. Loss of faith seems to be a natural and even inevitable reaction to it. In "Autobio- graphical", Klein describes the visit of two fellow-men who barely escaped the pogrom:

. . . . . .
And the two strangers, come
Fiery from Volhynia's murderous hordes—
The cards and humming stop.
And I too swear revenge for that pogrom.

The onslaught is enough to crush innocent faith.

The third phase. Differing from Uncle Melech, Klein himself never lost his faith even though we must admit that there were periods when he was more revolutionary and political than pious and religious. (Klein sometimes refers to his loss of faith, as in the oft-quoted lines:

And I who in my own faith once had faith like this,
but have not now, am crippled more than they.
(" The Cripples " in *The Rocking Chair*)

But it is the inherited unquestioning form of faith and the ritualistic rabbinical type of faith that he had lost. Klein never, I presume, doubted the fundamental truth of his faith.)

In *The Second Scroll*, we have some references to Marxism:

" Uncle Melech had joined the Bolsheviks! To my father this was tantamount to apostasy. . . . my father was no pharisee who stood shocked at a man's changing of his political convictions. Nor was my father a man to be startled by rebellion; . . . But Bolshevism—

Bolshevism meant the denial of the Name. My father's notions about the philosophy of Marxism were very primitive."

(p. 24)

This appears to be a fairly accurate description of how Marxism was looked upon in Klein's orthodox family. Klein's own attitude towards Marxism may be seen in the following passage:

> "I was by this time attending the university and already had been conditioned to look at Marxism with a most unfilial impartiality, and so the reports of Uncle Melech's progress in the Communist Party not only failed to disturb me but indeed filled me with a secret pride. . . . .It was a strange metamorphosis, this from Talmudic scholar, syllogizing the past, into Moscow student, conspiring a world's future."
> (pp. 25–26)

Klein in actual life remained a lawyer and a poet, but the two poles —'Talmudic scholar' and 'Moscow student'—were latent within him as his unrealized possibilities. There must have been occasions when Klein considered himself a Talmudic scholar *manqué* or a revolutionary *manqué*. Uncle Melech is a projection of Klein's unactualized dreams. In actual life a man can never realize his whole possibilities. He makes one choice, and feels somehow that he is not doing justice to his other unrealized possibilities. Every man has within him his own brand of Uncle Melech.

The fourth phase, i.e. the disillusion with Marxism. In the 1930's, as in any other decade, there were many naive and innocent soi-disant communists and radicals. To some of them the Spanish Civil War, to some the Moscow trials, and to the remaining stalwarts the Russo-German Pact of 1939 proved to be the turning points, or if you prefer, the stumbling blocks. A man of integrity would find it almost impossible to remain unshaken through these crucial trials. Of the Russo-German Pact which proved to be the turning point for Uncle Melech we have the following description:

> ". . . .It was late '39, and when the enemy swarmed over Poland, I found myself in Kamenets, still abashed by the treachery of the pact that the Soviets had made with the sons of Belial. In the midst of our anguish we were regaled with a dialectic which proved that fascism was but a matter of taste. The taste was bitter unto death. . . . With a

> stroke of the pen, a dart of the tongue, they had handed over to perdition, those two-faced masters of thesis and antithesis, three and a half million souls. My ideology had been a saying of peace before poison." (pp. 31–32)

This was Klein's own reaction. As an editor of a weekly paper Klein had angrily denounced this pact as " one of the greatest treacheries perpetrated in the history of diplomacy at its most treacherous " (*Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, August 25, 1939).

There are some writers who, when disillusioned with communism, turn into rabid anti-communists and begin advocating the cause of the reactionary forces, as was the case with another Jewish writer, Arthur Koestler. Not so our Klein. As mentioned before he was politically aligned with the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, and would at present, I would surmise, support the New Democratic Party. It is difficult to explain here, but Klein is fundamentally not of the Koestler type. A disillusion can take many forms.

The fifth and last phase, wherein one returns to the Judaic faith. The whole story of *The Second Scroll* follows Uncle Melech's wandering that leads to this phase, and is, in a sense, a eulogy of this phase. The faith described here is no longer the faith from which one wandered away. It is more toned down, mellower, and yet deeper. Klein describes one aspect of it as follows:

> What is it stands between us? Not disbelief!
> We worship all the same great sovereign Lord;
> In gesture and genuflection differ,
> Differ only in the choice of him we send
> With our soul's embassy to the throne of God;
> In all other respects we do not differ.
> (" The Three Judgements ", *The Second Scroll*, p. 135)

There is no fiery self-righteousness here, nor the excessive desire to differentiate.

Another factor we must not forget in considering Klein is the

founding of the State of Israel. If the persecution of the Jews and their homeless wanderings had not come to an end, if the founding of Israel had remained an unrealized dream, the situation would have been different. In this century the pogrom and the concentration-camps lie at one end but happily (and what a contrast!) at the other end lies the glorious founding of Israel. In other words, Auschwitz at one end, and Zion at the other end. This is the framework within which the spiritual and physical movements of the present-day Jews have taken place. A 20th century Jew cannot escape from this frame. It somewhat regiments the Jewish imagination but yet it is deeply and undeniably moving. The depth of the suffering and the height of the joy may be beyond the reach of a Gentile's imagination. Yet at least we know that Klein has added something of a different dimension, something that was greatly lacking, to Canadian literature.

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