

TEXT INTO FLESH: A LACANIAN READING OF SELECTED SHORT
STORIES BY I.B. SINGER

Méira Cook

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Arts
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
for the Degree of Master of Arts

Johannesburg 1988

ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to explore the symbiotic intercourse between the word and the flesh as manifested in the short stories of I.B. Singer. The insights afforded by post-structural and psychoanalytic theorists, particularly Lacan, have been used to re-examine Singer's tales. From this alternative reading I hope to demonstrate the relationship between writing and the body, between the law and desire, that is of such significance in his stories. Moreover, it will be shown that it is precisely these extremities which structure the shtetl communities of whom Singer writes.

The transmutation of flesh into word is demonstrated by the developing individual who at the moment of his negotiated entry into society, seeks to locate himself within the locus of a language at once fragmentary and alienating. An examination of Lacan's three developmental stages will be facilitated; the birth into the imaginary, the movement through the mirror stage and the entry into the symbolic.

Of central importance in these tales is the independence of the word and the autonomous status of all language rooted at once in the parameters of the law and in the volumes of the body. The potency of the word is explored, both as transcendent artifact and as adjunct of the flesh. The means by which language may be transformed from blessing to curse in the context of a religious community will be demonstrated as well as the secular processes of reification by means of which the dual axes of the word and

the flesh are constructed.

The final concern of this dissertation is an exploration of the insistence of the letter in the unconscious, and the means by which the structures of language come to mirror the arrangement of the unconscious according to a Lacanian discourse.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work.

It is being submitted for the degree of *Master of Arts*
in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or
examination in any other University, nor has it been
prepared under the aegis or with the assistance of any
other body or organization or person outside the University
of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

[Signature]

Financial assistance rendered by the Human Sciences Research Council towards the cost of this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed or conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not to be regarded as those of the Human Sciences Research Council.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for the gracious and timeous guidance of Professor R. Nethersole. Her professionalism and insight have been invaluable.

I would like to thank my mother for many patient hours at the typewriter, and both my parents for their practical support and their encouragement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	Page
INTRODUCTION	10
1. THE STRUCTURES OF ANALYSIS.....	12
1.1. Contexts	12
1.2. Language and the Law.....	14
1.3. Lacanian Figures	18
2. THE MOMENT OF THE MIRROR	29
2.1. Negotiation of the Three Stages	30
2.2. "Gimpel the Fool"	35
2.3. "A Crown of Feathers"	55
2.4. Oedipus Foreclosed	71
2.5. "Black Wedding"	73
2.6. "Two Corpses go Dancing"	83
3. THE POTENT WORD	97
3.1. Transformations	98
3.1.1. "Something is There"	100
3.1.2. "The Plagiarist"	105
3.2. Fragmentations	109
3.2.1. "Cockadoodledoo"	110
3.2.2. "A Pair"	115
3.3. Disemberment	121
3.3.1. "The Blasphemer"	123
3.3.2. "The Man Who Came Back"	127
3.4. The Imperatives of the Word	129

Section	Page
4. THE INSISTENCE OF THE LETTER IN THE UNCONSCIOUS	138
4.1. "The Last Demon"	140
4.2. "The Little Shoemakers"	146
4.3. Full Circle	152
5. SOUL-CATCHERS, TALE-TELLERS AND TALISMANS	158
5.1. <i>Human Pictions</i>	159
5.2. The Weaver	160
5.3. The Evil One	161
5.4. Aunt Yentl	165
5.5. The Festival	171
CONCLUSION	177
BIBLIOGRAPHY	181

In woman's womb word is made
flesh but in the spirit of the
maker all flesh that passes
becomes the word that shall
not pass away

James Joyce

Ulysses

In woman's womb word is made
flesh but in the spirit of the
maker all flesh that passes
becomes the word that shall
not pass away

James Joyce

Ulysses

INTRODUCTION

Interpretation is not open to all meanings, it is not just any interpretation. It is a significant interpretation, one that must not be missed.

J. Lacan

The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis

This thesis is concerned with implementing a post-structural, psychoanalytic examination of those short stories by Isaac Bashevis Singer which address the rabid discourse between language and the body. The connection between writing and the flesh insists in the tales of Singer as in the écrits of Lacan, both of whom chronicle within their separate oeuvres the structures of compulsion by which language may be imprinted on the body. Furthermore, Singer's stories with their magical resonances and fantastical configurations, would seem to yield to a psychoanalytic study, where myth, dream and fantasy are utilised as the instruments of psychic recovery.

In his essay on research in The Rustle of Language, Roland Barthes speaks of "true interlocution" as "overflow",¹ of a language of desire which junkets the discourse of research through the freedom of the signifier, encountered here as fête:

...the return of words, of word games and puns, of proper names, of citations, of etymologies, of reflexivities of discourse, of typographies, of combinative operations, of rejections of languages. This freedom must be a virtuosity; the kind which ultimately permits us to read within the support text, however ancient, the motto of all writing: it circulates (Barthes' emphasis).²

It is this freedom of the signifier that I have employed in my dissertation, and by means of which I have endeavoured to

prepare a text which defines itself both as exploration and as circulation. My subject deals to a large extent with the dual concepts of the word and the law, and it will be noted that these icons are often capitalised within the body of the text. It is necessary at this point to enumerate the polemical differences implied in the separation of lower and higher case significations.

The law as a literal construct, as an actual body of commandments and sanctions, is distinguished from the Law as a symbolic structure, a mythological reservoir comprising Lacan's notion of the paternal metaphor, la nom-du-pere.

Similarly, the word as linguistic currency, as grammatical transaction, is delineated from the Word as created artifact, as when for example, it is used by the devil as instrument of persuasion, or by the rabbi as chalice of absolution.

I have used the following abbreviations to indicate Singer's texts in my thesis. Each title refers to a collection of short stories:

- CF A Crown of Feathers
- FK A Friend of Kafka
- GF Gimmel the Fool
- I The Image
- OL Old Love
- P Passions
- S The Séance
- SF Short Friday
- SMS The Spinosa of Market Street

SECTION ONE

THE STRUCTURES OF ANALYSIS

I was brought up on three dead languages - Hebrew, Aramaic and Yiddish and in a culture that developed in Babylon: the Talmud.

I.B. Singer
Shosha

1.1. Contexts

Scholarship on Singer like research on any other writer has ranged from bibliographic explorations³ to literary criticism.⁴ Critics like Irving Howe⁵ and Irving Malin⁶ have taken pains to place Singer within the context of Jewish American writers, a category that accords his work refugee status. This is particularly evident in Dorothy Seidman Bilik's book entitled Immigrant - Survivors⁷ in which his fiction is seen to be at once assimilated into and differentiated from the mainstream of the American literary tradition.

Other theorists have viewed Singer as a writer concerned essentially with what is known as the Jewish experience, and whose characters express the extremities of exile and persecution. An example of this may be seen in Sanford Pinsker's study, entitled The Schlemiel as Metaphor⁸ in which characters are accorded archetypal significance, Gimpel, in "Gimpel the Fool" for example being described as the symbolic figure of the Lamed Vov, a righteous man or wandering Jew. More recent studies have paid tribute to the narrative strategies contrived in Singer's shorter fiction. David Neal

Miller in particular, writes of the "self-conscious shaper of fictions" ³ that we encounter in these tales.

Whilst studies of Singer's fiction have spanned historic, racial, generic and symbolic considerations, there is a lacuna in the body of theory which has neglected to explore the language of these tales and the cultural preoccupations inherent in the acts of speech, writing and exegesis in a particular community. What I hope to do in this present study then, is to examine the tales as cultural and linguistic artifacts by means of which a people's consciousness may be excavated. My task is in many ways facilitated by the specificity of Singer's enquiry. Whether his fictions describe the shtetl communities of Eastern Europe or the ghetto neighbourhoods of North America, the emphasis is on isolation, of a culture under siege and of the nature of their communications with the outside world.

The people of whom Singer writes: rabbis and heretics, sages and fools, virgins and harlots, women barren and bountiful, are all bound by the constraints of a narrow culture and it is this *topos* that I wish to illuminate through the medium of psychoanalysis. Through the insights afforded by Lacan I have hoped to explore the cultural artifacts of a community who define themselves in language, by the Word and through the Law. The work of Lacan concerned as it is exhaustively with language and silence, desire and prohibition, speech and writing would seem to provide the ideal tool for excavating the collective psyche of these isolated communities. For the shtetls of Europe, Singer's preferred milieu, no longer exist, their

people extinct, their language extinguished, they survive only in memory, as fiction. Paradoxically it is precisely this eidetic status that provides us with the only communicable forms with which to measure a culture, the self-enclosed artifice of narrative.

Isaac Bashevis Singer is a prolific and versatile writer and his oeuvre includes novels, short stories, children's books, memoirs, essays, reviews and translations.¹⁰ My object of enquiry is his short fiction and the tales chosen all attempt to illustrate the central concern of my thesis which is the significance of writing and speech for those communities whose physical survival and ethical continuity is entirely dependent upon a covenant: The Word of God and the Law of the Fathers.

1.2. Language and the Law

If we are to be concerned here with language as it traces itself out upon the flesh, we must necessarily define language as sentient, as capable of animating. In the following pages I wish to examine the source of the original vernacular of the tales in order the better to define a lost world of living corpses and dead languages. I wish also to examine the race of whom Singer writes almost exclusively; they are a people peculiarly connected to the word and the book. This may best be illustrated by a comparative analysis between the sacred principles of the Hebraic Kabbalah and the secular principles of post-structural literary theory.

In his Nobel prize acceptance speech, Singer replied to the

question "Why write in Yiddish?", with the following words:

'First, I like to write ghost stories, and nothing fits a ghost better than a dying language. The deader the language, the more alive is the ghost. Ghosts love Yiddish; they all speak it.' 11

Singer's protagonists of the Eastern European shtetle and the American ghettos speak Yiddish, write Yiddish, and are written in a language which situates itself both as statement of survival and as acknowledgement of extinction: the characters caricaturing, via the authority of their author, spectres animated by an obsolete language. And if to write in a defunct tongue may be hailed as the preservation of a sentient past, it must also be reckoned as an archeology of effaced runes. For the places that he writes of, Fraampol, Turbin, Bilgoray no longer exist except in fiction, where lost worlds may be apprehended only through an extinct grammar. Indeed literature is the site of the only possible resurrection,¹² the location of alchemy and transmutation, where, as Alfred Kazin has it, history is transformed into "fiction, fable, story".¹³

Yiddish was the language of women and children, occupying in ancient days the place of secular discourse, while Hebrew was the sacred language of the holy tongue through which intercourse with the Deity alone could be gainsaid, and that only by the men of the community. This division is significant in the light of Lacan's categories, where Yiddish becomes the subverted language of desire, spoken in the imaginary register, and Hebrew is situated in the symbolic dimension, the place of language and the law, spoken in the name of the Fathers. The tales written in the

original idiom then, frame themselves structurally as texts of routed pleasure in the invocation of an old and dying tongue. Singer writes about a people bound by ritual and remorse both to language and the law. The Jew by virtue of an ethos that inheres in an endless proliferation of texts, interpretations and exegeses, experiences his God at a remove, at the displaced site of significance, or what Susan Handelman has called "mediation, deferment, exile, absence, equivocal meaning".¹⁴ For where the Christian experiences the flesh of his mediator Christ, as in the ceremony of the Eucharist, the Jew is unreconciled except by a covenant, a Word and the body of the Law, repossessed through the father by the son. The holy text thus functions as a gift of continuity and survival to a people exiled and bereft, redeemed only through the spoor of the sacred letter traced out upon regenerate flesh. It is this trope that Michel Foucault has called "similitude":

...the value of language lay in the fact that it was the sign of things. There is no difference between the visible marks that God has stamped upon the surface of the earth, so that we may know its inner secrets, and the legible words that the Scriptures, or the sages of Antiquity, have set down in the books preserved for us by tradition.¹⁵

Like all ancestral races, the Jew is no more than the history that writes him, but like few genealogies he is also the writing that writes his history. Nowhere is this presented more profoundly than by Derrida:

The only thing that begins by reflecting itself is history. And this fold, this furrow, is the Jew. The Jew who elects writing which elects the Jew... (Derrida's *clipsis*)¹⁶

And what writing elects more strenuously than the holy tracts of the most sacred text, the Kabbalah ? What I wish to show here is the connection between Kabbalistic exegesis and post-structural deconstruction in order to establish the bridge between the sacred and the secular word that is necessary to our enquiry. This will be facilitated in my dissertation by an examination of the textual structuration of the short stories and an exploration of their existence as cultural and communicable forms.

17
According to Gershom Scholem in Kabbalah, mysticism is knowledge that can only be communicated through symbol and metaphor. Kabbalists, called doreshai reshumot meaning "those who interpret texts", established communities of scholars led by a Master, and concerned with the exegesis of the Torah as a living body, an organic structure from which no single letter may be erased without mutilating the entire body. The Kabbalah instructs us that all the world came into existence through the inter-connection of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet with their two hundred and thirty one possible combinations, so that the dimension of the world is essentially linguistic and based on infinite acrostic polyglot. Added to this is the mysticism of language, where the speech of men and divine speech are aligned, all deriving from the source of the Sacred Name, where God Himself is the soul of its letters. The infinite significations of divine speech are equalled only by the multiplicity of interpretations accorded the Sacred Writings. There is a legend that affirms that the Torah is written in black

fire on white fire. The white fire (the spaces between the letters) is believed to be the true text of the Torah, and the black letters comprise the Oral Law. Concealed in the parchment of the scroll then, is the true written Law, a vanished text which will only be revealed in the time of the Messiah. These then are the elements of Kabbalistic mysticism: initiation, metonymy and metaphor, erasure, divine letters and sacred names, plurivalency, hidden texts and infinitely creative exegesis. The parallels with deconstructive theory are explicit, especially when we consider those writerly texts, polymorphous, carnivalesque and dialogic upon which post-structural theory is based. Umberto Eco, speaking of the Kabbalistic treatise compares it to a book "blown up, so to speak, in a really unlimited semiosis".¹⁸

Having established now the reciprocity between sacred tracts of the law and secular texts of language, I would like to explicate those points of Lacanian doctrine necessary for my literary exploration.

1.3. Lacanian Figures

Life does not pass into speech intact.

Vincent Descombes
Modern French Philosophy

The imaginary register in accordance with Lacan is the dimension of the image and is characterised by the relation of similitude, that being the concordance apparent between the object and its

image. And if, as is most often the case, the figure projected conforms to the lineaments of the psyche, then the ego thus addressed must seek its own congruence in the volumes of the image. The symbolic register is located in the domain of the signifier and is characterised by relationships of conjunction. For the sign in this incarnation is an empty cipher which acquires value only insofar as it defines other signs, themselves enigmatic except in their function as differential referents: the signifier is what defines the sign for the subject. The symbolic register pre-exists the subject who is defined through his entry into it and his articulated response to language and the law, the dual axes of symbolisation.

The child located in the imaginary phase may best be described by an identification that is at once fusional and perversely dual. The infant believing itself to be part of the mother can perceive no separation, no difference between itself and the source of all gratification. When this plenitude is generalised to encompass all of the external world, the subject is then possessed of an illusory and false unity of the ego by which all further images are measured. If the subject does not negotiate the mirror stage at this point he will remain locked within an imaginary dimension of phantasms, images and spectres, unable to redeem the self from the mother, the word, the world.

The mirror stage is that mythic moment symbolised by the first glance of the subject into the looking glass - when he apprehends his own image beyond himself and witnesses then and ever after

the physical fragmentation into ego and image. Presented thus with the apparent material disintegration of the self into unitary image and statutory ego, the infant experiences his first trauma of the flesh, identifying his own body as "other" and beyond himself, anarchic, subversive and rebellious. Lacan's mirror stage is reminiscent of Freud's oedipal crisis insofar as the moment of the mirror is brought about through the precipitate intervention of the Father's Law which severs forever the blissful dyadic unity of mother and child. The loss of this imaginary identity with the mother (and through her, with that of the world), the violent separation from the maternal bounty, can only be experienced as a physical expulsion from the mother's body - as amputation or as birth.

Like all births there is pain and the tearing of flesh; like all births there is the wail of the infant wrenched from its source. And it is here that language begins, here at the place where the subject articulates its loss, so that language first uttered by the "I" who has lost, must ever after be defined and structured about an absence, an insatiable desire. The speaking subject comes into existence through its loss and its desire, and loss and desire must thenceforth be the orientation of all language. And it is at this place too that we locate the unconscious, emerging like language from the child's thwarted desire for symbiotic unity with the mother. Like language, the unconscious is precipitated by desire, perpetuated by repression and taboo.

Let us return to the father whose Law invokes the mirror stage:

it is always the father's phallus that precedes both the child's real birth and its psychic separation from the mother. The infant within the imaginary register comes to represent the phallus for the mother, and as such becomes her decoy, the elided object of her desire for the phallus that she lacks or lost in her own childhood. So the child must conform to the desire of the Other, the law-giver, the phallic progenita, he who has not lost, he who has never lacked. Furthermore, with the entry into the symbolic order, the primitive icons of the imaginary register are translated into signs - flesh becomes word, word fragments into letter; the mother that once was, now is m(other) and the father becomes Name and Law, both legal fiction and paternal metaphor.

Polymorphous, perverse, heterogeneous and ineluctable, the subject now falls subject to the law, the divisions of language, and the prohibitions of the phallus. The dyad has been broken and the child must take up his position in the symbolic order, separate and distinct, free to choose beyond the incestual circuit from object choices not constituted by his own lack. But too many misrecognitions have taken place: the child who believed he was part - mother, and was proven wrong, the child who believed he was part - mirror, and was proven wrong, grows wary of the words de-signed to catch the world. Despite the successful negotiation of the mirror stage, imaginary significations proliferate, the subject misrecognises himself and his world, and the very language that defines him falters on misconstrual and enigms.

This Lacan called *méconnaissance*, a neologism which in his discourse represents this failure to recognise that is so pivotal to the figure and function of knowledge (*connaissance*).

Language and the Law, the monotheistic edicts of the symbolic father, act as a bar to the child's hectic desires, and as such divide the subject on his entry into the symbolic dimension. It is however, a division of the word that is experienced perversely as a fragmentation of the flesh, a point which deserves clarification as it is of great significance in the third section.

Firstly, the child enters the symbolic dimension already mutilated by the effects of a discourse that divides even as it names. This disfigurement may be physical, as is evidenced in the fairy-tale genre which explicitly reveals the mayhem of the coming of age: the Little Mermaid is cloven and from a tail torn apart she receives two new legs (and the space between them, which is the real lure), but with every step she walks on knives and can utter no sound of pain, for she is mute, her lovely mermaid voice drawn from her by the sea witch in exchange for a woman's form with which to catch a prince. More often however, the maiming is psychical and no less painful for that: Hindele ("Black Wedding" SMS) is rent, and from her shattered womb a demon child is torn. She too is mute despite the agony of misbegotten travail, for her voice has been stolen by the father in the promise of salvation. Neither Hindele nor the Little Mermaid survive the ordeal, the one diving silently beneath the waves to her grave, the other sinking mutely through the earth to

gehenna: such are the deaths of those who live unmediated by speech.

Secondly, language whether it be the spoken word or the written cipher is inextricable from the subject who speaks - writes, and the precariousness of that identity before articulation mimes the misconstruals and misreadings to which all flesh is heir. In Barthes' words, writing destroys identity insofar as the author-ity of each writer is displaced by the *ecritaire* that writes him:

Writing is the destruction of every voice, every origin. Writing is that neuter, that composite, that obliquity into which our subject flees, the black - and - white where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes. 19

Speech similarly annihilates the body that speaks, the voice that names, and speech even more than writing is potent to depose the subject who desires and through whose utterance desire is recognised ("Speech is irreversible; that is its fatality", says Barthes)²⁰. Whilst the tales of the second section exhibit the plight of the subject who is written-spoken by others (the prohibitive father, the permissive mother) and who cannot then achieve symbolisation, the tales of section three illustrate the bedlam of the subject written by his own texts, spoken by his own speech. Both situations involve a displacement of the word; in the first place from the individual to the authority who speaks for the subject; and in the second place, from the subject to the authoritative centre of his speech. A Lacanian paradigm facilitates the passage of the word from subject to other, from

speaker to speech by a notion of exchange where the word is given in the form of a reciprocal gift, and received as debt, deposit or demand. ²¹

The particular form of the discourse between two speaking subjects then, patterns the figures of their ensuing social intercourse. The word thus forms the basis of all political ties, establishing itself as contract and so entrenching a power relationship between sender and receiver. The balance of power lies of course with the subject best able to limit meaning, able that is to restrict the arbitrary forms of the signifier to univocal significance. ²²

The symbolic Father whose Word is Law is he who most stringently represents the power of language to limit, and in limiting, prohibit all ambiguity, all desire. It is to him that all speech falls, and the subjects who disobey his edicts and indictments are to greater or lesser extent spoken, stricken or silenced.

One further connection needs to be made with regard to discourse, and that is the symbiosis of language and the unconscious.

Section four deals explicitly with the agency of the letter in the unconscious and must be understood as a further statement of the initiatory motif which insists that the infant subject confront the language to which he is subject, the law which subjects him.

In his paper "A Note upon the Mystic Writing Pad", Freud compares the functionings of the unconscious to writing, and more particularly to the trace of the letter upon an imaginary slate which may at once erase and recall:

None the less, I do not think it is too far-fetched to

compare the celluloid and waxed paper cover with the system Popt - Cs and its protective shield, the wax slab with the unconscious behind them, and the appearance and disappearance of the writing with the flickering-up and passing-away of consciousness in the process of perception. 23

Lacan recalls this metaphor, returning to the subject's entry into the symbolic register wherein language and unconscious become inextricable and enmeshed, and the structures of the former dictate the function of the latter:

For interpretation is based...on the fact that the unconscious is structured in the most radical way like a language, that a material operates in it according to certain laws, which are the same laws as those discovered in the study of actual languages, languages that are or were actually spoken. 24

When the subject first confronts the symbolic register he is divided by his own speech at the moment that he says "I am", fractured by a discourse that has gained at last the power to name. In retribution the "I" that speaks fragments in language; in recompense the subject now spoken acquires the gift of the word with which to speak others. These are the processes of the unconscious by which language stands and falls, by which it is written and erased.

REFERENCES TO INTRODUCTION AND SECTION ONE

1. Roland Barthes, The Rustle of Language (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) p.71.
2. Barthes, The Rustle of Language p.72.
3. Paul Kresh, Isaac Bashevis Singer: The Magician of West 86th Street (New York: The Dial Press, 1979)

Another work which emphasises Singer's background is a biography of the Singer family, particularly of the relationship between Isaac Bashevis and his brother Israel Joshua.

