

70 YEARS OF HOLLYWOOD'S VISION OF
JEWISH CHARACTERS AND THEMES



The Jewish Image in American Film



LESTER D. FRIEDMAN

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By Lester D. Friedman

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Two refugees attempting a new life in the new land (Jill Haworth and Sal Mineo) in EXODUS (1960).

Chapter 6

The Sixties

The movies of the sixties offer a more diverse series of Jewish portraits than seen in any previous era. These films attest to the Jews' growing stature in American society and to the centrality of the Jewish experience within the American experience of the sixties. Whatever esthetic criticism may be leveled against pictures like *Bye Bye Braverman*,

(1968), *Funny Girl* (1968), *The Pawnbroker* (1965), *No Way to Treat a Lady* (1968), and *Goodbye, Columbus* (1969), one must still recognize them as movies in which clearly identifiable Jews appear and wrestle with very human, and specifically Jewish, problems. Jews still function as the butts of humor in many of these pictures, but as the decade

The British general sympathizes to the creation of the new state (Ralph Richardson with Eva Marie Saint), in *EXODUS* (1960).



NEAL PETERS COLLECTION

Ari disguises himself as a British officer (Neuman with Peter Lauford) in *EXODUS* (1960).



progresses even the comedy films confront very serious issues. Jews are no longer an "invisible" minority. They have moved into the heart of American culture, and this move disturbed those who longed for the comfortably safe anonymity that characterized earlier times. In presenting a fuller portrait of Jews, many of the decade's films seemed to emphasize the unpleasant elements of Jewish-American life, and many feared that such movies would fuel the fires of anti-Semitism.

Hollywood during this decade responded to the Holocaust not only by dealing with the Jewish victims of the past but also by portraying the Jewish heirs of the future. In particular, the decade's filmmakers paid increasing attention to the Jewish battle to create and then to maintain the state of Israel, a psychological and geographical safety valve for survivors of Nazi atrocities. The most famous Hollywood film about the founding of Israel made during the sixties is director Otto Preminger's *Exodus* (1960). It is not generally known that MGM actually commissioned author Leon Uris to write a novel about the creation of the Jewish state because they felt it would make a good film. However, the way Preminger finally obtained the property, or at least how he recounts the story in his autobiography, *Preminger* (1977), tells something about the role of economics and fear in Hollywood. Preminger frightened the studio into selling him the film rights to *Exodus* by raising the specter of Arab boycotts of MGM theaters and movies. It worked. The studio sold the film rights for \$75,000, a ridiculously low figure for a novel that was the biggest bestseller in the United States since *Gone With the Wind*. Preminger insisted on hiring then-blacklisted writer Dalton Trumbo and using his real name in the screen credits. The film thus played a part in finally breaking the blacklist of Hollywood writers begun with the HUAC hearings.

The focus of the most popular Hollywood film ever made about the founding of Israel is not an Israeli, or for that matter, even a Jew. Instead, Kitty Fremont (Eva Marie Saint), an American widow who finds her life entangled with some Palestinian refugees, emerges as the film's central character. Early in the movie, Fremont seems desolate and alone. Her husband's recent death in Palestine

Kitty prepares to aid Ari in a mass break-out of Jewish prisoners in the stockade at Acre (Eva Marie Saint and Paul Newman) in EXODUS (1960).

NEAL PETERS COLLECTION



Mickey Marcus (Kirk Douglas) leads his Israeli troops to victory in CAST A GIANT SHADOW (1966).



where he went to tend the country's poor leaves Kitty a detached cynic. "Is there anything worth dying for?" she asks early in the picture. By the movie's end, she has an answer. Dressed in an army uniform, a gun slung over her shoulder, Kitty marches off with the Jewish freedom fighters, a part of something far larger than her personal grief. Through Fremont's educational journey toward understanding the importance of a Jewish homeland, Preminger shows there are causes worth sacrificing one's life for.

In the figure of Ari Ben Canaan (Paul Newman), American audiences met a character far different from Hollywood's earlier portraits of weak, ineffectual, and passive Jews that had dominated America's movie screens since the silent days. Ari is a fighter who resembles John Wayne more than he does George Sidney. But in doing this, Preminger robs Ari of much that might be considered Jewish. He quotes the Bible but has no apparent religious feelings. His participation in ceremonial tradition is limited to his