Clive Sinclair, The Brothers Singer (London: Allison and Busby, 1983)
4. As in the collection of critical essays edited by M. Allentuck entitled The Achievement of Isaac Bashevis Singer (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969)
5. Irving Howe, Critical Views of I.B. Singer (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co. 1972)
6. Irving Malin, Isaac Bashevis Singer (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co. 1972)
7. Dorothy Seidman Bilik, Immigrant - Survivors (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1981)
8. Sanford Pinsker, The Schlemiel as Metaphor (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971)
9. David Neal Miller, Fear of Fiction (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985) p.73.
10. Apart from his translations of works by writers like Stefan Zweig, Knut Hamsun and Thomas Mann, Singer is closely concerned with the translation of his own fiction into English. He is often cited as collaborator when his work is translated from the original Yiddish.
11. Quoted in Kresh, Isaac Bashevis Singer: The Magician of West 86th Street p.418.
12. Gabriel Josipovici in Writing and the Body (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982) makes a similar point with regard to Lawrence Sterne's novel The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy.

By exploring the multiple possibilities, their inevitable limitations and final disappearance, Sterns returns us, his reader, to the primal world of polymorphous perversity, and simultaneously makes us realize that a condition of such an exploration is that such a world has gone for good and that soon we too will be no more. As he does so the dead bones of his body and ours begin to live. (Josipovici's emphasis p. 32-33)

John Forrester in his article entitled "Philology and the Phallus" in *The Talking Cure*, ed. C. MacGabe (London: Macmillan Press, 1981) would seem to concur with Josipovici when he speaks of the dual capacity of the word both to renounce and reclaim the past:

On the one hand, the word stands for the object that is searched for and renounced.
On the other hand, the word is a monument to a past satisfaction - to the lost object. p.55

In many ways these fictions fulfil both capacities: on the one hand a past is voluntarily renounced; on the other, the memory of that past restores to us, in writing, the minutiae of its existence.

13. Alfred Kazin, *Bright Book of Life* (New York: Delta Books, 1974) p.157.
14. Susan Handelman, "Jacques Derrida and the Heretic Hermeneutic", *Displacement: Derrida and After* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983) p.108.
15. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973) p.33.
16. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978) p.65.
17. Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974).
18. Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) p.153.
19. Barthes, *The Rustle of Language* p.49.

If writing destroys identity, then speech is the means by which identity is reclaimed. Rocco Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy take this point in their psychoanalytic study entitled *The Works of Jacques Lacan* (London: Free Association Books, 1986):

In Lacan's view, speech is the dimension by which the subject's desires are expressed and articulated. It is only when articulated and named before the other (e.g. the analyst) that desires are recognised. It is only with speech that the subject can fully recognise his history. p. 83

20. Barthes, The Rustle of Language p.76.

21. Lacan bases this notion of the exchange of the word on structural accounts of exchange practices amongst tribal communities. Marcel Mauss in The Gift (London: Routledge, 1959) and Bronislaw Malinowski in Argonauts of the Western Pacific (London: Routledge, 1922) present systems of reciprocal obligation, where a formal and non-functional gift is given whose purpose is to reinforce kinship ties by demanding that the gift be returned in kind. The gift has no intrinsic value within the society but is at the same time priceless because it can never be replaced. Lacan maintains that the tribal artifact is replaced in modern culture by the gift of the word - the only object given, whose sole value lies in exchange.

Although Nauss and Malinowski are working in the context of anthropology, many psychoanalysts have taken up this idea. In Psychoanalysis and Feminism (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), Juliet Mitchell utilises this concept in the context of the social sciences: "Furthermore, it is not what is given, but the act of exchange itself that holds any society together" (p. 374).

22. Juliet Flower MacCannell makes this point particularly trenchantly in her book Figuring Lacan (London: Croom Helm, 1986).
23. Sigmund Freud, "A Note upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad'", On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984).
24. Jacques Lacan, Ecrits (London: Tavistock Publications, 1985) p.234.

Susan and Leslie Brisman in their article "Lies against Solitude: Symbolic, Imaginary and Real", The Literary Freud, ed. J.M. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), comment on this well-known Lacanian axiom by explaining that both language and the unconscious involve a "pre-established symbolic order" (p. 41).

SECTION TWO

THE MOMENT OF THE MIRROR

Because language is by nature *fragmentary*, and the law inherently prohibitive, the subject who enters discourse suffers both mutilation and privation. And it is this crisis that is traced inexorably upon the flesh as wound or beatitude, the sign and symmetry of all loss, all gain. I have explored "Gimpel the Fool" in detail because it is a tale in which the protagonist encounters and masters both language and the law, passing from silence to story in the course of the narrative which is told of a subject trapped in the imaginary register, by the identical subject resurrected in the symbolic dimension.

Whilst Gimpel attempts to negotiate the mirror stage, Akhsa of "A Crown of Feathers" engages more specifically in an oedipal struggle, structured as quest motif. This tale was chosen because it so ably illustrates the plight of the infant subject divided by the rival discourses of her grandparents, each of whom purports to know and to express a separate truth. Eventually Akhsa frees herself by setting out to find her own truth, knowledge, story.

If to enter discourse is to suffer division, what of the subjects who refuse apportionment, who remain inviolate despite the immersion in language. As will be seen, Lacan makes it clear within his oeuvre that the individual may not pass into language intact. There is always a price to be exacted and if

one refuses to pay one's debts, then one is rendered a bankrupt. Hindele of "Black Wedding" provides an example of this spiritual insolvency. A woman circumscribed by the patriarchal laws of her culture, she refuses to speak, and as such is prevented from negotiating the passage from the imaginary phase to the symbolic order.

Whilst Hindele refuses symbolisation, the inept protagonists of "Two Corpses go Dancing" are merely incompetent to transform imaginary objects into a symbolic discourse. For lives governed by illusions and images they pay the price of death at once mute and obscure, a memory unremembered.

This section then offers four alternatives to the problem of development. The protagonists of "Gimpel the Fool" and "A Crown of Feathers" achieve symbolisation at great cost, but they are survivors who live to tell a tale. And it is these tales that bear witness at least, to their mastery of language and the law. The subjects of "Black Wedding" and "Two Corpses go Dancing" on the other hand, refuse the stigmata of the letter, and so they die for their sins, unconsecrated by the Word, unredeemed by the Law.

2.1. Negotiation of the Three Stages

Man is the language of God.

Menahem-Mendl of Vitebsk

Souls on Fire.

In his influential seminar on "Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis"¹ included in the Écrits collection, Jacques Lacan delineates

the mirror stage as a point de capiton of sorts, a crux of meaning or knot of experience through which the developing psyche must pass in its evolution from the imaginary to the symbolic order. In so doing, certain empathetic phases must be negotiated on a continuum which moves from a sudden imaginary recognition of the identity of the self to a gradual alienation from this "I" manifested symbolically in the individual's desire for the other. The movement from what one commentator has called an "undifferentiated state of the signified" ² to the articulated status of the signifier predicates the entry of the subject into a socially structured world, governed by language and the desire of the Other. The first two stories in this chapter present the archetypal theme of the child who must enter psychical maturity through the reflexive world of mirrors. In the traditional Lacanian paradigm, the child before the mirror is duped by the perception of what is in effect a false unity of the ego. It is fitting then that Gimpel, thwarted by an imaginary consistency, commits multiple acts of méconnaissance, blithely complying in his own downfall: the fool once self-deluded now is deluded by all. His entry into the symbolic phase therefore is consonant upon the recognition of his own felony and the congruent apprehension that all truth is deceptive and that language itself is both fragmentary and duplicitous.

"Gimpel the Fool" thus charts the progress of the fool, perineal child, through the blind labyrinths of the imaginary phase towards an apprehension of the aerial vistas of the symbolic dimension. Gimpel, like the maturing child must learn to

distinguish between certain falsehoods and deceptive truths, between harmful allegiances and hurtful colloquy, between the truth of the heart's affections and the manifold betrayals of the marriage bed. He must, in effect, ascend through the purgatorial realms of appearance and fallacy to a dawning comprehension of that apparently baroque hybrid that we call truth in this our mortal world.

That Gimpel eventually enters the symbolic dimension is apparent in the final act of story-telling in which the conscious manipulation of truth and the word to the ends of artistry may be envisaged as the undisputed mastery of language by the speaking subject.

This is the self-same task that Akhaa in "A Crown of Feathers" must accomplish. She too, like the infant before the mirror stage must extricate herself from the incestuous circuit of consanguinity that encloses her, to journey forth into a symbolic extension in search of the mutant, truth. This tale is primarily concerned with the negotiation of the oedipal conflict and the means by which the girl-child, wedged between a prohibitive masculine law and the force of her own subversive feminine desires, disentangles herself from the destructive effects of a rigorous upbringing. Initially she chooses the wayward dictates of her hectic and hegemonous desires. But she spends the remainder of her life expiating this impulse, in penitence to Zeevach the lover she has wronged and through deference to Reb Naftali, the father who has wronged her. In this way she submits wholly to the Law of the Father, literally

prostrating herself upon the threshold of the prayer-house. Like Gimpel, the mirror stage for Akhsa is structured about a moment of humility. And, like Gimpel, her entry into the symbolic phase is dependent upon her apprehension of truth as a crown of feathers; duplicitous, elusive and allegorical. The connection in these two tales between truth and language is symmetrical and congruent. Akhsa and Gimpel, gallant knights errant, voyage forth in quest of a grail, a truth at once beatific and revelatory. What they discover is a series of falsehoods, phantasms of the persona founded upon the arbitrary status of the word and the equivocal position of language. There is not the conventional self-discovery of the protagonists of the *Bildungsroman*, heroes and heroines whose every developmental gesture entrenches an ego posture ever more monumental and irrevocable. On the contrary, theirs is an existence which falters upon the periphery of Cartesian doubt, a fallacy at once hard won and voluntarily renounced: 'I think falsely therefore I am truly.'

Finally however, both Gimpel and Akhsa attain their majority, entering the symbolic arena via language, he through the enunciation of the spoken word in the lattice-work of his tale, she through the discovery of the written word in the tracery of her crown.

Thus Gimpel and Akhsa pass beyond the imaginary when both reach an apprehension of multiplicity in the world. This is the ultimate test of the infant before the mirror, the jubilation of one-ness fallaciously assumed gives way to the precarious postures of multiplicity in the world. The "I" reflected in the

glass refracts into the I before, of, and in the mirror; and henceforth are all pseudonyms assumed. But what of the subjects who cannot recognise the duplicity of their own images reflected back at them. In the tales which follow, we may observe the plight of the individual unable to accommodate the infinite other because of the fantasy of the immutable one; unable that is, to say "thou" for the stridency of the unpronounceable "I". And so it is language itself that forecloses the subject, language that traces upon impenitent flesh the profane writ of dispersal and death.

Both Singer's stories "Gimpel the Fool" and "A Crown of Feathers" accommodate the Lacanian passage of the sign, as the subject attempts to navigate his way beyond the signature of the imaginary stage to reach the significations of the symbolic order. Gimpel, severed from an imaginary dimension of lies, deceptions and falsehoods, gains the power of language, the potency of the spoken word to become a story-teller, a wanderer, a wonder in strange lands, a dedicated alchemist who seeks to transmute all falsehoods into the one true faith of his own desire for and in the other. Akhsa, for her part, learns through the interstices of the written word of the equivocal structures of a mortal world fallen foul and fallow in the dreary wake of her unfulfilled feminine desire. Anika Lemaire, in her treatise on Lacan, speaks of the restitution that must be made, the penance exacted upon the child as, like Alice, she falls through the mirror and into one-derland:

Each stage in the process of becoming, in which man fashions his world by assuming his original rent, is marked by a

sacrifice bordering upon suicide.³

Akhsa upon her deathbed braids her life into the story of a talisman, and that is her sacrifice. Gimpel, weaves a story into a shroud, and that is his.

2.2. "Gimpel the Fool" (GF)

I, Serafi, the absent one, I was born to write books.
(I am absent because I am the storyteller. Only the story is real).

Edmond Jäbe

Livre des questions.

The Lacanian developmental paradigm typically conceives of an early imaginary phase which must be straddled and shouldered in order that the child may then enter the symbolic order via the oedipal conflict after passing through the mirror stage. In "Gimpel the Fool" the title character and narrator learns to navigate these three points of temporal contiguity through a laborious and highly personal incarnation of the symbiotic nature of truth and falsity. To perceive that "truth" is part of a plurivalent and equivocal code, Gimpel must needs pass through an imaginary world of deceptively univocal laws where he is in effect written by his own future. He reaches psychic maturity first by gaining control of his past, and then by renouncing it, and offering it up as a sacrament through the liturgical ceremony of storytelling.

I wish to stress at this point the potential for confusion that

is apparent when we juxtapose the imaginary stage with the univocal law. While it is true that "Gimpel the Fool" serves to illustrate the immature, childish nature of its protagonist who succumbs to the lure of the indivisible certainties of the imaginary and equally well, while the index to Gimpel's growth toward maturity is measured by his ability to accept the equivocal code of the symbolic, we must nevertheless take into account the fact that for Lacan, the law is always associated with the symbolic phase. However, Lacan's concept of symbolic law is ruled by the vicissitudes of language, and insofar as language is always plurivalent, multidimensional and inherently deceptive, we may argue that both the law and language, when obscured by the spectres of an imaginary world, become themselves open to all manner of flux and change, associating in effect, less with a symbolic realm of equilateral truths than with the shifting, fantastical world of imaginary relations. Moreover the fact that such disjunction unquestionably exists between the law which is rigid and explicit, and the ambiguities of language, once again reinforces the figure of the fractured subject, divided at the very moment that he enters the discourse of the symbolic register.

Gimpel's tale begins with a list of taunts levelled by the village folk at the hapless orphan:

Gimpel, the Czar is coming to Frampol; Gimpel, the moon
fell down in Turbeen; Gimpel, little Hodel Furpiece
found a treasure behind the bathhouse. And I like a
golem believed everyone. (GF 9)

Leventhal in her examination of the techniques of storytelling, makes a distinction between the behaviour of the performers and

the truth of the tale and concludes that Gimpel "misreads" the text.⁴ What is more to the point is that Gimpel's consecutive acts of misrecognition in the face of almost universal ridicule bespeak a false unity, an imaginary wholeness, a deliberate act of *méconnaissance* on the part of one who, despite all appearances to the contrary, persists in regarding himself as simply misled in his valuation of what Malcolm Bowie calls the "ego ideal":

The unity invented at these moments, and the ego which is the product of successive interventions, are both spurious; they are attempts to find ways round certain inescapable factors of lack (*manque*), absence and incompleteness in human living.⁵

According to this view Gimpel's excessive gullibility in an hysterical attempt to overlay lack by acts of imaginative misrecognition, and finds resonance in his deluded self-characterisation as a passive misled "fool". At each point in the text where Gimpel is gulled, a farce of mishearing is simultaneously played out. At one stage a Yeshiva student mocks Gimpel with the coming of the Messiah; Gimpel replies:

"What do you mean?" I said. "I heard no one blowing the ram's horn!" He said, "Are you deaf?" and all began to cry, "We heard it, we heard!" GF 10

The absurdity of Gimpel not hearing what can't be heard and yet what by common consent nevertheless "sounds" is compounded when Gimpel pretends to hear what is palpably a collective fiction. A similar impasse is reached when the community persuade Gimpel of Elka's chaste and virginal nature: "They talked at me and talked until I got water on the ear" (GF 11). Gimpel is denied speech at these critical moments: his fate is spoken by a

community of cynical collaborators, so that when he refers to himself as "a golem" (GFS) we must take this figurative trope quite literally: he is as one invoked through the speech of others.

Of course, Gimpel's misguided belief in Elka has a different origin: it is a manifestation of his love, what Lacan in his "Seminar of 21 January 1975"⁶ characterises as that state of affect where one not only believes in woman, but one believes her:

"To tell the plain truth, I didn't believe her; but when I talked it over next day with the school-master he told me that the very same thing had happened to Adam and Eve." GF14

Characteristically however, Gimpel transforms this error of the heart into an unshakeable declaration of monolithic religious intent:

However, I resolved that I would always believe what I was told. What's the good of not believing? Today it's your wife you don't believe; tomorrow it's God Himself you won't take stock in. GF17

Superficially these lines express the stoical grandeur and heroic quality of blind faith, however I would question the validity of a fallacious sequential argument that takes as its initial premise the treachery of a whore, by means of which the unquestionable good faith of the Deity is proven. This is not to imply that the existence of God is questioned in the tale, but rather that a system of belief which assigns primary significance to the univocal assertion of monotheistic meaning is represented by the author as an error in faith, a religious méconnaissance.

At one point in the tale, Gimpel quotes his religious advisor, the

rabbi as saying, "belief in itself is beneficial, it is written that a good man lives by his faith" (GF 21). Gimpel lives by his faith and consequently becomes what existentialists somewhat slightly call, a man of "good faith". Thus his childish belief in a fixed and static hierarchical system of univocal denotation leaves him vulnerable to that supreme sophist and corrupter of words, Satan, the "Spirit of Evil" (GF 21). In the fourth section, Satan appears to Gimpel in his sleep to taunt him with a vision of absence, and to reveal to him the echoing void that lies beneath this world of meaning and appearance:

"Well then," I said, "and is there a God ?"
He answered, "There is no God either."
"What", I said "is there, then ?"
"A thick mire." GF22

In response to this nihilistic image, Gimpel precipitately re-enacts the fall of man, complete with serpent, and Eve as part-object: "Hearing such words, I wanted to snatch him by the tail, but I tumbled from the flour sacks and nearly broke a rib" (GF22).

What Gimpel must learn in his imaginary phase, where like the infant before the mirror stage he believes passionately in the breast, as a primary, whole object, is that meaning is fragmentary, reality elusive, and truth at best, convoluted, a moebius strip the converse side of which is falsehood. As a result of this insight, all the univocal values are deflated within the course of the tale. In particular, the intricate and subtle machinery of a religious law which seeks to exalt faith as the only true and worthy value, and doubt as

ambiguous and consequently worthless, is held up to ridicule and finally discarded as torpid.

Gimpel, like Elka is an orphan: parentless and dispossessed he seeks solace and direction from the Law of his fore-fathers, his chosen paternal metaphor. However, the rabbi's noble and weighty biblical exegesis: "It is written, better to be a fool all your days than for one hour to be evil. You are not a fool. They are the fools. For he who causes his neighbour to feel shame loses Paradise himself" (GF10), appears facile when Gimpel is absurdly tricked by the rabbi's daughter immediately after hearing this pronouncement. Whenever Gimpel enters the synagogue he is ridiculed by the congregation at large who laugh ribaldly at his shame and in so doing, mock the very instruments of their faith: "Pray, pray!" they told me. "Prayer never made any woman pregnant." One of the congregation put a straw to my mouth and said, "Hay for the cows!" (GF13). Gimpel nevertheless believes faithfully in the might and power of the law as a supreme denotative, grammatical structure whose function is the imposition of order and meaning upon a chosen people, a series of letters which would otherwise be arbitrary, disordered and meaningless. However, Gimpel the innocent narrator functions here much like the naive raconteur of The Canterbury Tales whose bland profundities unconsciously reveal much that is both cynical and pungent. Similarly, Gimpel's own pronouncements on the law serve only to heighten for us the absurdities of this intricately wrought system of letters. When Gimpel asks the elders to reconsider their decision regarding his separation from Elka,

ambiguous and consequently worthless, is held up to ridicule and finally discarded as torpid.

Gimpel, like Elka is an orphan; parentless and dispossessed he seeks solace and direction from the Law of his fore-fathers, his chosen paternal metaphor. However, the rabbi's noble and weighty biblical exegesis: "It is written, better to be a fool all your days than for one hour to be evil. You are not a fool. They are the fools. For he who causes his neighbour to feel shame loses Paradise himself" (GF10), appears facile when Gimpel is absurdly tricked by the rabbi's daughter immediately after hearing this pronouncement. Whenever Gimpel enters the synagogue he is ridiculed by the congregation at large who laugh ribaldly at his shame and in so doing, mock the very instruments of their faith: "Pray, pray!" they told me. "Prayer never made any woman pregnant." One of the congregation put a straw to my mouth and said, "Hay for the cows!" (GF13). Gimpel nevertheless believes faithfully in the might and power of the law as a supreme denotative, grammatical structure whose function is the imposition of order and meaning upon a chosen people, a series of letters which would otherwise be arbitrary, disordered and meaningless. However, Gimpel the innocent narrator functions here much like the naive raconteur of The Canterbury Tales whose bland profundities unconsciously reveal much that is both cynical and pungent. Similarly, Gimpel's own pronouncements on the law serve only to heighten for us the absurdities of this intricately wrought system of letters. When Gimpel asks the elders to reconsider their decision regarding his separation from Elka,

interminable communications follow:

Nine months passed before all the rabbis could come to an agreement. Letters went back and forth. I hadn't realised that there could be so much erudition about a matter like this. GF17.

Indeed, it is only thanks to an obscure reference in Maimonides that the workings of law and order eventually grind towards their conclusion. Each elevation of the law in the mouth of this ostensibly inept narrator suffers a sudden turn toward the farcical, as when Gimpel muses, "in the first place, everything is possible, as it is written in the Wisdom of the Fathers. I've forgotten just how" (GF10).

But if the letter of the Law is rigid, static and indivisible, it is liable to corruption by the unscrupulous in much the same way that the Word was desecrated by the oracular utterances of Satan in Gimpel's dream. When Gimpel, on his wedding night pleases for his marital dues, his by right according to the law, he is answered by the voice of unreason strengthened with brutal improbities and rhetorical evasions: " 'Today isn't yesterday,' she said, 'and yesterday's not today. You can beat it if you don't like it.' In short, I waited" (GF13).

Finally, when Gimpel believes himself saved by the Law of his fathers, a Law which allows him a further union with his virgin bride, Elka the whore, his heart overflows in joy:

I said nothing to anyone, although as far as my heart was concerned it was like one of the Holy days. The women teased and twitted me as they did every day, but my thought was: Go on, with your loose talk. The truth is out, like the oil upon the water. Maimonides says it's right, and therefore it is right! GF 18

The use of this biblical parallel which compares truth as an

inviolable form to the oil which separates itself from the water shows that Gimpel, still immersed in an imaginary world cannot yet assimilate the precarious nature of corporeal truth. In a strange and moving world of changes, truth is no more nor less than a reflection of the contradictions of language, as Bowie also can points out:

Every statement that does not provoke change and strangeness within itself is wrong. Truth which seeks to remove itself from the contradictory process of language becomes a falsehood there and then.⁷

Gimpel's movement from an imaginary plane of being to a symbolic depth of focus is facilitated by the mirror stage. In this tale, the mirror stage is enacted through two primal scenes of misrecognition where Gimpel comes to learn the necessity for plurivalent codes in an equivocal universe. Whilst the imaginary phase was primarily concerned with univocal structures, the mirror stage is centred about the phenomenon of the gaze. What is striking in this respect is the potency of the gaze as a generalised portent, both in its guise as evil eye (GF14) and as basilisk, as when Gimpel exclaims of Elka: "One of her looks could rob you of the power of speech" (GF 15). The gaze in these instances functions as a cut, a tear in the fabric, a crack in the glass, a sudden lesion that mercilessly severs subject from object, self from other.

This gaze-as-castration is presented essentially as an act of méconnaissance. Gimpel consistently believes himself to be mistaken each time he witnesses one of Elka's manifold betrayals:

And then she denies it so, maybe I was only seeing things. Hallucinations do happen. You see a figure or a mannikin or

something, but when you come up closer it's nothing, there's not a thing there. GF17

What Gimpel does in fact see in these primal scenes is literally a "mannikin", the treacherous penis of the other, which because it is not yet the signifying phallus of the symbolic phase, presents itself as disappearance. The first primal scene occurs when Gimpel returns home unexpectedly during the week to take his conjugal place at his wife's side:

Coming in, it seemed to me that I heard not the snoring of one but, as it were, a double snore, one a thin enough snore and the other like the snoring of a slaughtered ox. GF15

Here, like the oedipal child, he hears in the night the dead father (slaughtered ox), who usurps his privileged place beside the sleeping mother. It is in the interstices of these scenes that Gimpel is reduced to a child, one who mistakes the phallus for the penis and who must learn not only that the latter is accidental, but that the former is at best, supremely contingent. At the moment of potential recognition (reconnaissance) "things suddenly turned black" (GF15), so that the sentences which follow evoke the overdeterminacy of the primal metaphor:

Next to Elka lay a man's form. Another in my place would have made an uproar, and enough noise to rouse the whole town, but the thought occurred to me that I might wake the child. A little thing like that - why frighten a little swallow, I thought. GF16

If Gimpel is the child in this scene, the nocturnal witness to his parents' post-coital sleep, who is the child who must not be awakened? The "little thing", the "little swallow" can be none other than the disappearing mannikin staged here as re-appearance at the scene of treachery. The desolation that Gimpel feels at

his wife's faithlessness is presented here as a primal reflection of the despair that the child feels at his parents' manifold betrayals. Gimpel, like the child awoken by his parents' love-making, has seen something (what but the béance of the penis fading along an appearance - disappearance - reappearance continuum), and his silence is merely the stigmata of this secular vision. It signifies here that a Yiddish synonym for fool is "chochem",⁸ the argot for which connotes the penis. The vision is grotesque, and Gimpel the cycloptean organ, stretched out on a sack of flour in the bakery, his one eye centred and unblinking, omniscient in the silence, begins to weep: "I sobbed so that I wet the flour where I lay" (GF17). And yet, Gimpel the eye refuses to see. He converts the primal scene into a mirage of misrecognition by telling the rabbi that he has been mistaken: "'It must have been a shadow,' I said" (GF18). In an early seminar in Écrits, "Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis" Lacan speaks of this gesture of méconnaissance:

It is in this erotic relation, in which the human individual fixes upon himself an image that alienates him from himself, that is to be found the energy and the form on which this organisation of the passions that he will call his ego is based.⁹

The second primal scene repeats and reinforces these self-same patterns of (mis)recognition. This scene begins in the bakery where Gimpel covers the dough to let it rise - after the fertilisation of the flour, the gestation of the dough is enacted.

This metaphor of pregnancy and possession prefigures Gimpel's later act of ritual desecration when he micturates into the

bread dough. As he walks home to his sleeping wife, the memory of the last scene presents itself: "I hurried onward, and before me darted a long shadow" (GF19), so that once again the displaced symptom reappears, and, in preparation for a further scene of scopic violence, he is silenced, struck dumb:

I had a mind to sing, but it was growing late and I didn't want to wake the householders. Then I felt like whistling, but I remembered that you don't whistle at night because it brings the demons out. So I was silent and walked as fast as I could. GF19

It would seem as if all the elements conspire towards opening Gimpel's eyes; as he gazes at the infant's cradle, the moon violates the room with a violent lunge that would seem tantamount to rape: "The shutter was closed, but the moon forced its way through the cracks" (GF19). There are two moments of *méconnaissance* in this scene, the first occurs as Gimpel stares at the infant: "I saw the newborn child's face and loved it as soon as I saw it - immediately - each tiny bone" (GF19). He loves the child with the fervour of possession and paternity: he recognises himself in "each tiny bone" of its face, and in this he is woefully mistaken. The second moment occurs when he sees the apprentice lying beside his wife. At this instant the moon, aghast, dims, and he is left in "utter blackness" (GF19) once more. Moreover, Elka seeking to persuade him of his error, shrieks out, "an evil spirit has taken root in you and dazzles your sight" (GF20).

Thus, the elements of the first scene, darkness, silence and misrecognition are reiterated in the second, *de capo*, in

structural mimicry of the repetition of the repressed. As a result of these two experiences, Gimpel would seem to have been struck both blind and deaf, for as he tells us, within the next twenty years, "all kinds of things happened, but I neither saw nor heard" (GF30).

Suzanne Gearhart¹⁰ makes a distinction between the imaginary primal scene where the young boy is reassured that although the little girl is castrated, he still possesses his sexual organ, and the symbolic mirror stage where the scene reveals to the boy that his sex is contingent and that the penis and the phallus are not the same. However we have been concerned with imaginary primal scenes centred about the misappropriation of the penis and a misrepresentation of the gaze. However Gimpel's task is to negotiate the reflexive planes of the mirror stage and enter into the plastic volumes of the symbolic dimension. This is achieved through a moment of recognition, where Gimpel is directly confronted by the spectre in this as in every text - the dyslogistic phallus of the other.

Immediately prior to the second scene of betrayal, Gimpel, returning home feels an upsurge of masculine pride and propriety:

Dogs in the Christian yards barked at me when I passed, but I thought: Bark your teeth out! What are you but mere dogs? Where's I am a man, the husband of a fine wife, the father of promising children.. GF19

At this point he believes himself to be whole and potent - homo erectus - a delusion which necessitates his complete emasculation in order that he may truly recognise the symbolic order of the phallus. Through the repression and misrepresentation of the

structural mimicry of the repetition of the repressed. As a result of these two experiences, Gimpel would seem to have been struck both blind and deaf, for as he tells us, within the next twenty years, "all kinds of things happened, but I neither saw nor heard" (GF20).

¹⁰
Suzanne Gearhart makes a distinction between the imaginary primal scene where the young boy is reassured that although the little girl is castrated, he still possesses his sexual organ, and the symbolic mirror stage where the scene reveals to the boy that his sex is contingent and that the penis and the phallus are not the same. Hitherto we have been concerned with imaginary primal scenes centred about the misappropriation of the penis and a misrepresentation of the gaze. However Gimpel's task is to negotiate the reflexive planes of the mirror stage and enter into the plastic volumes of the symbolic dimension. This is achieved through a moment of recognition, where Gimpel is directly confronted by the spectre in this as in every text - the dyslogistic phallus of the other.

Immediately prior to the second scene of betrayal, Gimpel, returning home feels an upsurge of masculine pride and propriety:

Dogs in the Christian yards barked at me when I passed, but I thought: Bark your teeth out! What are you but mere dogs? Whereas I am a man, the husband of a fine wife, the father of promising children. GF19

At this point he believes himself to be whole and potent - homo erectus - a delusion which necessitates his complete emasculation in order that he may truly recognise the symbolic order of the phallus. Through the repression and misrepresentation of the

moment he is able to circumvent the truth-as-castration implied in the lacunae of the glance. Twenty years later, however, he is forcefully confronted with the knowledge that he is not the supreme progenitor, the father, the phallus, but in effect a somewhat ineffectual and unempowered castrate:

"Whose are they?" I asked. "I don't know," she said.
"There were a lot . . . but they're not yours." GF21

This then is the decisive moment of the mirror stage where the codes of verisimilitude intersect with the equivocal structures of a corporeal and fallen universe both converging simultaneously upon the poor fool - deaf, dumb, blind - now castrated. Two significant gestures ensue from this moment: firstly, Gimpel roundly revenges himself upon a precarious world of indeterminate and epicene paternity by performing an act of elemental and vicious desecration. When Gimpel, about to urinate, sees the "riser dough" (GF22) in the oven, he symbolically destroys his only sure claim to fatherhood in an action which arches across the tale in its reference to the scene of the fertilised flour. Simultaneously he attacks the censorious patriarchal religious order and, in the devil's words, "let(s) the sages of Frampol eat filth" (GF22).

The penis is used here, both as an instrument of sexual catharsis and as a scourge of religious purgation, but because it still functions as a utilitarian object of vengeance, it has not yet reached the exalted realm of the signifier, the order of the phallus. At this point Elka speaks to Gimpel in a dream and her discourse drives a wedge between the rigidly univocal values of

moment he is able to circumvent the truth-as-castration implied in the lacunae of the glance. Twenty years later, however, he is forcefully confronted with the knowledge that he is not the supreme progenitor, the father, the phallus, but in effect a somewhat ineffectual and *unempowered castrato*:

"Whose are they?" I asked. "I don't know," she said.
"There were a lot ... but they're not yours." GF21

This then is the decisive moment of the mirror stage where the codes of verisimilitude intersect with the equivocal structures of a corporeal and fallen universe both converging simultaneously upon the poor fool - deaf, dumb, blind - now castrated. Two significant gestures ensue from this moment: firstly, Gimpel roundly revenges himself upon a precarious world of indeterminate and epicene paternity by performing an act of elemental and vicious desecration. When Gimpel, about to urinate, sees the "risen dough" (GF22) in the oven, he symbolically destroys his only sure claim to fatherhood in an action which arches across the tale in its reference to the scene of the fertilized flour. Simultaneously he attacks the censorious patriarchal religious order and, in the devil's words, "let(s) the sages of Frampol eat filth" (GF22).

The penis is used here, both as an instrument of sexual catharsis and as a scourge of religious purgation, but because it still functions as a utilitarian object of vengeance, it has not yet reached the exalted realm of the signifier, the order of the phallus. At this point Elka speaks to Gimpel in a dream and her discourse drives a wedge between the rigidly univocal values of

society and the law, and the relativist, linguistic ethic of truth-in-falsity: "Because I was false is everything false too?" (GF22). Gimpel must be weaned of his deluded view of a reality which either professes an unswerving faith in all, or, equally illusory, which aspires towards complete disbelief and trust in none. The burial of the desecrated bread in the frozen earth precedes Gimpel's movement into the world beyond the constraints of the village. It also precipitates a ritual of burial and resurrection that is clearly symbolic of the search for the self through an archaeology of the word. This connection, reminiscent of Jensen's *Gradiva*, becomes explicit in another story "Remnants" (II), when Zina says:

"When I finally reached Warsaw, I walked among the ruins like that prophet - what was his name? - Jeremiah. I saw a young man there digging up the earth with a spade. I asked him what he was trying to find and he told me, 'myself'." (III)

His second charade of misdirection truly precipitates him into the singular isolation of the symbolic arena. Here he becomes what many critics¹¹ have called a lamed vov, a righteous man or wandering Jew:

I wandered over the land, and good people did not neglect me. After many years I became old and white; I heard a great deal, many lies and falsehoods, but the longer I lived the more I understood that there were really no lies. GF23

What is even more significant is Gimpel's heightened understanding of the intricate and treacherous collaboration between truths and falsities, the sudden realisation that both project forward into a fourth dimension, where the modalities of time and space converge upon a zero degree of signification:

Whatever doesn't really happen is dreamed at night. It happens to one if it doesn't happen to another, tomorrow if not today, or a century hence if not next year. GF23 12

With this inspired fantasy, Gimpel's imaginary world of méconnaissance is entirely overthrown ("I saw your mother tonight" I said 'she's turning black, poor thing.'" GF23). Before the tale ends he constructs within the text a juncture of divinely wrought symbolic recognition, the epiphanic vision of Elka - transformed:

She is standing by the washtub, as at our first encounter, but her face is shining and her eyes are as radiant as the eyes of a saint, and she speaks outlandish words to me, strange things. GF24

It matters little that this glowing visionary creature is neither the matted haridnn of their first meeting nor the charcoal winner of his dream. What signifies is Gimpel's spiritual confirmation of his inner conviction: this madonna, this virgin bride restored to him intact - a sacrament. Like the narrator of "A Tale of Two Liars" (SMS), Gimpel learns of the interdependence of truth and falsehoods, and that, "a lie can only thrive on truth; lies heaped one upon another, lack substance" (SMS36).

Gimpel's entry into the symbolic phase presupposes a refined awareness of those enigmatic codes used to provoke the undercurrents of meaning in a contingent world. This quality of opacity is directly reflected by the language of the tale, both as it is reported to us in the speech of others, and more importantly, as it is presented to us as the utterance of the self constituted through the language of the tale. Gimpel's

impetus towards storytelling as a means of reparation and as a mode of self-renewal from the chaos wrought by the destructive speech of others, is as a therapeutic and healing value, nothing short of Homeric: an act of secular resurrection, the transcendental gesture of the phoenix.

Gimpel's stoical ideology prompts him to remark philosophically: "Besides, you can't pass through life unscathed, nor expect to" (GF11). That Gimpel does not succeed in remaining entirely intact in this rite of passage seems obvious; indeed he is materially wounded by the speech of the other, which in this case is that of the whore, Elka. Gimpel tells us that, "her mouth would open as if it were on a hinge, and she had a fierce tongue" (GF11). The sexual metaphor is unmistakable here; she who would vehemently deny Gimpel access to her vaginal orifice (the door is closed), all but compulsively incites entry via the oral cavity, that is, through speech. Thus the sensuality of the mount, admittedly lascivious in this case, is displaced onto the equally wanton sexuality of the mouth. Hers is the frenzied language of oaths and abuse, and she curses Gimpel with all the fervour of an ardent nature wrought to extremes by the repressed sexuality of hysteria: "She screamed out, 'You hateful creature! You moon calf! You spook! You uncouth man! Get out, or I'll sure as hell Frampol out of bed!'" (GF20). It is clear that Gimpel is titillated by this display of labial eroticism, instinctively conceiving of the relation between repressed sexuality and linguistic violence:

And her orations! Pitch and sulphur, that's what they were full of, and yet somehow also full of charm. I adored her every word. She gave me bloody wounds though. GF15

Exit the fool, tongue-lashed and pussy-whipped, a martyr to his lost love.

Gimpel's initial reaction to Elka's sexual violence, is silence. In the face of her vociferous and treacherous acrimony, he refuses to speak. This denial of speech represents both *less* and more than Elka's *cacophony* in that it refuses the fragmentary nature of the hysteric's discourse but simultaneously denies his own claim to completeness and self-hood through speech. It is only in the symbolic phase, where Gimpel breaks the silence to begin the story that a new era of *tr*acy begins. I wish to stress here that "Gimpel the Fool" is a tale told a posteriori, that is, the fact, so that the act of storytelling can be conceived of here as a *gesture of symbolic renewal* - the reconstitution of the scattered self in words.

In his seminar on the mirror stage, Lacan speaks of this nexus as:

... a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation - and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the *succession* of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality.¹³

Gimpel's imaginary insufficiency figuratively *mimes* the process of fragmentation, when in the beginning of the tale he divides himself in language, thus: "I had seven names in all: imbecile, donkey, flax-head, dope, glump, ninny and fool" (GF9). Divided by language he must seek within the *casura* of the word some

form of integration by means of which the self may emerge, whole and complete if not "unscathed". Gimpel achieves this through the art of storytelling, ("I spin yarns" GF23), in general and through the re-telling of his-story, in particular.

By the end of the narrative, Gimpel has become a teller of tales, one who uses speech as a plurivalent trope for self-regeneration, what Forrester calls a "bringing-into-consciousness" through a recollecting which leads to forgetting: "... speech is the agent by which permanent marks that lead to the suffering of the symptom are dissolved, forgotten."¹⁴ This phenomenon is evident in the repetitive nature of Gimpel's performance-tales:

The children run after me, calling, 'Grandfather, tell us a story.' Sometimes they ask for particular stories, and I try to please them. A fat young boy once said to me, 'Grandfather, it's the same story you told us before.' The little rogue, he was right. GF23

Furthermore, as Kojève points out, the act of narration, per se, is one of self-conscious, consciousness of self:

Man becomes conscious of himself at the moment when - for the "first" time - he says "I". To understand man by understanding his "origin" is, therefore, to understand the origin of the I revealed by speech.¹⁵

Just such a recognition occurs in the narrator's very first words: "I am Gimpel the Fool" (GF9) and the ensuing tale serves more or less as a codpiece to this penal affirmation of existence. The tale is in this sense a colloquy to Gimpel's fledgling capacity to say "I am", so that the earlier Gimpel divided by the effects of language, now emerges as an artisan of language, a maker of words, a skilled craftsman who sets out to refashion his life which emerges in the course of the narrative:

a golden bowl pieced together from the broken shards and alivered
tesserae of a forgotten past, a future imperfectly remembered;
one of whom in the words of the old poet it would be meet to
ask, "How can we tell the dancer from the dance?"¹⁶

Gimpel constructs himself in language to gain his freedom from a
fusional dependence upon Elka-the-whore-m(other). In order to
break open an incestuous dyadic circuit, a third term must
intervene; traditionally, the Law of the father. In this case, as
we have seen, the laws of the fathers prove impotent because they
can only operate within a rigidly univocal armature. To
counteract this atrophy Gimpel moves away from the uniformity of
the law and, in his search for utterance, turns full circle to
embrace the artifice of language. Language as a term of mediation
has its own intrinsic drawbacks however. For one thing the
possibilities opened out are polymorphous, precarious and thereby
liable to delusion, as can be observed in the fable of Elka
transformed. Lemaire points out:

By mediating himself in his discourse, the subject in effect
destroys the immediate relation of self to self, and
constructs himself in language as he wishes to see himself,
as he wishes to be seen, and thereby alienates himself in
language.¹⁷

That Gimpel is in this sense alienated is plain in his final
speech when he speaks of the illusory quality of the world: "No
doubt the world is entirely an imaginary world, but it is only
once removed from the true world" (GP24). These words have
traditionally been interpreted as an heroically hopeful epitaph
in the face of mortality. However to regard them in this light is

a facile conclusion which negates the despair of one who must live life at a remove. The price of maturity Gimpel tells us in these lines is that one loses that illusory, but nevertheless invigorating sense of velocity, where desires are unmediated and immediate. This yearning for a paradise irrecoverably lost is a retrogression to an earlier stage of infancy where desires were urgent, gratification was immediate and expectations elementally if illusorily, fulfilled:

Whatever will be there, it will be real, without complication, without ridicule, without deception. God be praised: there even Gimpel cannot be deceived. GP24

The story is in the final analysis, a winding sheet, a shroud for a dead past. If Gimpel has woven his life in the tale through the embonpoint of the narrative's warp and woof, he has no less surely braided therein the tangled signifier that sets out inevitably to unravel the thread at the moment of its fixing within the fabric:

The gravedigger Jew has his spade ready. The grave waits and the worms are hungry: the shroud are prepared - I carry them in my beggar's sack. GP24

Of what do these shrouds consist? They are the beggar's only provision for the future, of what can they consist then but of his accumulated past. I picture to myself the scene of Gimpel's death - the fool displaced by the text; he who has situated himself beyond anecdote, beyond artifact, finally comes to inhabit the logos of a life lived autobiographically in the present tense. The burial society approaches to lay Gimpel out and to prepare him for his grave, they open his sack and shake out his shrouds, and upon the pure white linen of the new sheets

are inscribed many letters, many tales:

...improbable things that could never have happened - about devils, magicians, windmills, and the like. GF23

2.3. "A Crown of Feathers" (CF)

The unconscious is that chapter of my history which is marked by a blank or occupied by a falsehood: it is the censored chapter. But the truth can be found again; it is most often already written down elsewhere. That is to say: - in monuments: this is my body ... the hysterical nucleus of the neurosis where the hysterical symptom reveals the structure of a language and is deciphered like an inscription which, once recovered, can without serious loss be destroyed.

Jacques Lacan.

"Discours de Rome"

What is this Truth ? Wherein is found all Truth ?

Kabbalah: The Greater Holy Assembly

This tale, like "Gimpel the Fool" is concerned with the negotiation of those developmental stages that Lacan calls real, imaginary and symbolic. Akhsa, the child, provides the psychic substratum upon which an oedipal dispute concerning the law of the father and the desire of the m(other) is played out. Like the previous story, the narrative is largely preoccupied with the opposition between those staunch, unyielding familial structures which express univocal values and the obscure and provocative nature of truth in an equivocal world. Akhsa must leave an imaginary latitude of illusory stability to wander outwards into the real world of shifting co-ordinates in order to search for

her crown of feathers, her "truth", which as she learns upon her deathbed, on the final lap of her voyage into the symbolic extension, is nothing more than a grammatical statement of an elliptical nature.

Akhsa, who like Gimpel is an orphan, is the granddaughter of Reb Naftali Holishitzer, a respected and prominent man, "the community leader" (CF9) of Krasnobrod. He is a business man and a scholar, an honest and righteous member of the community, a charitable, upright arbiter of law and order, a Holy-shit-zer of pernicious intent. His word is law in this mediaeval Hebraic patriarchy, a community of rigid and prohibitive structure which guards passionately against dissent from within and assimilation from without. Small wonder then, that Akhsa the convert, cannot even utter the name of her grandfather: "There were times when Akhsa desired to call out to her grand-father, but she did not dare mention his name with her unclean lips" (CF18). For Lacan, this forbidding, threatening and conscrisious father becomes, what Bowie calls, "the inaugurating agent of law":¹⁸

Lacan is concerned not with the real or imaginary father of a given individual but with the symbolic father whose name initiates and propels the signifying chain.¹⁹

If Reb Naftali is the agent of paternal law, then Nesha, the grandmother is the provocateur of maternal desire insofar as it impeaches and transgresses the law of the fathers. She comes from a family that is reputed to have belonged to the Sabbatai Zevi sect, the cult of the false Messiah. To compound this betrayal, within the pages of the forbidden book, the New Testament, Akhsa finds her grandmother's mark of possession;

pressed cornflowers signifying treachery. Whilst the masculine control of her grandfather's law betokens in the text a spiritual movement toward the Godhead, her grandmother's seductive femininity invites complicity in the chaotic desires of unredeemed lechery and Satan worship. Within a patriarchal society, the woman must either prostrate herself before the univocal law of her forefathers or step beyond the law into Law-d knows what cesspool of gratified desires that await the good wife, the gentle matron in the wilderness beyond. So runs the Puritan code of ethics everywhere; Salem Massachussetes is only a geographical distance from Krasnobrod, Poland - ask any witch. Thus whilst the order of Reb Naftali is connected with the hierarchical values of law, virtue and righteousness, Nesha's reign advocates chaos and desire, the repudiation of a religious code and the instigation of a reprehensible new ethos of devil worship. Thus, runs the argument of the text, Akhsa who has elected her grandmother's way, has in this choice made a covenant with the devil. Indeed, her desires, unbounded by the circumscriptions of the law, are so strong that they summon up Satan, a phallic figure, (in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Phallus), who comes one night to gratify her wish:

In the shine of the late-night moon she saw a naked male figure - tall and black, with long elflocks, the horns of a buck, and two protruding teeth, like a boar's. CF19

Presented with such a plethora of sharp, pointed protruberances the unregenerate woman may be simultaneously gratified in her feminine desire and punished for her transgression of the

pressed cornflowers signifying treachery. Whilst the masculine control of her grandfather's law betokens in the text a spiritual movement toward the Godhead, her grandmother's seductive femininity invites complicity in the chaotic desires of unredeemed lechery and Satan worship. Within a patriarchal society, the woman must either prostrate herself before the univocal law of her forefathers or step beyond the law into Law-d knows what cesspool of gratified desires that await the good wife, the gentle matron in the wilderness beyond. So runs the Puritan code of ethics everywhere; Salem Massachussetes is only a geographical distance from Krasnobrod, Poland - ask any witch. Thus whilst the order of Reb Naftali is connected with the hierarchical values of law, virtue and righteousness, Nesha's reign advocates chaos and desire, the repudiation of a religious code and the instigation of a reprehensible new ethos of devil worship. Thus, runs the argument of the text, Akhsa who has elected her grandmother's way, has in this choice made a covenant with the devil. Indeed, her desires, unbounded by the circumscriptions of the law, are so strong that they summon up Satan, a phallic figure, (in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Phallus), who comes one night to gratify her wish:

In the shine of the late-night moon she saw a naked male figure - tall and black, with long elflocks, the horns of a buck, and two protruding teeth, like a boar's. CF19

Presented with such a plethora of sharp, pointed protruberances the unregenerate woman may be simultaneously gratified in her feminine desire and punished for her transgression of the

masculine law. Furthermore, by the admission of her own fantasy, she is unable to escape the tyranny of the masculine phallus, from pillar to post she is impaled, merely exchanging in the final analysis Priapus Satan for the sceptre of the Law. This impasse characterises what many critics, most notably Jacques Derrida have called Lacan's "phallogocentrism",²⁰ a term which purports to criticise his reliance on the transcendental signifier of the phallus, so that the female situated within a masculine erotic landscape must of necessity choose between one phallus or another, whether it be the authoritative organ of the law or the subversive machinery of Satan the out-law. At this point it would be interesting to closely examine the moves and counter-moves made between the prohibitive father and the provocative mother as they are enacted upon the site of Akhsa's unformed psyche. At first, Nesha exerts her will by denying Akhsa's right to a lover and husband:

Matches were sought for her early, but her grand-mother was hard to please. She would look at a boy proposed by the marriage brokers and say, "He has the shoulders of a fool", or "He has the narrow forehead of an ignoramus." CFS

The effect of this refusal is to draw the child back into a closed circuit of oedipal desire: "Sometimes Akhsa would cry out, "I wish you were my fiance, not my grand-father!" and kiss his eyes and his white beard" (CF10). Even after her death, Nesha with perverse foresight, denies her granddaughter access to jouissance, her voice, strident and critical is heard from beyond the grave:

How strange, but her grand-mother still expressed her opinion. Once, Akhsa heard her say clearly, "He has the shout

of a pig." Another time, she said, "He talks like the standard letter book." CFI1

We are asked in the tale, to accept these imprecations to virginity as an effect of the spiteful malice of feminine perversity which seeks to belittle and ridicule the male in his guise as suitor. What this viewpoint consistently fails to realise is that feminine desire confined within the narrow limits of a patriarchal culture has little recourse to self-actualisation, other than to vehemently refuse desire where it fashions itself most strongly, most monolithically, as a question, or rather as the question. Significantly, at the very moment when desire is refused and the desideratum triumphantly denied, the law of the father, what Lacan calls the "nom-du-(grand)-pere" violates the sealed circuit of feminine eros, and with one clean blow of the phallus severs the dyad forever:

For the 'nom-du-pere', the original Other, introduces a gap between desire and its object(s) which the subject is bounded by, and bound to, throughout his life and at all levels of his experience. This primordial estrangement is by its very nature destined to recur ... 21

Reb Naftali, realising that his granddaughter is in danger of remaining a spinster forever "decided not to give in to her whims anymore but to marry her off" (CF11).

At the signing of the marriage contract, there occurs the first scene of direct conflict between the two grandparents as they seek to impose their respective wills upon the young girl:

Her grand-father passed her the contract and a quill, and her grand-mother cried out, 'Don't sign!' She grabbed Akhsa's elbow and a blot formed on the paper. CF12

Here, Akhsa does not speak, she is spoken by others; neither does she act, but is acted upon. It is entirely fitting then that in

response to this simulacrum of external activity, her reaction is silence and inertia.

At this point in the drama, Akhsa receives a visitation from the nether world in the form of her venerable grandfather who sternly chastises her conduct and demands that Akhsa seek the forgiveness of her blighted suitor, Zemach. By this means the girl-child is commanded to submit to the law of the father by moving beyond the sealed vacuum of the mother's desire:

'Apologise to Zemach. Become his wife.'

'Grandfather, I hate him.'

'He is your destined one.' (F13)

Only through absolute obedience to the will of the father, the inference runs, may the child be inscribed as anything other than a saleable commodity in a symbolic circuit of exchange. However as a female encapsulated in a male discourse, as a daughter trapped within the dialogue of her dead grandparents, Akhsa is characterised by her economic value as currency rather more than in her erotic function as current. Thus, in accepting the rule of the father, a symbolic debt is extracted from the child who perceives in this violent separation from the maternal bounty, a sacrifice bordering upon castration. That Akhsa refuses this harsh rule does not save her from the retributive scourges of paternal law. On the contrary, her punishment for transgression is intensified by the animus of Zemach, the suitor she had once been proud enough to scorn.

The entry of Nesha into this field of punitive restraint is peculiarly fitting:

'Grandmother, where are you ?'
'I'm here.'
'What should I do '
'Whatever your heart desires.' CF14

Thus speaks the voice of the she-demon, whose rule is one of indulgence and plenty. It is significant that feminine desire should be directly aligned with the most heinous impiety visited upon the Hebraic Patriarchy, the sin of conversion, so iniquitous, that those who gainsay it are automatically consigned to the host of hell, the order of the damned and the fallen:

"You're not my grandmother. You're a demon!" (CF14).

Here follows the second scene of opposition structured as a parallel crisis of the word, where each opponent seeks to annihilate the identity of the other insofar as identity constitutes the site of all authority:

"Akhsa, that is not your grandfather but a goblin from behind the bathhouse." Grandmother interrupted. Zemach is a ne'er-do-well, and vengeful to boot. He will torment you, and the children he begets will be vermin like him. Save yourself while there is time. God is with the Gentiles." CF14

If the function of this exchange is to demean, then we must deem it triumphant, for in it Nesha and Naftali are reduced to expletives:

"Lilith! She-demon! Daughter of Ketev M'riri!" Grandfather growled.
"Liar!" CF15

And Akhsa herself becomes nothing more than a commodity that may be bartered in an economic circuit of exchange, what Wilden very aptly describes as,

"... a sign or an icon exchanged in his parents' fantasies, the child becomes the equivalent of a word in somebody else's conversation." 22

The female-as-temptress, Akhsa's grandmother Nesha, in her guise as Satan impels the girl-child toward iniquity and sin. Her conversion and marriage to a Polish squire ends when in the throes of a phantasmal labour²³ she prays to the God she had forsaken. And in answer to this call for salvation, the grandfather, keeper of the law and purveyor of the holy word appears to proclaim sentence: "It is never too late. Find the man you have shamed. Become a Jewish daughter" (CF20). Akhsa cleansed and renewed, adopts her grandfather's law and adheres to it passionately thenceforth. She recites the Hebrew prayer of thanksgiving, prostrates herself upon the graves of her grandparents in expiation for past sins, and sets off into the world to find Zemach, and absolution for her transgressions as a Jewish daughter.

At the very moment when Zemach is found, Akhsa experiences her third opposition scene. Nesha exhorts her to flee "back to Esau" (CF23) and presumably eternal damnation, but Reb Naftali intervenes and pleads fervently for her soul: "Akhsa, he will save you from the abyss" (CF23). The drama is reminiscent of that of the morality play, where the virtues of the good angel plead with the vices of the bad angel for the soul of the common hero, everyman. Once again Akhsa chooses the path of the good, indistinguishable from that of the way of the law, and forces herself to undergo the scourge of the phallus as it exacts minute retribution upon the female penitent. In sack-cloth and raga, hung with a wreath of garlic, she permits herself to be led into the synagogue with a rope around her neck, "as if she were a

cow" (CF23), and prostrates herself upon the threshold: "Jews, step on me!" she called. "Jews spit on me!" (CF23). This praxis indicates Akhsa's passage through the mirror stage, and her mediation of it amounts to what Lavers has called "castration as the entrance into society".²⁴

Akhsa's penitence amounts to a sadistic ritual of mortification imposed by her vengeful and guilty suitor, Zemach. All this she undergoes with feminine suppliancy, indeed with conviction and righteousness, so that as a reward for her staunchness she is finally allowed to encounter her grandfather: "She recognised his high forehead, his benign smile, and the loving kindness of his gaze" (CF30). It is an instant of intense if misdirected spiritual ambience, a mutual recognition framed by the reunion of the gaze. Toril Moi,²⁵ in her feminist critique of Freud's first case-history, the analysis of Dora, delineates the male as the bearer of knowledge, he alone who has the power to penetrate both woman and text. Reb Naftali is presented here both as shaman and as oracle: "My daughter, your ordeal is over. We are waiting for you - I, Grandmother, all who love you. Holy angels will come to meet you" (CF30).

Despite the benevolence of this edict, Akhsa must undergo in absolution, a formal ordeal of purification and reparation that is sadistic in the extreme, involving as it does an obligatory public recital of sins committed, iniquities performed:

"...Akhsa beat her breast with her fist and recounted her sins; she had spited God, served idols, copulated with a Gentile"

(CF24). Later on, Zemach, himself guilty of many transgressions,

joins her in this self-same ritual of catharsis and litany:

She turned in the snow slowly and in silence while
Zemach recited, 'We have sinned, we have betrayed,
we have robbed, we have lied, we have mocked, we
have rebelled.' CF23

The impulse in both cases is one of confession, but Akhsa is
compelled not only to confess her sins to the public at large,
but also to mortify herself before Zemach, who like a Catholic
priest behind the grating of the confessional box, draws her out
with agonising sufferance in what Michel Foucault calls a "ritual
of discourse"²⁶ that has something akin to the sweaty
excitement of the voyeur:

'Get up, adulteress. This may be your last night.'
'I wish it were.'
'Confess! Tell the truth.'
'I have told you everything.'
'Did you enjoy the lechery?'
'No, Zemach, no.' CF28

Foucault speaks of this ritual as one that unfolds within a power
relationship, where the one who confesses subjugates himself
before an acknowledged authority, a divine interlocutor:

... an authority who requires the confession, prescribes and
appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish,
forgive, console and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth
is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had
to surmount in order to be formulated ... 27

And a ritual in which, naturally enough, the one who confesses is
female, the one who judges, male.

The unregenerate female in a prohibitive culture is perceived of
by the male community as inherently lusty and enormously
lascivious: "The rabbi pronounced that, according to the law,
Akhsa was not married. Her union with the squire was nothing
but an act of lechery" (CF25). Furthermore, the woman is

entrenched by a communal mythology as seducer and siren, so that Nesha turned Satanic temptress appears again and again in Akhsa's dreams to entrance and cajole the girl into numberless dissipations and fleshly debaucheries:

She sang bawdy songs, drank wine, and danced with charlatans. Some nights she led Akhsa into temples where priests chanted and idolators kneeled before golden statues. Naked courtesans drank wine from horns and gave themselves over to licentiousness. CP27

It would seem then that if masculinity is the repository of culture and breeding in the tale, of a reinforcing armature of laws and prohibitions that seek to contain disordered nature, then femininity comprises the very substratum of this entropic and chaotic fecundity. This is apparent when Akhsa, on the day of her death, falls into a heady trance in a far off pasture which seethes with potent and writhing life: "The earth steamed with the scent of grass and herbs, and it made Akhsa's head reel" (CP29). It is astonishing then, given this stark division of experience that the final lines invert this relation so that Zemach is suspected of demonism and Akhsa is revered as a holy woman:

Some surmised that Zemach was not a man but a demon. Akhsa was buried near the chapel of a holy man, and the rabbi spoke a eulogy for her. CP32

This startling inversion must be understood in the light of the elliptical nature of truth in the tale, a subject which will be discussed in detail later on.

One further contrast between the paternal law of the grand-Father and the unconscious desire of the grand-Mother can be adduced by the function of books in the tale. All the men in "A Crown of

Feathers" are learned and scholarly, Reb Naftali devotes half his day to a study of the Holy Books, Zemach "seemed to know the Talmud by heart" (CF11), and even Ludwik, the Polish squire reads historical works on religion and genealogy. In contrast to these divine books of masculine law, the women are tempted into transgression by the perusal of forbidden texts. Thus Akhsa, forsakes the book of Job to investigate the substance of the New Testament in a Polish translation belonging to her grandmother: "Akhsa knew it was a forbidden book, but she turned the pages anyway" (CF13). The woman, by virtue of her intrinsic weaknesses is here subjected to a prohibition of the glance (see no evil), which seeks to protect her from the castigating vision of the immediate presence in time and space, of God:

She remembered that on the Gentile feast days, when holy icons and pictures were carried in processions near the house, she was not allowed to look out of the window. Her grandfather told her it was idolatry. CF13

By denying the material validity of the image, the elders consign the Hebraic G-d to an abstract realm of what Steiner calls "immeasurable absence". "The God of the Torah not only prohibits the making of images to represent Him. He does not allow imagining." ²⁹ Thus the woman is denied access to this elaborate vision of God on the grounds that it is a gentile custom. Moreover she is refused entry to a more austere acceptance of the word of God through study of the holy books on the grounds that it is not a Jewish custom:

It was not the custom for a female to study at a yeshiva, because 'the king's daughter is all glorious within' and Jewish daughters are all the daughters of kings. CF9

Akhsa's only recourse it would seem, is to retreat into the world of fantasy and superstition encapsulated within the moth-eaten parchment of Ludwik's library where she finds the book on witchcraft that teaches her how to conjure up demons. Akhsa, denied the sight of the true Hebraic God, quickly fulfills her scopophilic desires by invoking a false demonic deity whose ambivalent appearance simultaneously bespeaks absence and presence: "His body was as translucent as a spider web" (CF19). Akhsa's entry into the symbolic register is very different from Gimpel's rite of passage which was facilitated by a movement from certitude to equivocation. Akhsa learns the self-same lessons of maturity, but she is fractured by the oppositions that have spawned her and divides from within to complete the truce.

From the beginning Akhsa locates herself within the division formed by the cleft of her grandparents' dichotomies. One is always situated in opposition to the other: "Just as her grandmother saw only bad, Reb Naftali saw only good" (CF10), and later: "Her grandfather had told her one thing, her grandmother another" (CF31). Of course Zemach only perpetuates this contrariety when he asks Akhsa, "'Why did you listen to your grandmother and not your grand-father?'" (CF28). It is only to be expected, given these dual axes about which Akhsa must arrange herself, that her own outlook is supremely bifocal, so that when she finally comes to take the measure of her own life, she comes up with a neat algebraic inversion:

She took stock of her soul. She had been born rich and beautiful, with more gifts than all the others around her. Bad luck had made everything turn to the opposite. CF31

In order to weld division into unity, Akhsa, like Gimpel, sets off on a quest for the lost object, the crown of feathers, which will compose the boundaries of her truth. Interrogatives resound in her discourse, from the first time that she becomes aware of the need for a mate: "Where, Grandfather ? Where ?" (CF10), to the final moment of recognition and yearning: "When, Grandfather ?" (CF30). Her life is one of successive leave takings and journeyings, she leaves the shtetl of her birth to enter a Polish village as a convert, a place she abandons years later to voyage forth in search of her lost fiancé. The first words she utters on entering her old home, resound throughout the narrative with poignant appeal: "Where is Akhsa ?" (CF29) she asks an old woman, and the question functions both as a literal directive and as a metaphorical conundrum. We are told of her interminable search for Zemach, where for three months Akhsa wandered from town to town, questioning elders and examining community records. When she does eventually locate him, the two leave town to settle in a remote outback in the woods, where, we are told, Zemach, the vindicator "kept on searching for new misdeeds in both of them" (CF29). Zemach's quest is for redemption in a stringent and austere culture: "I wanted to cleanse you so that you could sit in Paradise with the Holy Mothers" (CF30). Akhsa's eternal pursuit is less simple, she wants to find The Truth, and it is both pitiable and fitting that her truth is conceived of as a "pure" sign, capitalised and univocal: "She had now one desire - that a sign should be given, the pure truth revealed" (CF31).

Like Gimpel, Akhsa must learn of the deceptive nature of truth as an impure compound in a mortal world subject to all manner of ambiguities and concealment; the fact that, as Jacqueline Rose succinctly comments: "The image in which we first recognise ourselves is a misrecognition" (Rose's emphasis).²⁹

The crown of feathers, her primal image is explicitly referred to as a sign: "'If you don't believe me, ask for a sign'" (CF15), says Akhsa's grandmother, and the child reaches psychic maturity only when she comes to witness the elision of the signified by the signifier. At first the image is perceived of as miraculous, an object of wonder:

The sun made it sparkle with the colours of the rainbow. It looked as if it were set with the smallest of gems. She sat and contemplated the wonder. CF15

Later, on her deathbed, Akhsa again witnesses this wonder, but whereas the airy structure had previously been wrought in the form of a cross, now it is braided into the four letters of the Hebrew name of God. The letter has come at last to replace the symbol erected in the place of the word. At this moment Akhsa straddles the symbolic rift, firstly insofar as she is able to construct for herself a valid abstract icon of her God; and secondly as she comes to a laborious realisation of the multiplicity of truths in the fallen world:

But, she wondered, in what way was this crown more a revelation of truth than the other? Was it possible that there were different faiths in Heaven? CF32

Indeed, the crown of feathers which appears, dissolves, and reappears transfigured within the course of the tale, functions

as the metaphoric index to language as it presents itself within the world. With all the insouciance of a linguistic strip-tease, where the symbol of the cross moves aside to reveal the name of God, so signifieds coquettishly glide sideways to disclose a flash of signifier, a glimpse of sign. To understand this conception of truth, what the Kabbalah calls the nature of the broken vessel, we must go back to the moment where the devil, translucent and cold, confesses to his part in the weaving of the crown:

'You deceived me ?'
'I am a deceiver,' the Devil answered with a giggle.
'Where is the truth ?' Akhsa asked.
'The truth is that there is no truth.' CP19 30

Two philosophers of very different theoretical standpoints, both avow in almost the same terms this quality of ellipsis so akin to the nature of truth in the tales. Michel Foucault maintains that: "Truth is a thing of this world; it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint."³¹ While Lacan, in his preface to The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, similarly affirms that: "There is no truth that, in passing through awareness, does not lie."³² An ideological statement of intent that is very similar in feeling to the final lines of the story:

And what had she been searching for ? No matter how much the townspeople pondered and how many explanations they tried to find, they never discovered the truth. Because if there is such a thing as truth it is as intricate and hidden as a crown of feathers. CP 32

Akhsa, in accepting what one critic has called "the-truth-as castration"³³ surmounts her old life of imaginary identifications within a claustrophobic circuit to encompass a

view of reality that, like truth, is as unfinished, piece-meal, sporadic, dispersed and fragmentary as the very nature of language itself. And, as Lacan has repeatedly declared:

...truth proves to be complex in essence, humble in its offices and alien to reality, stubborn to the choice of sex, akin to death and, all in all, rather inhuman ... 34

2.4. Oedipus Foreclosed

Lacan's conviction that language is a symbolic construct which pre-exists the individual ³⁵ is particularly evident in his 1957 seminar, "The agency of the letter in the unconscious", a portion of which states:

"Language and its structures exist prior to the moment at which each subject at a certain point in his mental development makes his entry into it. 36

The notion that man may negotiate the mirror stage and thenceforth accede to the symbolic order through an awareness of the word both as it constitutes a social covenant and as it composes an individual contract, is central to Lacan's epistemology. In the following two tales, language is proffered as an emphatic refusal, so that the subjects involved are incisively barred from symbolisation. The central protagonists, Hindele the blighted hysteric of "Black Wedding", Itche-Godl and the Widow Finkle, the capricious ghouls of "Two Corpses go Dancing", assume an exhaustive denial of the three psychical stages of maturation. In refusing to partake in such metaphorical processes as the law, writing and language, Oedipus is foreclosed and they all three fail to enter the symbolic dimension remaining

thus below mirror level at the stage of infancy for the duration of all their sewing adult lives.

These two stories illustrate the plight of the individual when language is denied and the symbolic portal is foreclosed. Hindele, the hysterical bride of "Black Wedding" refuses to allow the paternal metaphor adequate expression in her virgin's discourse, and as a result she remains perpetually intact and entire, neither speech nor syllable ever passes her (hymen) lips.

In "Two Corpses go Dancing", Itche-Godl and Finkle the Widow, spirits deceased, can find no rest in the unquiet earth until their lives are inscribed by the law, their deaths sanctified through the word, their flesh consecrated in the stately ceremonial of the letter.

These protagonists cannot symbolise, cannot speak - but are spoken by others and become, in the end, symbols and words used by the other: the masculine discourse that stunts and maims Hindele; and the Devil's monologue as he narrates the tale of the two dead marionettes.

George Steiner's enumeration of the constraints of language are particularly apt in this case: "The substantive limitations of man are madness and death, conditions in which language refuses to signify".³⁷ These conditions it will be seen, refer as trenchantly to the former modality as it predicates the hysteria and frenzy of "Black Wedding", as they do to the latter category in its moribund insistence on the mortal coil in "Two Corpses go Dancing."

2.5. "Black Wedding" (SMS)

The irreversibility of speech brings the monster out of its
hiding place:
the irreversibility of death keeps the father in his.

Racine

Phédre

The entry of the child into the symbolic order is dependent upon his arrogation of language as a unit of social exchange. It is for this reason that Gimpel must reveal his tale and Akhsa must uncover her crown. Both tale and crown stand in the place of the word that the child has mastered and which composes his entry into language and the law. Wilden, in commenting upon Lacan's concept of the mirror stage emphasises this point:

The child's release from the alienating image, if indeed he is released from it, will occur through his discovery of subjectivity by his appropriation of language from the Other, which is his means of entry into the Symbolic order in the capacity of subject. 38

The two stories which follow, "Black Wedding" and "Two Corpses go Dancing", trace the denial of symbolisation on the part of the undeveloped psyche, through a refusal of speech in the former tale, and a radical suppression of the written word in the latter. The protagonists of these tales refuse the word, foregoing thenceforth their developmental passage through the mirror, and remaining thereafter infants caught and bound by an imaginary form, captured by a false reflection in a duplicitous glass. Mindele especially, rejects the sacred word in favour of a profane image, thereby keeping faith with the perverse covenant of her silence even when confronted with the manifold

hallucinations of a history lived as hysteria.

"Black Wedding" is a tale which tells of the inheritance of the curse of silence, an hereditary scourge of the word.

Hindele is the female off-spring of a long line of rabbis, all of whom "warred constantly with the evil ones" (SMS27), and all of whom, because blessed with the power of the word, eventually emerged triumphant. Hindele however, as a woman, is denied access to the language of incantation and exorcism and consequently is exhorted to everlasting silence by the patriarchal edict of her father, the rabbi of Tzivkev. Her refusal of speech is tantamount to a sequestration of the symbolic extension, so that the ensuing narrative bespeaks her imprisonment in an imaginary expanse of phantasms and shades.

Hindele's father, Rabbi Aaron Naphtali is a past-master both of the word and of the letter. We are told that his penmanship mimes that of the ancient scribes and that this sanctified script is used for the writing of amulets, which are in turn hung from the necks of each of his followers. The chain of signifiers here, literally a yoke, a harness of the word, stretches back in time to the letter of the ancients binding by the written word its present day adherents. Moreover, Reb Naphtali immerses himself in the ancient lore of Kabbalah, a cult of the word insofar as it evokes the object:

It was said that Reb Aaron Naphtali wanted to imitate the feats of the ancient ones, to tap wine from the wall and create pigeons through combinations of holy names. It was even said that he moulded a golem secretly in his attic.
SMS26

This practice of holy utterance whereby clay may be animated through the intercession of the word is a Godlike practice which in the words of Harold Bloom:

... goes so far as to say of God and the Sefirah:
"He is They, and They are He", which produces
the dangerous formula that God and language
are one and the same. 39

An assumption one might add, which locates the praxis of power firmly in the mouth so to speak, of the suppliant, in this case the divine doyen of all speech, holy Reb Naphtali, the Kabbalist. Windele, who has been named after her saintly grandmother is the final product of a blighted generation all of whom bear the cross of the family name, stretching backwards through the centuries to her great grandfather, the exorcist. The sins of the fathers find resonance in this girl, the feminine extract of three generations of male rabbis, each one of whom, in sequence, has repressed the speaking signifier. We are told that the old Rabbi of Tzivkev exorcised a dybbuk from a young girl and that the evil spirits unable to harm his son Rabbi Hirsch, who died young, revenged themselves upon the grandson, Reb Naphtali, who thenceforth had to contend with malevolent devils all his life. As we have already witnessed in Akhsa's case, the female in a rigidly patriarchal culture, does not speak, but is spoken by a consensus, a male quorum as it were. The silence of the woman in this context is nothing more than an hysterical denial of masculine law, a refusal to be spoken, ironically presented here, through the symbol of the dybbuk, the possessor, he who literally expropriates the speech of the other, and in so doing bequeaths

the gift of tongues. This possession of the woman by a dybbuk is imbued with dual significance. Firstly insofar as it provides a metaphoric index to the feminine condition as it is inscribed within a masculine discourse; secondly, it mockingly parodies the restrictive law of the fathers through the restorative anarchy of inversion; the self-deposed, the possessor enshrined. The procedure of exorcism then, is no more nor less than an attempt to oust this rebellious usurper of the masculine locus of power. However, like any anarchist expelled from the gates of the city, the symptom returns from exile to pursue each generation, until the circuit of vengeance is completed. The first father, the old Rabbi of Tslivkev exorcises the demon in his lifetime; the second father, Rabbi Hirsch escapes the demon through his death and the third father, Rabbi Naphtali endures the demon all his life, transferring it at the moment of his death to his daughter, Hindele. In so doing, the cycle is completed, as like returns to like, the circuit of repressed feminine desire resounding throughout the generations to find a hollow echo in the hysteria of Hindele's silence. Even before she is exhorted to silence, Hindele is stricken with all the symptoms of impotent language, of speech repressed and restrained at the outer limits of its utterance: "Hindele often suffered attacks of yawning; red flushes spread over her face, her throat ached, there was a buzzing in her ears" (SMS27). Schneiderman, following Lacan, calls this phenomenon the "speaking symptom":

The patient is effectively deprived of her speech insofar as that speech can function to give her access to a desire that would be hers. As a bearer of a symptom, the subject is prey to some-one else's desire. 40

The displaced desire in this case is, quite clearly that of the father, manifesting itself first in speech: "At such times incantations had to be made to drive away the evil eye" (SMS27), and finally in silence, as when the Rabbi entreats Hindele: "You must keep silent if you are to be spared" (SMS28). This is the moment of the frontier, when silence is hidden, speech forbidden. Julia Kristeva in *The System and the Speaking Subject* provides an illuminating gloss on this demarcated crisis-point, in her treatise on the infringement of the law:

All functions which suppose a *frontier* and the transgression of that frontier, are relevant to an account of signifying *practice*, where practice is taken as meaning the acceptance of a symbolic law together with the transgression of that law for the purpose of renovating it (Kristeva's emphasis). 41

It remains to be seen then to what extent the frontier is redressed, the edict renounced and the law renovated.

Before we examine this process, it would be well to familiarise ourselves with a milieu which, to say the least, wholeheartedly favours the masculine order in all things:

There was a custom in Yampol that when the wife of a young man gave birth to a girl, the father was placed on a table and lashed thirty-nine times with a strap. SMS29

Lacan, in his notorious "Discours de Rome", explicitly aligns the failure of the word as signifier with the presence of the bespoken subject:

The absence of the word is manifested here by the stereotypes of a discourse in which the subject, one might say, is spoken rather than speaking. 42

The patient is effectively deprived of her speech insofar as that speech can function to give her access to a desire that would be hers. As a bearer of a symptom, the subject is prey to some-one else's desire. 40

The displaced desire in this case is, quite clearly that of the father, manifesting itself first in speech: "At such times incantations had to be made to drive away the evil eye" (SMS27), and finally in silence, as when the Rabbi entreats Hindele: "You must keep silent if you are to be spared" (SMS28). This is the moment of the frontier, when silence is bidden, speech forbidden. Julia Kristeva in The System and the Speaking Subject provides an illuminating gloss on this demarcated crisis-point, in her treatise on the infringement of the law:

All functions which suppose a frontier and the transgression of that frontier, are relevant to an account of signifying practices, where practice is taken as meaning the acceptance of a symbolic law together with the transgression of that law for the purpose of renovating it (Kristeva's emphasis). 41

It remains to be seen then to what extent the frontier is redressed, the edict renounced and the law renovated.

Before we examine this process, it would be well to familiarise ourselves with a milieu which, to say the least, wholeheartedly favours the masculine order in all things:

There was a custom in Yampol that when the wife of a young man gave birth to a girl, the father was placed on a table and lashed thirty-nine times with a strap. SMS29

Lacan, in his notorious "Discours de Rome", explicitly aligns the failure of the word as signifier with the presence of the bespoken subject:

The absence of the word is manifested here by the stereotypes of a discourse in which the subject, one might say, is spoken rather than speaking. 42

In "Black Wedding", Hindele is undeniably spoken for if not fore-spoken:

True, Reb Simon was a divorced man with five children.
But as Hindele was an orphan, who would protest ? ...
She was told that he was a widower, and nothing was said
about the five children. SMS29

The subject who is refused speech and who retaliates by refusing to speak makes a political point by this gesture, but in consequence inestimably fails to inscribe herself as a potent and autonomous subject in psychic terms.

In his seminar on the mirror stage in Écrits, Lacan speaks of the entry into a symbolic order as that nexus which constitutes:

...a moment that decisively tips the whole of human knowledge into mediatization through the desire of the other, constitutes its objects in an abstract equivalence by the co-operation of others, and turns the I into that apparatus for which every instinctual thrust constitutes a danger ...43

There is just such a moment in the tale, in which the aforesaid "mediatization" may be fulfilled, the mirror stage completed and the symbolic order straddled. Significantly it is at this very point that Hindele refuses to comply with the desire of the other, withholds her speech and consequently tumbles backwards into an imaginary world. This moment constitutes the frontier of the gaze, the cutting edge of potential recognition: "When Reb Simon lifted the veil from Hindele's face after the wedding, she saw him for the first time" (SMS30). What Hindele sees is an object covered entirely by hair, he wears a broad fur hat, has a pitch-black dishevelled beard and a long mustache: "Clusters of hair grew out of his nostrils and ears. His hands, too, had a growth of hair as thick as fur" (SMS30). And, from this point

onwards, the poor girl finds herself surrounded by a plethora of squirming, writhing, and entangled phalluses, from the archetypal symbol of the serpent to the multiple "pricks" of the hedgehogs: "The sashes of the young men were snakes in reality, their sable hats were actually hedgehogs, their beards clusters of worms" (SMS30). What is disclosed to her in this primal scene, at this, the close of the imaginary phase is no different to that which mediates the imaginary for most children - the phallus suddenly revealed by the desire of the other: "He gazed at her like an animal" (SMS30).

However, Hindele, stricken by the silence of the three fathers, whose law is that of the Word, can never effectively take her place in the desire of the Other for she is bereft of words, unable even to pray: "She wanted to call out 'Hear, O Israel' but she remembered her father's death-bed admonition to keep silent" (SMS30). For Hindele, speech would not only endanger her soul, but, more stringently, it would invoke the dead father, and it is for this reason alone that Hindele, like Phèdre before her, refuses speech. If the daughter persists in her silence, the father remains dead, this despite the refracted mirror and the symbolic portal fore-closed.

In her despair, Hindele seeks consolation in the Word:

She found a page of a psalter in the mossy forest and she recited psalms furtively. She also remembered a few passages from the Torah and of the prophe's. SMS33

This persistence in the ancient discourse of her forefathers emphasises her servitude and is only slightly less futile than the

silence she maintains in the face both of sexual violation and agonising birth pangs: "One sigh and she would be lost. She must restrain herself in the name of her holy forebears" (SMS34). Her silence, the words she dare not speak turn to flesh in the kaleidoscopic violence of her imaginings. There is a displacement from what Lacan has called the invocatory to the scopophilic drive, and, as one critic has very astutely observed, "Lacan studies the relation to the image as part of the insertion of the subject into language and discourse." 44

Hindele's holy union with Reb Simon takes on the aspect of an iniquitous Black Mass in her covered imaginings. With all the aplomb of the signified gliding blithely beneath the signifier, reality similarly escapes behind the manifold elisions of appearance and disguise. Beneath the layers of respectable apparel peek the webbing of goose-feet, elf-locks and snouts; beyond the staid walls of the living room lurks the forest; behind the familiar songs of the joyous festival, snakes hiss. It is significant that at this point, the images of violation, sexual abuse and masculine domination take precedence and the bridegroom becomes all that is rapacious, brutal and pillaging: "He stepped on the bride's foot with his hoof so that he might rule over her. Then he smashed the wine glass" (SMS31). This breaking of the hymen, this ritual entry into a male world of division and difference contrasts with Hindele's insistence on the validity of the image, a point which Jacqueline Rose, in her Lacanian seminar on feminine sexuality emphasises:

It is therefore a refusal of division which gives the woman access to a different strata of language, where words and things are not differentiated. 45

However, words and things are undeniably different, in this world as in the next. The child of her belly, Belial the mannikin, recalls division from whence she had banished it by his disembodied insistence on the word and more specifically, on a language that identifies, on a syntax that names: "He was already chattering, calling her mother, cursing with vile language" (SMS33). And it is this egoistical insistence on utterance that cruelly divides and ravages Hindele, for whom after all, language has always been flesh. With the pain of child-bearing, her speech is forced, and as a piercing scream of torn flesh rises from her throat, the heavens divide, language fragments, the flesh and the word are severed and a hellish fire flares up, the earth opens and Hindele sinks into a Lacanian abyss:

Where is the background? Is it absent?
No. Rupture, split, the stroke of the opening
makes absence emerge - just as the cry does not stand
out against a background of silence, but on the contrary
makes the silence emerge as silence. 46

This moment of utterance, constitutes the still centre of primeval loss: "Hindele had lost everything, this world and the world to come" (SMS35). For not only is the daughter damned for all eternity by the bar of her speech, but more perniciously, the father is resurrected triumphant and resplendent to resume his rightful place in the community, as the eldest male child of Reb Simon and the late, unlamented Hindele. After the howling and hell-fire, as the host of Asmodeus welcome Hindele to their lair,

there is a sudden, disconcerting return to a real world of teleology and responsibility, of just cause and measured effect:

In Tsivkev and in the neighbourhood the tidings spread that Hindele had given birth to a male child by Reb Simon of Yampol. The mother had died in childbirth. SMS35

The resumption of the omniscient voice of the narrator over-rules the turmoil of Hindele's delirium so that in the final analysis her hysterical discourse signifies not at all. She, for whom womb has become word, this high priestess of fleshly sin and syntax, is in the final lines crucified upon the cross of the word, what Lacan in a highly relevant passage from Forits has called the "passion of the signifier":

This passion of the signifier then becomes a new dimension of the human condition, in that it is not only man who speaks, but in man and through man that it speaks, that his nature is woven by effects in which we can find the structure of language, whose material he becomes, and that consequently there resounds in him, beyond anything ever conceived of by the psychology of ideas, the relation of speech. 47

If man is woven by the structure of a language that is his creation and his domain, then woman is no less ineluctably constructed by the pattern of a silence that is her refusal and her retreat.

2.6. "Two Corpses go Dancing" (S)

"The closest they came was once when both of them were looking up the meaning of a word or an idiom in Ben Yehudah's great dictionary and their heads met accidentally. Yabloner fell into a playful mood and said,

'Deborah, let's trade eyeglasses.'

'What for?' Deborah Soltis asked.

'Oh, just like that. Only for a little while.'

The two lovers exchanged reading glasses, but he couldn't read with hers and she couldn't read with his. So they replaced their own glasses on their noses - and that was the most intimate contact the two ever achieved."

"The Cabalist of East Broadway" (CP)

In our relation to things, insofar as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it - that is what we call the gaze.

Jacques Lacan

The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis

Where Hindele of "Black Wedding" refused to enter the symbolic register, this tale typifies the subject's inability to master symbolisation and hence to negotiate the mirror stage and enter into a symbolic order. Unlike the previous tale "Two Corpses go Dancing" constitutes an allegorical narrative where the plight of the living dead comes to parallel the paradigm of the impotent child locked within the convoluted reflections of an unresolved mirror stage as if bound within a coffin. Itche-Godl and the widow Finkle, psychical infants unredeemed by language or the law do not even know that theirs is a life lived beyond mortality,

and in this, they resemble the unselfconscious egoism of the child who cannot yet say "I am".

The two characters concerned are asocial, hermetic outcasts from the community at large. In order, like the Lady of Shalott, to untie the loom and shatter the glass, they must be reintegrated into a social milieu, where like respectable citizens they can engage in a union blessed by society, with all the ceremony and state of a communal pageant. Leitch maintains that our entry into society correlates an insertion into "a network of pre-existent signifiers"⁴⁸ made up of those grammatical and cultural systems which impose order on the individual as he comes into language, and which are constituted before his birth: linguistic structures which, as the tale allows, are active no less potently after death.

In the opening lines the narrator "I, the Evil One" (S163) names himself and, from this point onwards he is the master of speech, the manipulator of all language in the tale; he alone occupies the place of acknowledged identity. He commands by virtue of the Word, corrupt and iniquitous as it may be, but nevertheless, capable of resurrecting the "dead":

'Listen here, Itche-Godl,' I shouted at him. What's the use of rotting underground? Why not get up and go into the city? There are plenty of corpses roaming around Warsaw. There might as well be another,' Itche-Godl rose ... S164

In contrast to this locus of self-assured and confirmed identity which the devil occupies in the tale, Itche-Godl and Finkle the widow remain un-named and un-mourned. Itche-Godl we are told, lived an innocuous life and died a death of complete obscurity.

The body was hurriedly disposed of, the funeral unattended: "Not even a marker was placed over the grave" (S164). This "forsaken cadaver" (S164) forgotten by angels and devils alike, does not even undergo the traditional rites of passage, of confrontation and of naming: "Usually after a man dies the Angel Dumah confronts him, demands his name, and then proceeds to weigh up his good against his evil deeds" (S164). Unmanned by the speech of others, he is no less forsaken by the written word, for as the evil one remarks, Itche-Godl was not listed in the Book of Life and thus could not claim clemency from the angels. In a religion in which the written word constitutes the seal of existence, the exclusion of a name from the celestial book, becomes what Jacques Derrida has called, "the repression of writing as the repression of that which threatens presence and the mastering of absence."⁴⁸ Given this exclusion from recourse to the spoken word no less than to the written, it is not surprising, to learn that Itche-Godl's speech is entirely ineffectual, his bearing abysmally torpid: "It was not his way to argue and he had never even learned how to raise his voice properly" (S166).

Widow Finkle, unlike the hapless Itche-Godl had made adequate provision for her demise, an eternal light was to burn in memory of her death and pious men were engaged to say Kaddish in remembrance of her life. Despite these precautions however, Finkle dies in a strange city and, divided from her ancestors she can find no rest in the unhallowed ground of Vienna. She, like Itche-Godl lies forgotten in an unmarked grave, her name unconsecrated.

Itche-Godl and the widow Finkle inhabit a twilight world of life-in-death, of corruptions of the flesh and the rotting of the spirit, what the devil calls limbo ("Woe unto such a one! One who is neither alive nor dead, but who exists somewhere on the borderline" S163, and Lacan, "alienation":

Alienation consists in this val, which - if you do not object to the word condemned, I will use it - condemns the subject to appearing only in that division which, it seems to me, I have just articulated sufficiently by saying that, if it appears on one side as meaning, produced by the signifier, it appears on the other as aphanisis 50 (Lacan's emphasis).

"Aphanisis" denotes here the fading of the subject consonant with the disappearance of desire, a term it would seem that is entirely fitting to describe the union of Itche-Godl and Finkle the widow, in which indifference vies with apathy within the courtship circumscriptions of the gaze: "And he looked at her with lacklustre eyes, and she looked back, the depths of her eyes blank" (S171). This moment of recognition, what Lacan has called, "...a consciousness of the other that can be satisfied only by Hegelian murder" ⁵¹ is the precursor of their final love scene, where once brought to the fecundity of the marriage bed, the two corpses gaze at each other from the depths of the abysses, powerless and mute:

'I've fallen in! Save me!' moaned Itche-Godl, whose tongue was becoming numb. Finkle tried to get up but was unable to move" S174

The subjects who can no longer be represented by the Word, split, divide or fade so that there is a tearing, a Spaltung of the flesh. Hence Lacan's notion of aphanisis, or the division of subject: "...when the subject appears somewhere as meaning, he

is manifested elsewhere as 'fading', as disappearance." 52
After this initial spasm of paralysis, the muscular rictus of the tale relaxes and slackens so that a veritable babble of the Word, both as it is inscribed and as it is invoked is liberated thenceforth:

'Good Heavens! Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One', gasped Itche-Godl, and those were his last words. The god-fearing widow Finkle answered: 'Blessed be His Name, Whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever ...S174

There follows the letter from Vienna which tells of Finkle's death three months prior, an epistle which initiates a collective scourge of the letter, as the tablets and scrolls of the law - the mezuzahs in every household of the neighbourhood, are minutely examined for evidence of the desecration of the word of God. A quorum of pious Jews are sent immediately to Itche-Godl's grave to beg his forgiveness, and to extract from him by oral pledge his blessing. And finally in an absolving and monumental resurrection of the Word, the community erects a tombstone over his grave, to appease the restless corpse. Itche-Godl is named at last, not once but twice, for in a final cataclysmic passion of the word turned flesh, Tryna-Rytza is delivered of a son whom she names after her first husband, Itche-Godl.

Thus, interred in ritual, mourned with ceremony, inscribed through generations, Itche-Godl enters the brackets of a symbolic order, where identity precedes personality and essence, existence:

In bearing a name, man gains, not a sense of wholeness, but rather a sense of an otherness that is neither whole nor complete. 53

Thus far we have concluded an examination of the mechanisms by means of which language may permit or prohibit entry through the mirror and into the symbolic modality. The subject who refuses the Word, the subject like Hindele who responds to the Law of the Father with silence is barred from entering the symbolic arena. The subject who speaks however, and in speaking sanctions division and dispersal, like Gimpel, like Akhsa, is permitted entry. But the immersion into language and the law is dangerous, precarious in many ways; the subject, by this very gesture of complicity, is made vulnerable to the hegemony of the word. In the following chapter we shall examine such occasions of anarchy by trailing the subject as he enters a symbolic discourse, remembering always the frailty of all life which cannot pass undamaged into the volumes of the letter.

REFERENCES TO SECTION TWO

1. Lacan, Forits pp.8-29.
2. Robert Detweiler, Story, Sign and Self (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) p.156.
3. Anika Lemaire, Jacques Lacan (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980) p.181.
4. Naomi Leventhal, Storytelling in the Works of Isaac Bashevis Singer diss. Ohio State University, 1978. (Ohio: Ohio State University, 1978) p.44.

Of course the concept of a "mis-reading" is often a fruitful one in the post-structural context, as Edith Kurzweil makes clear in The Age of Structuralism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) when she remarks that there is a "need to misunderstand" (p. 137). This idea is implicit in Lacan's body of work where acts of *méconnaissance* comprise the inherent structures of *connaissance*. Or to put it another way, Colin McCabe in "On Discourse" speaks of language as operating on "a continuous mis-construction of its constitution; which misconstruction is the appearance of the subject." The Talking Cure ed. C. McCabe (London: Macmillan, 1981) p.199.

5. Malcolm Bowie, "Jacques Lacan," Structuralism and Since, ed. J. Sturrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) p.122.
6. Jacques Lacan, Feminine Sexuality (London: Macmillan Press, 1982) p.169.
7. Bowie, Structuralism and Since p.146.
8. The Yiddish word used in the text however is "tam", meaning simple-minded fellow, and played against the word "nar" denoting fool.
9. Lacan, Forits p.19.
10. Suzanne Gearhart, "The Scene of Psychoanalysis: The Unanswered Questions of Dora," In Dora's Case, ed. Bernheimer and Kahane (London: Virago Press, 1985) p.109.
11. Pinsker, The Schlemiel as Metaphor p.62.
12. This insight recurs throughout the tales in many different forms, as for instance, in this narratorial

phrase from "The Joke": "I had realised long ago that whatever anybody can invent already exists somewhere" (FK166).

13. Lacan, Écrits p.4.

14. John Forrester, Language and the Origins of Psychoanalysis (London: Macmillan Press, 1980) p.137.

Sherry Turkle in Psychoanalytic Politics (London: Burnett Books, 1979) observes that it is those unsymbolised aspects of the self that are at the root of neurosis, "but psychoanalysis can cure by bringing it to awareness and symbolisation" (p. 133).

In this case it is the narrative that cures, for Gimpel in the process of telling his tale, reacquires those symbols of his past by which to construct the metaphors of his future.

15. Alexandre Kojève, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel (New York: Basic Books, 1969) p.3.
16. William Butler Yeats, "Amongst School Children," Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats (London: Macmillan, 1961).

Gimpel's position at this point: both of and outside the tale, directs one to Hegel's dictum in The Philosophy of Subjective Spirit (Dordrecht: D.Reidel Publishers, 1978):

I know of the general object as its being mine, and since it is my presentation, I know of myself within it. p. 37

Indeed Lacan's debt to Hegel should never be underestimated, in terms both of Hegel's study of desire, as well as his emphasis on the process of recognition in the Master-Slave paradigm. An interesting essay which traces Lacan's debt to Hegel is "Hegel as Lacan's Source for Necessity in Psychoanalytic Theory" by Wilfried Ver Beke in Interpreting Lacan eds. J. M. Smith and M. Kerrigan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

17. Lemaire, Jacques Lacan p.64.
18. Bowie, Structuralism and Since p.134.
19. Bowie, p.134.
20. Quoted by Barbara Johnson in "The Frame of Reference", ed. R. Young Unruly Texts (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981) p.235.
21. Bowie, p.137.

René Girard in his book Deceit, Desire, and the Novel (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985) speaks of the mediated nature of affect where desire is conceived of as symmetrical and mimetic. In this context, Reb Naftali's prohibitions against Weisha's desire through the channel of Akhsa become subject to Girard's observation, "it is always his own desire that the subject condemns in the Other without knowing it" (p. 73).

In a later study of desire, "To Double Business Bound" (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978) Girard applies his thesis to the idea of the double in literature. This book is very helpful in developing a theory of desire by means of which imitation/doubling is described as a "desiring mimesis" (p. 91). Tales like "Caricature" (SMS) and "The Mirror" (GP) may be disseminated from this perspective, for both are concerned with specular identity, the mimicry of the subject unable to generalize beyond the contours of his own body.

22. Anthony Wilden, System and Structure (London: Tavistock Publications, 1980) p.28.
23. The concept of a "phantasized labour" is interesting in view of those tales in which young virgins undergo hysterical pregnancies, believing themselves to have conceived through the very heat of their suppressed desires. Ventl in "Ventl the Yeshiva Boy" is one such example: "Ventl's period was late and she was suddenly afraid ... In Meдрash Talpith she had read of a woman who had conceived merely through desiring a man" (p. 111).

And Feigle Bialer in "One Day of Happiness" is another:

Sometimes at night, lying awake, she could feel her body beginning to swell up like dough. Her skin burned, her breasts tightened as if filled with milk. And though Feigle was a virgin, she was sometimes afraid she might suddenly begin to give birth. She felt fluids coursing through her like saps in a plant before blooming. I 17

24. Annette Lavers, Roland Barthes Structuralism and After (London: Methuen, 1982) p.17.

It is interesting to notice that Akhsa enters society at the moment of her defilement, so that perhaps it is punishment itself that civilises the subject. Paul Ricoeur in The Symbolism of Evil (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) makes the connection between defilement and speech that is necessary to this argument:

Now, defilement enters into the universe of man

through speech, or the word (parole); its anguish is communicated through speech; before being communicated, it is determined and defined through speech; the opposition of the pure and the impure is spoken; and the words which express it institute the opposition. p.38

25. Toril Moi, "Representation of Patriarchy: Sexuality and Epistemology in Freud's Dora", in Dora's Case p.198.

Again, in Sexual/Textual Politics (London: Methuen, 1986) Toril Moi speaks of the female caught and pinioned in a masculine discourse:

Caught in the specular logic of patriarchy, woman can choose either to remain silent ... or to enact the specular representation of herself as a lesser male. p.135

In "A Crown of Feathers" Akhsa chooses the second alternative, and attempts to mine the masculine desires that she lacks, the desires of her Grandfather and of Zemach. In "Black Wedding" (SNS) a tale that will be discussed in detail later, we shall see how Hindele chooses to remain silent as a means of eluding her own imprisonment in a masculine discourse. There are many other instances of feminine hysteria in these tales, where the jouissance of the woman is circumscribed by a despotic masculine autocracy. In tales like "Zeitl and Ricketl" (S), "The Lantuch" (GF) and "The Bond" (I); female desires are measured, judged and sentenced by the decrees of a rigid phallic law. The women in these tales are either beaten and burnt by husbands, lovers and protectors, or take their own lives in shame.

26. Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality (London: Penguin Books, 1979) p.61.
27. Foucault, The History of Sexuality p.62.
28. George Steiner, Id Bluebeard's Castle (London: Faber and Faber, 1971) p.36.
29. Jacqueline Rose, Introduction to Feminine Sexuality (London: Macmillan Press, 1982) p.30.
30. A similar pronouncement is made by the Devil who is sent to tempt Zeidlus to conversion in "Zeidlus the Pope": "The world is not knowable and there is no truth" (SF154).
31. Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980) p.131.
32. Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986) p.vii.

33. Gearhart, In Dora's Case p.119.
34. Lacan, Écrits p.145.
35. This is not an entirely innovative concept as many linguistic theorists, notably Noam Chomsky in his book Reflections on Language (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975) subscribe to a theory of language which posits an "internal grammar," that being those intrinsic properties of language by means of which man may interpret the structures and systems of symbolic thought into which he has been born.
36. Lacan, Écrits p.148.
37. George Steiner, Extra-Territorial (London: Faber and Faber, 1972) p.87.
38. Jacques Lacan, "Discours de Rome", in Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis ed. A. Wilden (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984) p.161.
39. Harold Bloom, Kabbalah and Criticism (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975) p.26. Séfirot are the holy names of God which can be used to conjure up spirits or to inspire golems.
40. Stuart Schneiderman, The Death of an Intellectual Hero (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983) p.116. In this context it is interesting to note Braver's description of Fraulein Anna O. in Studies on Hysteria (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983) a repressed woman suffering a similar vocalisation of the unspeaking symptom:

It first became noticeable that she was at a loss to find words, and this difficulty gradually increased. Later she lost her command of grammar and syntax; she no longer conjugated verbs, and eventually she used only infinitives, for the most part incorrectly formed from weak past participles; and she omitted both the definite and indefinite article. In the process of time she became almost completely deprived of words. p.77

Similarly, it is appropriate to consider Roland Barthes's observation in Elements of Semiology (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985), that, "the zero degree is therefore not a total absence, it is a significant absence" (Barthes emphasizes, p.77)

41. Julia Kristeva, The System and the Speaking Subject (Lisse: The Peter De Ridder Press, 1976) p.7.
42. Lacan, "Discourse de Rome" p.43.
The phenomenon of the spoken female subject is well

documented in feminist writings in general and in a volume entitled Feminist Literary Theory in particular (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986). Two especially well known contributors to this collection are Juliet Mitchell and Helene Cixous. In her essay entitled "Femininity, Narrative and Psychoanalysis," Mitchell maintains that hysteria is the logical feminine reply to the opaque discourse of the male:

Hysteria is the woman's simultaneous acceptance and refusal of the organisation of sexuality under patriarchal capitalism. It is simultaneously what a woman can do both to be feminine and to refuse femininity, within a patriarchal discourse. p. 101

The anodyne to this psychological disease, Cixous suggests in her article "The Laugh of the Medusa," is for the woman to regain her muted self through the sacrament of the word:

Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away so violently as from their bodies - for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Women must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by her own movement. p. 225

And Hindele, paralysed and mute, beyond history, beyond the world, distances herself from her body even as she estranges herself from the text.

43. Lacan, Ecrits p.6.
44. Steven Ungar, Roland Barthes The Professor of Desire (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983) p.62.
45. Rose, Feminine Sexuality p.55.
Again and again in these tales, men violate the fused circuit of feminine hysteria whether by brute force or through the formal rituals of exorcism. This scene from "The Power of Darkness" is a case in point:

Father called three men to ameliorate the dream, and they stood in front of Tzeitel and intoned, 'Thou hast seen a goodly vision! A goodly vision hast thou seen! Goodly is the vision thou hast seen. OL223
46. Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis p.26
47. Lacan, Feminine Sexuality p.78.
48. Vincent Leitch, Deconstructive Criticism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) p.12.

49. Jacques Derrida, Writing and Difference (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978) p.187.

50. Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis p.210.

The idea of "aphanisis" also explains another Lacanian concept introduced in his essay on Hamlet entitled "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet" in Literature and Psychoanalysis ed. S. Felman (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1982).

In this essay Lacan speaks of the uneasiness of the dead who have not been satisfied in their rite of mourning. This idea of "insufficient mourning" then becomes the portal through which they escape that aphanisis, that fading of the subject from the terrestrial plane:

This explains the belief we find in folklore in the very close association of the lack, skipping or refusal of something in the satisfaction of the dead, with the appearance of ghosts and spectres in the gap left by the omission of the significant rite. p. 39

Clearly Itche-Godl and the widow Finkle, like Hamlet's father, may be said to inhabit the realm of spirits in protest at the meagreness of the rites exercised to mediate their passing. These concepts of insufficient mourning and the unsatisfied dead comprises an important aspect of Singer's fiction where characters seem as incapable of recognising their own deaths as of apprehending the deaths of others. In "The Wager" (FK) and "By the Light of Memorial Candles" (GF), living men masquerade as corpses and the dead awaken, moved to anarchy (if we are to believe Lacan) by the absence of ritual that has failed to mark their passing.

Similarly, in "Hanka" (P) and "Wedding in Brownsville" (SF) victims of the holocaust awaken to walk the streets of New York in protest at their unmarked deaths and the equally unremarked slaughter of their race.

51. Lacan, Scrits p.8.

52. Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis p.218. Anika Lemaire has a similar view of this division in language, describing it in her book Jacques Lacan as a mediation from within:

Mediated by language, the subject is irremediably divided, because he is at once

excluded from the signifying chain and 'represented'
in it . p.68

53. Stuart Schneideman, Returning to Freud (New Haven:
Yale University Press, 1980) p.7.

SECTION THREE

THE POTENT WORD

This section is concerned with the autonomous Word which comes to stand in the place of truth and the flesh in the subject's discourse. According to Lacan, truth is located in language, in a speech that even as it lies yet reveals itself, signalled unerringly in errors, dreams, parapraxis and absurdity. For Lacan, the truth that was elided in the imaginary register of illusory wholeness emerges again with language at the symbolic phase of conditional identity when the subject first pronounces the "I" that is thereafter to inaugurate all credibility, deception and error.

In the preceding section I examined the subject's infant ability to master the words that come to initiate his world. Gimpel and Akhsa succeeded and entered their separate kingdoms gaining possession thereof through artistry and endeavour. The others failed and fell silent, speechless because spoken. There is however, a third condition of sufferance and one that is to be the present subject: the dissolution of a subjective world through the decree of the word which returns in this new figurement to master and subdue. And of what does this world consist but the boundaries of the flesh, the contours of a body particular and politic - the ineffable modality of the subject, "I". There is a subject then, an "I" who does not speak and is not spoken, for there are such, there must be,

for whom no bystander - father, rabbi, sage - takes proxy. And if he will not speak and is not spoken for, what of the words by which his world is won ?

3.1. Transformations

At the bachelor dinner Shloimele spoke brilliantly. First of all he propounded ten questions which seemed to be absolutely basic, and then he answered all ten with a single statement. But after having disposed of these essential questions, he turned around and showed that the questions he had asked were not really questions at all, and the enormous facade of erudition he had erected tumbled to nothing.

"The Destruction of Kreshev" (SMS)

The legend of the golem in the oral mythology of the Kabbalah is peculiarly symbolic of the enormous potency of the Word in the Lacanian ideology. For Lacan, the world of words creates the world of things, in much the same way that the golem caeth (truth) is invoked by pronouncing the miraculous name of God over a lifeless clay image. This repetition of the primal myth of the birth of man (in the beginning was the word/in the word was the beginning) may be inverted, for as Scholem² relates, the first letter of "truth" may be erased so that nothing remains but meth (he is dead), whereupon the mannikin immediately turns back to clay.

This iconic image of the word turned flesh is of great significance to the ensuing tales all of which are constructed at the juncture of transformation. Lemaire speaks of the specific characteristic of language as inhering in the ability to evoke the thing by means of a substitute: "The word is

the presence and the absence of the thing it designates ...³
And in the following we may perceive the stately spectre of the Word, presiding majestically over presence, as over absence. Both "Something is There" and "The Plagiarist" are concerned with the fall from grace of two holy men, learned rabbis who falter in their unconditional acceptance of the Word of God and the Law of their fathers. Language it is held in traditional theology, is a blessing, a transcendent means whereby faith can be creatively enshrined, praise offered, and prayer contained. Language in these two stories however, constitutes a curse, a tenet of disbelief, a signifier of loss. In the first story, the devil, supreme exponent of the Word, tempts Rabbi Nechemia to leave his community and enter the Warsaw world of sensual chaos and the entropy of disbelief, where he is divided by the effects of a discourse at once secular and profane. Here he finally comes to experience the reinvention of the renounced and absent object, as a holy relic of worship.

In the next tale, Reb Kasriel similarly seduced, moves from a celebration of the word as blessing, through the silence of faithless men, to the manipulation of the word as curse; a process which fragments his aged flesh unto exile and death.

These narratives illustrate for us the physical effects of disobedience and transgression converging as they do at the fulcrum of the Word, by imprinting thus upon the suppliant flesh, the pernicious marks of sin and hereticism.⁴

3.1.1. "Something is There" (FK)

Language is seen as the scene of the whole, the way to infinity; he who knows not language serves idols, he who could see his language would see his god.

Philippe Sollers

Lokiques

"Something is There" is a tale of faith and dissent and the transfiguration of the flesh through the intervention of the word. The Rabbi of Bechev is the receptacle of the Word in this narrative, the fleshly tabernacle of the Law as it were. The story begins with the tear, with the rending of the flesh, as the good Rabbi succumbs to the voice of the devil and is persuaded to throw off the mantle of the law and practice heresy in Warsaw. His descent into this Polish purgatory presages an eventual re-definition of his faith and a final return to the deity-centred universe of his fathers, a movement which is accompanied by the grinding jars of advanced age.

Rabbi Nechemia, assaulted by the savagery of the spoken word:

"His (the devil's) insolence grew. He screamed from morning till night" (FK257), impaled by the impotence of the written word:

"There was no answer to be found, neither in the Pentateuch, in the books of the Prophets, in the Talmud, in the Zohar, nor in the Trees of Life" (FK259), gives way to despair and a philosophy of random cause and accidental effect:

There is neither a judge nor a judgment. All creation is a blind accident - an inkwell fell on a sheet of paper and the ink wrote a letter by itself, each word a lie, the sentences chaos. FK259

This linguistic metaphor is the perfect vehicle for nihilism insofar as the letter, hitherto the supreme mediator of significance, is rendered cipher, in an arabesque of the word that simultaneously defaces and inscribes, that which Derrida has called the trace, and Ricoeur, the empty sign:

First, man's adoption of language is in a general way a making of himself absent to things by intending them with 'empty' intentions, and, correlatively, of making things present through the very emptiness of signs.⁶

The very title of the short story in its imprecise evocation of an amorphous existent bears witness to the slow draining away of purpose apparent in the linguistic trope which is constructed between "nothing exists" and "something is there". The opening pages present a symbolic battle of the word, between the demonic voices of dissent and the strident law of the Hebraic God. The order of the latter deity is entirely vanquished in the eyes of Rabbi Nechemia when the clamour of worldly suffering and sorrow ("A cry rose from the earth - a lament of men, women, serpents, demons" FK260), is prostrated before the sceptre of the law, itself flaccid and detumescent: "The rabbi tried to blow the ram's horn to excommunicate him, but instead of a blast the sound was a wheeze that might have come from a deflated lung" (FK260). At this point in the narrative, the rabbi foregoes speech for mimicry, as like a wooden dummy with detachable mouth-parts he begins to speak in the voice of the Other. He is first "astounded" (FK262) and then "baffled" (FK263) by his own words, while "a voice inside him" (FK268) taunts and tempts him with the wages of heresy. Indeed, as the narrator remarks, he is entirely

appropriated by the speech of the Other: "...the rabbi was no longer the same man. He felt that he was possessed by a demon who thought and chattered in its own peculiar manner" (PK263). Lacan, with consummate skill and characteristic aplomb has explicated this phenomenon of bodily possession in linguistic terms that take cognizance of the effects of a fragmentary discourse, as it impresses itself like a wax mould upon the psyche of the subject:

What Lacan, following the traces of the Freudian *oxymoron* I am telling you is that the subject as such is uncertain because he is divided by the effects of language. Through the effects of speech, the subject always realises himself more in the Other, but he is already pursuing there more than half of himself. He will simply find his desire ever more divided, pulverised, in the circumscribable metonymy of speech. 6

Rabbi Nechemia leaves his village shtetl to voyage forth into the ghettos and gutters of Warsaw, penetrating a milieu that is described as "a living grave, the gates to Gehenna" (PK273). It is here that he first comes across the heretical text, How the Universe Came into Being, and he pursues this elusive volume for much of the ensuing tale, eventually finding it once more, on the shelves of Bresler's library. His is the search for knowledge located within a mystical ideology where faith alone may intercede between language and silence.⁷ Jacques-Alain Miller, in a clinical report on psychosis, has aligned what purports to be an intellectual pursuit towards knowledge, with the persecution felt by the paranoid in a slowly contracting world: "What persecutes him if not a knowledge that ambles around the world, a knowledge that becomes a world?"⁸ The elusiveness of this quarry, knowledge, centres upon the disappearance from the

scopic field of a knowable God, and replaces Him with a hidden deity, one who is only able to reveal himself within the substance of the Word: "I had not thought to see thy face" (FK268), quotes Simcha David, and his words do not apply to the fraternal visage alone. The rabbi of Bechev, wounded by this denial of the gaze first threatens his deity with reciprocal invisibility: "'So be it. You conceal your face and I will conceal mine'" (FK280) and then, like Adam, flees the omniscient scourge of the glance: "'Whereto shall I flee thy countenance?'" (FK274).

Rabbi Nechemia, he who had once composed the receptacle of the sacred Word, he who had voyaged into the depths of the abyss in pursuit of the heretical texts of Warsaw, now renounces a partisanship with language insofar as it emphatically withholds access to all forms of knowledge, both scopic and invocatory, and like Hindele in "Black Wedding", undergoes a holy rite of silence:

'I will not recite my confession. I'm ready for all your Gehenna's. If you can be silent for an eternity, I at least will remain dumb until I give up my soul.' FK280

The rabbi's affirmed dictum that, "to a silent torturer one does not speak, and to a persecutor one does not pray" (FK261), is less a tenet of moral and ethical rigour than it is a strategy of expedient discourse, a statement of political intention to the ends of economic barter. Of course, the Hebraic structures of prohibition and punishment are never entirely discarded, so that the rabbi is threatened with an extinction that proliferates at the very source of his transgression: "You will collapse and they won't even know what to write on your headstone" (FK280), warns

the coal-dealer. He who refuses the spoken word in life, will assuredly be denied the blessing of the written word in death. Like Itche-Godl, the wandering corpse, Rabbi Nechemia is here confronted with the nomadic fate of the undead and the anonymous plight of the unmourned.

The rabbi who had rejected the substance of his own faith to seek out the nihilistic vision of the heretics, now witnesses in Warsaw the truth of the scientific principle that nature abhors a vacuum, for no sooner is one faith razed but another hastens to replace it:

It seemed that the world was full of faith. If you didn't believe in one God, you must believe in another ... But where were the real heretics, those who believed in nothing? He had not come to Warsaw to barter one faith for another. PK269

In the juncture of the Word, at the moment when "nothing" becomes "something", Rabbi Nechemia recognises that the signifiers of worship, the indomitable centre eternally proclaiming "I am that I am", can never be entirely vanquished by disbelief, for it is a property that re-invents itself most vigorously at the very moment of its fading:

'There are no heretics.'

Is that so?

'The whole world worships idols', the rabbi muttered,

'They invent gods and they serve them.' PK282

Like the heretic Benedict de Spinoza who renounced his faith only to propound a new logic of mysticism in the Ethica.¹⁰

Rabbi Nechemia of Bechev is forced to acknowledge the authenticity of a monotheistic signifier, if not the multiple accoutrements of its signifieds. For if God does not exist, we

must invent Him, and reinvent Him at each new motion of blasphemy. His final statement of faith, "something is there", in its austerity and assurance, rivals that of the philosopher himself. And who better than a renegade Jew, asks Lacan, to proclaim the sanctity of an unholy faith:

What, quite wrongly, has been thought of in Spinoza as pantheism is simply the reduction of the field of God to the universality of the signifier, which produces a serene, exceptional detachment from human desire... and it is no accident that it is a Jew detached from his tradition who embodies it11

3.1.2. "The Plagiarist" (S)

It may be that the whole universe is one big contradiction. God contradicted Himself, and from this the world evolved.

"Her Son" (CF)

In essence a word is after all the mimetic residue of a word that has been heard.

"The Ego and the Id"
Sigmund Freud.

This tale is about the appropriation of the written word and the division consonant with unlawful possession of the language of another. There are two plagiarists in this narrative, Shabsai Getsel and Reb Kasriel. The first is a disciple of the second and it is Shabsai Getsel who is the explicit plagiarist of the title for he appropriates the words of his master even as he plots to replace the Rabbi's son as assistant rabbi, itself an act of plagiarism. More subtly however, Reb Kasriel too is a

plagiarist as are all worshippers, indeed all speakers. For if a word is only the "mimetic residue" of a word once heard then all speech is mimicry and all language imitation. Prayer especially must ever be mimicry, formulated as it is through endless reiteration and constant exegesis. So it is Reb Kasriel, he who presides over all worship in the village of Machlev who is the supreme plagiarist of the tale and it is upon him that language finally reneges. For when he no longer prays, when he speaks that is for the first time with originality, his words are structured as curse and his wayward disciple falls ill and sickens.

"The Plagiarist" asserts the indestructibility of the Word, taking as its text the following quotation from Ecclesiastes: "And further, by these, my son, be admonished; of making many books there is no end" (397). Reb Kasriel Dan Kinaker learns within the course of the narrative, that the Word once invoked is displaced from one modality to another, from inscription to invocation until it reaches a finality within the planes and volumes of the body, where like shrapnel it explodes in the skin, tearing flesh and fragmenting bone.

Reb Kasriel, the rabbi of Machlev lives amongst a proliferation of unpublished religious texts believing with all humility in the Word of his God and the commentaries of his forefathers. His world it would seem, is sufficient in itself and entirely self-enclosed. This is clearly not the case with his treacherous disciple Shabsai Getsel, who, in the words of Alexandre Kojève is one of those beings "...formed only in terms of a Desire directed

toward another Desire, that is - finally - in terms of a desire for recognition." ¹² Not only does Getsel appropriate the

knowledge of Reb Kasriel ("He's actually copied word for word" S87), but he scorns his daughter and seeks to usurp his son's place in the community as assistant rabbi.

Reb Kasriel believing as he does in the sanctity of the name ("a good name is better than precious ointment" S91), cannot then suffer to see the Holy Name profaned. In refusing the expedient liberality of the word implicit in scandal, he, like Rabbi Mechemia renounces all speech as being an adjunct of the devil - to speak is to fall:

One false move and he would fall into the trap laid for him by Satan. He would sink into hatred, sorrow, fury and who knows what other transgressions. There was only one thing to do: keep his lips sealed and his brain pure. S91

If speech for the rabbi constitutes a bar, a frontier beyond which he cannot venture, then his silence represents what Lacan has called the symptom of "the supposed speaking subject". ¹³

The word is arrested at the moment of its utterance and scalloped, turned back upon itself in furrows. A knot is threaded, a noose formed that in-forms language with all the dread and fatalism of the implicit curse:

Reb Kasriel Dan closed his eyes. The reason for Shabsai Getsel's sickness was clear enough. The rabbi's involuntary curse was to blame... The rabbi noticed that his son was limping. 'What happened to him', Reb Kasriel Dan wondered. 'He doesn't look well, either.' S98

Thus sacred language denied, prayer refused, turns not to silence but to the venom and rancour of the word become curse.

At first, the rabbi believes faithfully in the healing power of

the Law to repair and redress the self-inflicted wounds of disbelief and heresy: "Why do I lie here allowing the evil spirits to tear me to pieces? There's only one remedy - The Torah!" (S97). However, from this point onwards, the rabbi's development is one of progressive fragmentation, beginning with the emasculation of the word and the disintegration of the image. His dreams are of mutilation and disfigurement, "a fire, a funeral, slaughter, all at one and the same time" (S97), and his prayers fall fallow, entirely impotent:

The rabbi lay in bed all night without closing an eye. He recited 'Hear, O Israel' and then pronounced the blessing, 'Causing sleep to descend', after which one is not supposed to utter a word. But sleep would not come. S96

He is brought to the outposts of despair so that when Pessachia bids the rabbi pray for the recovery of Shabsai Getsel, he answers morosely "What value have my prayers?" (S98). Prayer, it would seem has fallen prey to Freud's principle of vicious reciprocity, which states that: "In time the thing which is meant to be warded off invariably finds its way into the very means which is being used for warding it off."¹⁴ And, at least for Reb Kasriel the mental curse, the blight of the mind, is more powerful by far, than the spoken prayer, however sincerely meant:

The rabbi murmured: 'Be healed! In the name of the Torah...' Yet all the time he knew, with a certainty that was beyond his understanding, that Shabsai Getsel would never rise from his sick bed. S99

With the dissolution of the word and the disintegration of the flesh, the rabbi of Machlev, turned plagiarist and abductor of souls at the last, voyages out into the world beyond the village

in self-imposed exile. This is a gesture of penance not only for the blasphemy he commits when he realises that prayer is mimicry and therefore impotent, but for the knowledge of the curse, potent and unique by which his disciple is ravaged. Thus the narrative ends with the one plagiarist dying and the other exiled and bereft, each duly punished for his separate attempt to appropriate the sacred Word which alone remains intact throughout.

3.2. Fragmentations

In his seminar on "The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious", Lacan makes a statement that would stand at the cornerstone of his polemic and which is of great relevance to my own discussion of truth and knowledge. It is nothing other than that which knowledge can apprehend as knowledge only by setting its ignorance to work.¹⁵ It is typical that for Lacan knowledge may only be defined by ignorance, similarly truth is apprehended through falsehood and error.

The last two tales tentatively explored this paradox in their recovery of the words, sacred and secular that attempt to heal the flesh cleft by the subject's insertion into a language at once potent and corpulent. However, the word is seldom univocal, the letter rarely chaste; within the junctures and joins of language, the restlessness of inchoate desire intrudes:

"Impediment, failure, split. In a spoken or written sentence something stumbles."¹⁶

It is precisely this linguistic jar that ruptures (raptures) the flesh, and the following tales represent to a greater or lesser degree the bodily fragmentation which immediately follows in the wake of this human frailty of faith as it is manifested in a disobedience to the strident imperatives of the Word.

3.2.1. "Cockadoodledoo" (S)

If a bird were to paint would it not be by letting fall its feathers, a snake by casting off its scales, a tree by letting fall its leaves? What it amounts to is the first act in the laying down of the gaze.

Jacques Lacan

The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis

"Cockadoodledoo" is a religious allegory of the order of the fable. Like Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale, an anthropomorphised protagonist undertakes a narrative that elucidates the plight of a hitherto silent and unlabeled species. Of course, the tale may be read as a veiled metaphor of the plight of the Jewish nation dispersed in the diaspora and awaiting the invocation of the Word by courtesy of a benign and long-awaited Messiah. More importantly for this study however, "Cockadoodledoo" typifies that moment in the acquisition of language where the word entranced, spins free of its linguistic axis, to affix itself to a more corporeal stratosphere. This insertion of the phoneme within the fissures of the flesh, is classically constructed in a tale whose structures impel the reader toward the startling spectacle of farmyard vernacular turned veined corpulence.

In his preface to The Language of the Self, Anthony Wilden emphatically declares that, "language before signifying ¹⁷ something, signifies for someone" (Wilden's emphasis).

The implication here is that by its very utterance, the experience of language presupposes a process of communication involving as it does, a sender, a receiver and an accessible code. This is very obviously not the case in this tale, for the rooster narrator (the "Narrooster", as it were), makes a strange confession at the beginning of the narrative:

Maybe I'm betraying secrets. But to whom am I talking ?
To deaf ears. Your ancestors were never able to find out
the secret of the cockadoodledoo; it is certain that you
won't either. S79

A reflexive conceit is constructed here whereby the conventions of the tale which predicate the complicity of an audience, intersect with the idiosyncracies of the animal narrator whose peroration insists on the "deafness" of the reader. What occurs at this point is that language severs itself from any connection with dialogue per se, and, in the words of Martin Heidegger, ¹⁸ "speaks solely with itself alone", retaining all the while, as Lacan would have it, its value as "tesserae":

Even if it communicates nothing, the discourse represents the existence of communication; even if it denies the obvious, it affirms that the Word constitutes the Truth; even if it is destined to deceive, here the discourse speculates a faith in testimony. 19

Thus, when the narrator tells us that "the power lies in the crowing, not in the rooster" (S84), there is encapsulated an explicitly Lacanian statement of intent, to the effect that the only determining structure of the signifier is "that it should be

articulated".²⁰

The rooster of Pinchev, descended as he is from royalty on the one side and a spiritual aristocracy on the other, proclaims himself the master of discourse: "I am a great grandson of the rooster who perched on King Solomon's chair and I know languages" (S78). More than Gimpel (I am Gimpel the fool), the rooster proclaims his authenticity in the very dialect that has defined him, in what Steiner has called "identity as a first-person pronoun".²¹ The opening and closing hosannas, "Cockadoodledoo!" are thus grammatical statements of identity and existence, more so because they are articulated at the forefront of encumbent destruction:

...the slaughterer waits, the knife is sharp, everything is prepared: the tub for soaking, the salting board, the gravy bowl, the stewpot, or maybe the roasting oven... Every fowl ends up in the bowl. S79

Moreover, we are told that "Cockadoodledoo" ameliorates all difficulties, soothes all abrasions, resolves all questions and solves all riddles:

The rooster may die but not the cockadoodledoo... What is rooster, then, and what is hen? Nothing more than a resting place for the cockadoodledoo. S79

Once again the assertion constitutes a post-structural affirmation of the autonomy of the Word; that, as Roland Barthes²² has often stated, language speaks and not the author. Furthermore, it establishes the radical supremacy of language over reality, of word over object, and most importantly of signifier over signified.²³

Indeed language in this tale has grown beyond mere autonomy to

articulated".²⁰

The rooster of Pinchev, descended as he is from royalty on the one side and a spiritual aristocracy on the other, proclaims himself the master of discourse: "I am a great grandson of the rooster who perched on King Solomon's chair and I know languages" (S78). More than Gimpel (I am Gimpel the fool), the rooster proclaims his authenticity in the very dialect that has defined him, in what Steiner has called "identity as a first-person pronoun".²¹ The opening and closing hosannas, "Cockadoodledoo!" are thus grammatical statements of identity and existence, more so because they are articulated at the forefront of encumbent destruction:

...the slaughterer waits, the knife is sharp, everything is prepared: the tub for soaking, the salting board, the gravy bowl, the stewpot, or maybe the roasting oven... Every fowl ends up in the bowl. S79

Moreover, we are told that "Cockadoodledoo" ameliorates all difficulties, soothes all abrasions, resolves all questions and solves all riddles:

The rooster may die but not the cockadoodledoo...
What is rooster, then, and what is hen? Nothing more than a resting place for the cockadoodledoo. S79

Once again the assertion constitutes a post-structural affirmation of the autonomy of the Word; that, as Roland Barthes²² has often stated, language speaks and not the author.

Furthermore, it establishes the radical supremacy of language over reality, of word over object, and most importantly of signifier over signified.²³

Indeed language in this tale has grown beyond mere autonomy to

reach the exalted status of autocracy. No longer content simply to sever itself from the plastic object, the word here invokes a corporeal world of names and letters, as the rooster admonishes:

You people pore over the Cabala and rack your brains. But for us the Cabala is in the marrow of our bones. What is cockadoodledoo? A magic name. S79

Cockadoodledoo in this sense is transfigured as one of the ten Sefirot which Bloom tells us together make up the monolithic and unutterable Name of God, and which once invoked, composes a "perpetually renewable act of creation".²⁴

Like the four tales in section one, "Cockadoodledoo" is intensely concerned with the truth of the Word, and with similar promptitude locates the concept of univocality well within the boundaries of the spoken word: "You talk too much, you drown in your own words. All truth lies hidden in one word:cockadoodledoo" (S78). Many theorists, following Derrida, have intuited this connection between speech and clarity, and as Barthes has indicated, such correlations staunchly align themselves with the Law: "The spoken word is 'clear'; the banishment of polysemy serves the Law - all speech is on the side of the Law"²⁵ (Barthes' emphasis).

A rather more esoteric connection is made in the tale between the verisimilitude of the spoken word and the truth of its reply. Lacan in his notorious tractate, the "Discours de Rome", constantly emphasises the central tenet, that, "the Word always subjectively includes its own reply"²⁶

This insight is essential to an understanding of the rooster's miracle, his aural epiphany of question and answer:

It seemed as if the world had asked the ultimate question and was waiting for an answer: yes or no, one way or another. Things cannot go on like this. If a clear answer does not come, creation will return to primeval chaos. S84

The answer that rings through the night and which is interpreted by the narrator as the divine crowing of a celestial form, is nothing other than this Lacanian Word impelled by its own resonance to elicit a reply from the very atmosphere: "It sang like a fiddle, rang like a bell, resounded like a ram's horn. It sang and didn't stop singing" (S84). In ecstasy the rooster exclaims, "A new voice, a new word" (S84) and thenceforth deems it a privilege to "spread the word" (S86) so that all may bear witness to the testimony of the Rooster on High - exalted be his name. Thus, the Word, stripped and autonomous, is multiplied infinitely through time and space, firstly as it gives rise to a question, secondly as it elicits an answer, and finally, as it is retold both orally by the rooster and textually by the author.

As has been observed in the previous tales, it is only after the moment of the tear, that juncture of castration when the bar is finally lowered, that the subject may enter the symbolic stage. After the first crowing of the celestial fowl, our rooster begins to doubt his own existence: "Perhaps I myself was already slaughtered and the voice I heard was only the dream of a chopped-off head?" (S85). This dream of castration constitutes the juncture of the slash, the ineluctable praxis of the gash. The euphonic cock-a doodle-doo signifies the moment at which the veiled phallus is revealed within the text, the instant before it topples and falls across the subject thus barring his access to

the modality of speech: "Everything I know I learned that night. I can't reveal the secrets - my tongue is tied - ..." (S85)

What the rooster learns is that all is "cock" and thus severed, separated and bloodied: "Everything is cockadoodledoo: butcher and fowl; knife and throat; feathers and plucker; the blood in the veins and the blood in the ditch" (S85).

Of all the farmyard fowls, our rooster is the only one to hear and acknowledge the call: "What will chickens not do to avoid the truth? They fear the truth more than the knife, and this is in itself a mystery" (S86). He who has faith, the text reads, will live to witness the mighty transfigurations which herald the long-awaited coming of the messiah; the transformation of water into wine, of corpse into cock, and of word into flesh:

Happy is he who believes. A time will come when all will see and hear, and the cockadoodledoo of the Rooster on High will ring throughout heaven and earth.
Cockadoodledoo! S86

3.2.2. "A Pair" (P)

It is what one invents that matters. Even a lie must have some truth in it.

"Joy" (GF)

This narrative of fragmented language, psychosis and lies, establishes a teleological alignment between the transgressions of the Law and the dispersal of the self manifested both in speech and in the ligaments of the written word. "A Pair" is the tale of two pathological liars and the schizophrenic nature of

the modality of speech: "Everything I know I learned that night. I can't reveal the secrets - my tongue is tied - ..." (S85)

What the rooster learns is that all is "cock" and thus severed, separated and bloodied: "Everything is cockadoodledoo: butcher and fowl; knife and throat; feathers and plucker; the blood in the veins and the blood in the ditch" (S85).

Of all the farmyard fowls, our rooster is the only one to hear and acknowledge the call: "What will chickens not do to avoid the truth? They fear the truth more than the knife, and this is in itself a mystery" (S86). He who has faith, the text reads, will live to witness the mighty transfigurations which herald the long-awaited coming of the messiah; the transformation of water into wine, of corpse into cock, and of word into flesh:

Happy is he who believes. A time will come when all will see and hear, and the cockadoodledoo of the Rooster on High will ring throughout heaven and earth.
Cockadoodledoo: S86

3.2.2. "A Pair" (P)

It is what one invents that matters. Even a lie must have some truth in it.

"Joy" (GF)

This narrative of fragmented language, psychosisia and lies, establishes a teleological alignment between the transgressions of the Law and the dispersal of the self manifested both in speech and in the ligaments of the written word. "A Pair" is the tale of two pathological liars and the schizophrenic nature of

the modality of speech: "Everything I know I learned that night. I can't reveal the secrets - my tongue is tied - ..." (S85)

What the rooster learns is that all is "cock" and thus severed, separated and bloodied: "Everything is cockadoodledoo: butcher and fowl; knife and throat; feathers and plucker; the blood in the veins and the blood in the ditch" (S85).

Of all the farmyard fowls, our rooster is the only one to hear and acknowledge the call: "What will chickens not do to avoid the truth? They fear the truth more than the knife, and this is in itself a mystery" (S86). He who has faith, the text reads, will live to witness the mighty transfigurations which herald the long-awaited coming of the messiah; the transformation of water into wine, of corpse into cock, and of word into flesh:

Happy is he who believes. A time will come when all will see and hear, and the cockadoodledoo of the Rooster on High will ring throughout heaven and earth.
Cockadoodledoo! S86

3.2.2. "A Pair" (P)

It is what one invents that matters. Even a lie must have some truth in it.

"Joy" (GP)

This narrative of fragmented language, psychosis and lies, establishes a teleological alignment between the transgressions of the Law and the dispersal of the self manifested both in speech and in the ligaments of the written word. "A Pair" is the tale of two pathological liars and the schizophrenic nature of

their discourse, of burnt manuscripts, poems that may not be written and books that cannot be published, and of the splitting that necessarily follows a failure of the Word, once revered, now reviled.

The fiction ostensibly introduces to the reader a pair of liars, a phrase signifying duality and separation, but the peculiarly meshed nature of Getzele and Karola's intercourse would seem to imply something rather more in the nature of violent

fusion. Twisted, dicotyledonous, Getzele's mistress first introduces herself as, "'Karola Lipinska Kohen, Getzele Tertziver's shadow, victim and alter ego '" (P184).

Getzele Tertziver (the internal rhyme of the name, mimes duality), the poet, is constructed about the axis of a division so violent that even his gaze obeys the prerogatives of the split: ²⁷ "He had ...large, black, wandering eyes - the right one looked up, the left one down" (P178). Constantly avoiding confrontation ("Ask me no questions, I'll tell you no lies" P180), he moves fluently between boundaries, inserting himself blithely within the furrows and folds of a nomadic existence:

... Getzele would disappear for months. People began to say that he had died, then he would emerge again. They asked him where he'd been and he answered, 'Who knows?' P181

Combining as he does the physical likeness of his grandfather: "Old Hassidim who remembered Rabbi Alterel when he was young swore that Getzele resembled him like two drops of water - the same face, the same way of walking, the same mannerisms" (P178),

with the actions and misdeeds of his father: "Jonah Jerucham would disappear for months, and no-one knew what had happened to him" (P179), Getzele comes to locate the third place in a triadic circuit that has evidently outlasted its impetus. Dr. Baskind the psychiatrist for one, testifies to this dissipated, fin-de-siecle quality apparent in the poet's heredity: "The old Tertziwer rabbi himself was not normal. A deranged dynasty. I was told that he ate on Tishah-b'Ab and fasted on Purim" (P290).

The tale is in many ways an allegory of genocide, for it tells of a people who have experienced the rending of the flesh and who can no longer hear the ringing of the Word. Moreover a history has been unwritten, a race in part erased, so that Getzele Tertziwer, the poet of genocide writes only of the dead in language marked by psychosis and repression. In his perceptive essay "The Language Animal", George Steiner examines the failure of language in its relation to societal entropy and concludes:

... where definitions break down, where syntax dissolves, the old chaos returns, either in the pathology of an individual or in the collapse of a society, 28

This is precisely what occurs in the narrative, for Karola speaks of her poems as dead bodies, flesh unredeemed by translation and universal acknowledgement: "I write in Polish, this is my misfortune. My poems lie dead in Poland, together with the Jews" (P187). Getzele Tertziwer, another victim of the German scourge, a refugee from the Polish death camps ("You considered me dead, ha ? I have risen from the grave" P182), can conceive no longer of a literature of order and form: "'For whom are you scribbling - for Hitler ?'" (P181).

It is a common tenet of post-structural theory that words
represent the repressed,²⁹ and as such, reflexively mirror the
structures of the individual's particular malaise. The melody, as
Forrester would have it, speaks:

Between the dialectical freedom of speech and the analytic
fixity of neurcals, a third and intermediate sort of
language emerges: a speech that is structured in the same
manner as the neurosis. 30

Getzele's speech is fragmented and dispersed, the syntax faulty,
the idiom unwieldy and inaccessible, the style convoluted and
tortuous:

His speech was disjointed; he swallowed words and mixed
up dates. The Litvaks could not understand his gibberish
at all. He made jokes that had to do with the Warsaw
Writer's Club and the Tertziver Hassidim, and he used
idioms recently coined by Polish refugees. He mentioned
names I had long forgotten. P182

Furthermore, his hand-writing was such that, as the narrator
tells us, only one type-setter in the entire city of Warsaw could
scripber it. Later on when he presents his poems to the
journalists in America, they are described as, "dirty pieces
of paper, scribbled and scrawled, with ink spots and erasures. On
the margins he had doodled snakes, and horned fishes" (P182). It
would seem that Getzele Tertziver, one time author of The World
History of my Future, he who "could not make himself
understood either in his writing or in his speech" (P178), has
achieved that pinnacle of post-modernist artistic development,
what Harold Bloom has called the breaking apart of form.³¹
This penchant for obfuscation is no less discernible in his
passion for the written word. He believes by virtue of an
ecstatic vision, that all the mystery and knowledge of the world

is hidden in a secret code within the text of the first chapter of Genesis, and with all the fervour of a latter day deconstructionalist, proceeds to enumerate his fascination for the serrations and corrugations of the hidden word, uncovered through diligence and unceasing exegesis:

Every word has to be read backwards. One has to watch the small numbers and the big numbers - mispar koton and mispar gadol - and especially the cryptic musical symbols. P183

Karola's language similarly mirrors the structure of her depravities, being alternately lucid and entirely contradictory: "This is him! Exactly as I imagined but a little different. Actually completely different!" (P184). Indeed, the narrative text-ure consists of nothing more than a slow unravelling of orchestrated mistruths and car(d)inal errors centred largely on the legendary bestiality and tumescence of Getzele Tertaiver. Thus, the phallus (tail) uncovered at the climax of the tale, shrinks inwards to fade away entirely with the fixing of the gaze so that all we are left with is an empty space, a vacuum, nature abhorring which, it is immediately filled with the effervescence of words and gossip ... ³² (tell-tail).

Both Sartre and Lacan perceive of lies and untruths as structures designed to liaise between the self and the other. The former, following Heidegger, has described the lie as a "mit-sein", a "being-with" others in the world: "It presupposes my existence, the existence of the Other, my existence for the Other, and the existence of the Other for me" (Sartre's emphasis). ³³

As we have seen Lacan from a very different linguistic base

also invokes "truth" as the necessary companion to speech: "Truth is based only on the fact that speech, even when it consists of lies, appeals to it and gives rise to it." ³⁴

What this tale indicates however, is that truth, lies, silence, speech, all the broken shards and slivers of a life lived beyond the boundaries of the Law, serve only the ends of dispersal; to tear the flesh and fragment the soul. Karola Lipinska Kohen, her poems forever silent, as they lie interred like dead children in the unmarked graves of a ravaged land; she, poor mother, can no longer mourn her own flesh and blood except in the narcissistic reservoir of a life lived out beyond the auspices of any but the most masturbatory of muses:

"I myself have stopped writing. I lie in bed at night and speak my poems to the ceiling...since sex is only for two - and sometimes even for one - why must poetry be for many? I am my own bard. Sometimes when I used to lie with Getzele in bed, we held a poetic duet. Well, but two can also be too many. L'chayim." P187

"To life" indeed, if by this the poetess means the prolongation of a flabby existence in a world devoid of any but the most wordless and fleshless of pleasures. And what of the gargantuan, Getzele Tertziwer, sexual giant extraordinaire? He too suffers this failure of the word, this flaccidity of the flesh with a vengeance, and in a finale that is pure farce, as the funeral cortege passes through the ribald and colourful waltz of an Italian wedding, Dr. Baskind, therapist and final expurgator, turns to the narrator and says:

"Getzele suffered from impotence for many years. He admitted it himself...it seems there is no remedy for this, even in the Book of Genesis." P191

In "Cockadoodledoo" and "A Pair", the potency of the Word as a secular artifact is demonstrated. Whereas the previous two tales bespoke a reliance upon the structures of religious faith and doctrinal belief, these two fictions are concerned with a rather more worldly expression of the transformations of word into flesh.

"Cockadoodledoo" it is true has certain sacred resonances, but the worldly narrator of the tale, the rooster of Pinchev is essentially a profane figure who, unlike the faltering rabbi of Bechev and the fallen rabbi of Machlev, never seriously doubts and therefore undergoes no sacred stigmata of the Word. Instead, he joyously proclaims his faith throughout the tale, blithely invoking in the volumes of the flesh his robust and vigorous perception of the Word, "Cockadoodledoo!"

The might and power of language is garishly illustrated in the psychotic milieu of "A Pair" where words divide and speech separates the anguished inhabitants of a fallen, smoking world. Here the victorious and healing cry of the rooster is replaced by the jagged poems and splintered fragments of a literature of despair constructed bleakly in a post-holocaust discourse. Yet both tales testify to the autonomous strength of the Word even as it is deflected from its holy, doctrinal source.

3.3. Dismemberment

Whereas the preceding chronicles in this section have explored the psychical diseases that proliferate with the insertion of

the forbidden word, the following two tales, "The Blasphemer" and "The Nan who came Back" demonstrate the tangible results of faithlessness with a violence of effect that is akin to dismemberment. The concept of bodily fragmentation is particularly significant here, and I wish to introduce at this point the structural terms used by Jan Kott in his enthralling book The Eating of the Gods.³⁵ Omaphagia is the rending of the body, a ceremonial laceration of the limbs, a quartering of the flesh that presages communal disintegration and the chaos of transgression in the context of Greek tragedy. Sparagmos is the ritual consumption of the sundered flesh, a slow, stately gathering of amputated fragments and spilt blood, and the sacred ingestion thereof in an alimentary gesture that reinstates cosmic harmony through the symbolism of bodily integration. Both tales are constructed along an axis of opposition, where the order and harmony of a centred hierarchical universe intersects with the pandemonium of divergence and the anarchy of cannibalism.

The second commandment "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," prohibits blasphemy. He who reviles his God, profanes thus all of mankind and blasts his own black soul. The transgression of blasphemy is a sin against the Word and it is little wonder then that Chazkele Eastard, the blasphemer of the title is riven by ever-deepening ruptures of the flesh, the symbolic running sores that fester and supurate until all is dispersed and fragmented, all is flayed flesh and wrenched limbs.

"The Man who came Back" is likewise a tale of transgression and fragmentation, the misuse of the Word and the retributive stripping of the flesh. Language is all powerful we are warned in these fictions, for what may heal and absolve when spoken as blessing may equally well cleave and sunder when blighted as curse.

3.3.1. "The Blasphemer" (FK)

Our father, Reb Moshe the scribe, as he was called, was a saintly Jew. His father, Reb Yaruslan - also a scribe - was of such piety that before he transcribed a holy name he went to the ritual bath.

"The Secret" (I)

In "The Blasphemer" the central protagonist denies the Word of God, and as a result his world is fractured, his language cloven and his flesh cauterised (his flesh-and-blood, his only begotten son is literally and forcefully circumcised) as cosmos turns to chaos once again.

The first words of the fiction alert us to the narrator's pre-occupation with obedience to the Law of the Fathers and duty to the Word of God: "Faithlessness can also lead to insanity" (FK201).

But faith to Chaskels of Malopol, displaced person of the ghettos and gehennas of Warsaw, city of "soul-catchers" (FK206) and "flesh dealers" (FK208); seeker after truth ("I don't give a damn. I want the truth" FK203), and reviler of heresies both

sacred and secular, is only another, if more pernicious, snare. He is cursed by his mother when still enwombed: "She began to curse her infants when they were still in her belly. When the baby kicked her, Tsloveh would scream, 'May you not live to see the light'".³⁶ Later he is blighted by his father who for no apparent reason names his son Chazkele Bastard, and maligned by his sisters en-masse ("Whoever made up his bed would say to him, 'Go to sleep and don't wake up'" FK202), the boy learns quickly of the carcinogenic potential of the Word.

Lacan, following Freud in The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis has perceived that, "...nothing can be grasped, destroyed, or burnt, except in a symbolic way, as one says, in effigie, in absentia" (Lacan's emphasis)³⁷ Chazkele, following his esteemed and scrofulous parents, sets about annihilating the deity by proxy, destroying Holy Texts ("When something in a book didn't please him, he erased the words with a pencil or he tore out a page" FK204), desecrating the Torah with horse-dung, and profaning the Law by maliciously adorning a goat with the Holy Name:

Before he left, Chazkele fastened the head phylactery between the goat's horns, and the arm phylactery he bound to one of its legs. He even formed the letter 'shin' - the initial of the holy name Shodai - with the phylactery straps. FK206

Chazkele Bastard, blasphemer and scourge of the innocent ("He spoke such words that the rabbi's wife had to stop her ears" FK205), derides not only the spiritual configurations of his God but all who speak in His name. His is the momentous act of

blasphemy which simultaneously invokes the presence of the holy name whilst yet denying its validity, a profane impasse that Foucault has paradoxically named an "act of faith":

What is this act ? An act of faith, an act of affirmation and of negation - a discourse which sustains and at the same time erodes the image, undermines it, distends it in the course of a reasoning, and organises it around a segment of language. 38

In retaliation for his wrongs ³⁹ Chazkele suffers a series of escalating ruptures and perforations of the flesh that would seem to reflect back upon the cloven surfaces of his world, a dimly recognised moment of primal cleavage and inner dislocation, a phenomenon that Lacan in Scritta has called the imagos of aggressive intentions:

These are the images of castration, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body, in short, the images that I have grouped together under the apparently structural term of images of the fragmented body (Lacan's emphasis). 40

In effect, Chazkele is continually abused by his parents and the community at large. Tsloveh used to pinch him, "a long drawn-out, thin pinch that makes you see stars" (FK202), while Bendit the coachman thought nothing of whipping the boy into unconscious submission: "That feast day, even though it was forbidden, Bendit beat Chazkele with a heavy stick for such a long time that Chazkele lost consciousness" (FK204). In Malopol he taunts a gang of gentile boys into giving him a "good thrashing" (FK203) and even Reb Shimon and his sons are provoked into violence on the feast of Sukkoth: "He went home dripping with blood" (FK204). Indeed, the entire village sets upon him after one particularly

blasphemy which simultaneously invokes the presence of the holy name whilst yet denying its validity, a profane impasse that Foucault has paradoxically named an "act of faith":

What is this act? An act of faith, an act of affirmation and of negation - a discourse which sustains and at the same time erodes the image, undermines it, distends it in the course of a reasoning, and organises it around a segment of language. 38

39 In retaliation for his wrongs Chazkele suffers a series of escalating ruptures and perforations of the flesh that would seem to reflect back upon the cloven surfaces of his world, a dimly recognised moment of primal cleavage and inner dislocation, a phenomenon that Lacan in Écrits has called the imagos of aggressive intentions:

These are the images of castration, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body. In short, the images that I have grouped together under the apparently structural term of images of the fragmented body (Lacan's emphasis). 40

In effect, Chazkele is continually abused by his parents and the community at large. Tsloveh used to pinch him, "a long drawn-out, thin pinch that makes you see stars" (FK202), while Bendit the coachman thought nothing of whipping the boy into unconscious submission: "That feast day, even though it was forbidden, Bendit beat Chazkele with a heavy stick for such a long time that Chazkele lost consciousness" (FK204). In Malopol he taunts a gang of gentile boys into giving him a "good thrashing" (FK203) and even Reb Shimon and his sons are provoked into violence on the feast of Sukkoth: "He went home dripping with blood" (FK204). Indeed, the entire village sets upon him after one particularly

heinous deed, and he is similarly chastised by a Warsaw crowd:

"They punched him in the nose and he fought back. No matter how strong he was, they were stronger" (FK207). And, as the narrator ruefully informs us, his demeanour was such that, "not a day passed without his being slapped" (FK211).

All around this dissenter, this heretic in the midst of Jews, is fragmentation. In one cumulative scene, Chazkele's first-born son is forcibly circumcised, the cut is riven to the sounds of falling glass and flaying curses:

His window panes were smashed. On the eighth day, a quorum of porters and butchers stormed in, together with a mohel, and they circumcised the baby. Two men seized and held Chazkele. A father has to recite the benedictions. Nothing could force Chazkele to say the holy words. Basha lay in bed behind the screen and poured out deadly curses on him. FK210

Chazkele who has lived a faithless life, wishes at his end for a death of mutilation and mayhem: "Before his death, he asked that he be cut to pieces and thrown to the dogs" (FK211). But the God whom Isaac has called "unconscious"⁴¹ is at the last ironically disregarding. For Chazkele Bastard heretic and blasphemer is given a pious burial, as dressed in shrouds and prayer shawl, interred in the hallowed ground of a suburban cemetery, blessed with the Kaddish of his eldest son; he ascends toward the Godhead, to recount to Him his deeds. A true punishment for the reprobate indeed.

3.3.2. "The Man Who Came Back" (SMS)

Being analytical, language can come to grips with the body only if it cuts it up; the total body is outside language, only pieces of the body succeed to writing; in order to make a body mean, it must either be displaced, refracted through the anonymity of clothing, or reduced to one of its parts...

Roland Barthes

Sade Tourist Lovels

No-one is subject to penalty for words uttered in agony.

"Grandfather and Grandson" (CF)

John Irwin in his remarkable study of Faulkner's novels Doubling and Incest, points out that narration is a compulsive and obsessive act.⁴² This is certainly true of the narrative in "The Man Who Came Back," a tale which deals with the dark underside of the human soul and which is narrated by a woman, Aunt Yentl who, at each point in the story, registers her astonishment ("You may not believe it but there are people in the world who were called back. I myself knew such a one " SMS110). She performs complicated rites of exorcism ("God forbid it should happen to any of us" SMS110), and provides idiosyncratic commentary on the characters involved ("I beg her pardon, but she was a cow" SMS115). Narration it would seem, constitutes in Aunt Yentl's case, a sinuous and reflexive web of the word whereby characters, events, and internal structures are subtly framed by a self-conscious interlocutor.

Shifra Leah by dint of her passion is able to waylay death and

restore to life her corpulent mate through the potency of her desires given screeching utterance in the invocation of the name:

God help us, her screaming and wailing could be heard at the edge of town. 'Beasts, murderers, thugs! Out of my house! He'll live! He'll live!' SMS111

And her sleek and lubricious husband, smothered to death by the fat around his heart disregards the insistence of the flesh to obey with vigour the urgency of the Word. The tale proceeds from this point onwards to morally enumerate to its assumed audience of clucking, old women, the slow unthreading of a life rent and sundered by the daring misuse of prohibitive acts of speech: "Oh, it's forbidden. When the time comes for a man to die, he should die" (SMS112). Alter resurrected, adulterer and thief, similarly defiles the letter of the law (and what better metaphor to describe the triadic tenets of excommunication), gratuitously bringing upon himself the retributive and reactive justice of communal ire:

The rabbi sent the sexton to summon Alter to him, but Alter refused to come. Then the community threatened him with the three letters of excommunication. It didn't help, he had connections with the authorities and defied one and all. SMS116

Susan Sontag in *Illness as Metaphor* has ably defined the significance of disease within a moral allegory: "Disease is the will speaking through the body, a language for dramatising the mental; a form of self-expression."⁴³ In this tale of bruised pulp and gangrenous flesh, bodies putrify even as they move, and the narrator tells us with scrofulous glee of the Lublin men who crumbled to chalk:

When he died at last, all that was left of him was a sack of bones. He had been rotting all those years and his flesh had turned to dust. Not much was left to bury. SMS112

Alter, (the old one) rent and quartered on the Cossack's spears ("The Cossacks slashed and hacked at him till there was no more blood left in his veins" SMS120), suffers a death of ritual omophagia, as body turns to corpse and flesh stripped and flayed becomes decomposing pulp:

I didn't see him dead. But those who did swore that he looked like an old corpse that had been dug up from the grave. Pleasurs were dropping from his body. The face could not be recognised, it was a shapeless pulp. It was said that when he was being cleansed for burial, an arm came off, and then a foot; I wasn't there, but why should people lie. Men who are called back rot while they are alive. SMS120

Divided in life, fragmented in death, a pestilence within whose wake an epidemic spreads, Alter, the man who was called back by the power of the word, disintegrates into a liquefaction of livid flesh by virtue of a greater and more potent Word; the monumental, disembodied commandments of the Law: "Alter might scoff at Jewishness, but the law remained" (SMS119). Amen. Selah.

3.4. The Imperatives of the Word

There proceeds from this autonomy of the word, the sequestered power of language to maim and ravage, reneging violently upon the flesh once honoured. As we have seen there are three incarnations in the process by which language becomes potent, gaining ascendancy at last over the stations of the body.

The first phase concerns the displacement of the sacred word to the secular text and there again to the profane writs of hereticism. The symbolic dimension, the register of language and the law is the traditional place of higher religious authority so that the subjects most vulnerable to the effects of dispersal in language are religious subjects, holy men who spurn the body for the law, ascetics who tear their clothes and shred their flesh.

Both "Something is There" and "The Plagiarist" present us with holy men, rabbis who undergo progressive degeneration - of the word and of the flesh - as blessing turns to curse and body to corpse. In the former tale, the Rabbi of Bechev rejects the Word of God and the Law of his Fathers and replaces these holy relics with other writings, the secular texts of hereticism wherein one Daitly replaces all others by means of a decoy staged here as idolatry. Once again the word proves indestructible, for it cannot be entirely erased but is simply displaced from sacred letter to secular text. In "The Plagiarist" the profane writings of a disciple mimic his teacher's piety, making of grace, a blasphemy. And the rabbis of both tales wasted by language, dislodged by the letter, relapse at the last into silence and exile.

The second manifestation of the potency of language occurs when the exalted word comes to stand in the place of the body. Whereas in the first phase, word displaced word, here language comes to replace the body given over to writing, debilitated by words lost, won, squandered, sacrificed and hoarded. Here the

The first phase concerns the displacement of the sacred word to the secular text and there again to the profane writs of hereticism. The symbolic dimension, the register of language and the law is the traditional place of higher religious authority so that the subjects most vulnerable to the effects of dispersal in language are religious subjects, holy men who spurn the body for the law, ascetics who tear their clothes and shred their flesh.

Both "Something is There" and "The Plagiarist" present us with holy men, rabbis who undergo progressive degeneration - of the word and of the flesh - as blessing turns to curse and body to corpse. In the former tale, the Rabbi of Bechev rejects the Word of God and the Law of his Fathers and replaces these holy relics with other writings, the secular texts of hereticism wherein one Deity replaces all others by means of a decoy staged here as idolatry. Once again the word proves indestructible, for it cannot be entirely erased but is simply displaced from sacred letter to secular text. In "The Plagiarist" the profane writings of a disciple mimic his teacher's piety, making of grace, a blasphemy. And the rabbis of both tales wasted by language, dislodged by the letter, relapse at the last into silence and exile.

The second manifestation of the potency of language occurs when the exalted word comes to stand in the place of the body. Whereas in the first phase, word displaced word, here language comes to replace the body given over to writing, debilitated by words lost, won, squandered, sacrificed and hoarded. Here the

word lodges in the flesh, language engulfs the subject, either joyously as in "Cockadoodledoo" where the protagonist gladly gives over his body to the word, or compulsively as in "A Pair", where the couple obsessively sacrifice their broken bodies to a schizoid discourse.

In the final and most malignant incarnation, language becomes destructive, maiming and murdering its protagonist, dislocating the flesh and fragmenting the body. Here the emphasis is on the secular order of creatures, hedonists and heretics all, who scorn the sacred letter and fall unredeemed, shattered in their prime. Chazkele Bastard and Altele Old One, protagonists of "The Blasphemer" and "The Man who came Back" are mutilated by the language that names them, both ending as tattered corpses, their bodies flayed and far flung.

REFERENCES TO SECTION THREE

1. Lacan, "Discours de Rome" p.39.
2. Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974) p. 72.

The golem is a clay creature, constructed in the shape of a human being by virtue of a Kabbalistic act of creation. Through the ritual enunciation of holy names and magic letters, through the creative power of speech, the lifeless clay is animated, the golem lives and breathes.

3. Lemaire, Jacques Lacan p.61.
4. An adjunct to these two tales is the short story "On a Wagon" (CF) which very explicitly affirms the value of prayer and obedience in the face of misfortune. In this it contrasts with the following narratives insofar as it serves as a paradigm of faith resurrected at the moment of the tear.

The short story very clearly charts a spiritual journey from doubt through disillusionment to renewed belief. Ozer Mecheles travels home with a female villager in a darkened carriage which is the scene of numerous surreptitious intimacies and a steady stream of chatter on the part of the woman, who maliciously intrigues against his wife. In choosing to reject the faithlessness of womankind and the whole Enlightenment out of hand, Mecheles comes to embrace a faith resurrected by virtue of its insistence on the truth and solidity of the word of God, hitherto rejected. Ozer Mecheles, bereft, betrayed by womankind in word and in deed, retreats from the world of female and of flesh and attempts to find certainty in the ancestral texts of his fathers. He undergoes at this point a blinding méconnaissance of the gaze as he passes through the mirror stage to assume the symbolic structures of the Word once more:

The water in the barrel had become greenish, and Ozer saw his image in it as in a mirror; a pale face, sunken cheeks, two side locks like hemp, a throat with a pointed Adam's apple. He barely recognised himself. CP274

In the choice he makes of a God who may not exist as opposed to the material creatures of a fallen world, Mecheles passes through the symbolic portal and enters the arena of language and the law.

5. Paul Ricoeur, Freud and Philosophy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970) p.384.
6. Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis p.188.
7. Rabbi Nechemia's quest is similar in kind if not in quality to that of many of Singer's disembodied first-person narrators who pontificate wearily over the existence of God and the metaphysics of the universe. The narrator of "A Day in Coney Island" muses thus: "Can He be sex, as the cabalists hint? Is God an orgasm that never ceases? Is the universal nothingness the principle of femininity?" (CP37).
8. "Teachings of the Case Presentation," Returning to Freud, ed. S. Schneiderman. The quotation continues as follows: "Knowledge, that is all the paranoic knows. His relation to knowledge establishes his symptom" (p.52). Jacques-Alain Miller's point here is remarkably similar to that made by Forrester in Language and the Origins of Psychoanalysis: "Words replace symptoms in the process of the cure" (p.4).
9. Foucault in The History of Sexuality makes this same point:

Silence itself - the thing one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers - is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies p.27
10. Benedict de Spinoza, Ethica (London: Oxford University Press, 1910) p.38.

Spinoza's celebrated edict of faith which appears in the appendix to the first part, proceeds as follows:

I have now explained the nature of God and its properties. I have shown that He necessarily exists; that He is one God; that from the necessity alone of His own nature He is and acts; that He is, and in what way He is, the free cause of all things; that all things are in Him, and so depend upon Him that without Him they can neither be nor can be conceived; and, finally, that all things have been predetermined by Him, not indeed from freedom of will or from absolute good pleasure, but from His absolute nature or infinite power.
11. Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis p.275.

12. Kojève, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel p.7.
13. Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis p.11.
14. Sigmund Freud, "Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis," Case Histories II (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984) p.105.
15. Lacan, Écrits p.298.
16. Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis p.26.
17. Anthony Wilden, The Language of the Self (New York: Delta Books, 1968)p.x.
18. Martin Heidegger, On the Way to Language (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) p.111.
19. Lacan, "Discours de Rome" p.13.
20. Lacan, Écrits p.162.
21. Steiner, Extra-territorial pp.64-65.
The full quotation is relevant to the issue and reads as follows:

In a sense that cuts much deeper than semantics, our identity is a first-person pronoun. Monotheism, that transcendental magnification of the image of the human self, acknowledges this truth when it defines God by a grammatical tautology: 'I am that I am.'
22. Leitch, Deconstructive Criticism p.103.
23. Anthony Wilden, following Lacan, explicitly affirms the primacy of the Word, as in this passage from Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis:
"...symbols are more real than what they symbolise, the signifier precedes and determines the signified" (p. 257).
24. Bloom, Kabbalah and Criticism p.71.
The Mather's translation of the Kabbalah, The Kabbalah Unveiled (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), includes The Greater Holy Assembly, a portion of which reads:
It is said in the Arcanum of Arcana, that when Rabbi Schimeon opened his mouth, the whole place was shaken, and his companions also were shaken (p. 113).
25. Roland Barthes, Image Music Text (London: Fontana, 1982) p.191.

Author Cook Meira

Name of thesis Text into flesh: a Lacanian reading of selected short stories byB. Singer. 1988

PUBLISHER:

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

©2013

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg Library website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the Library website.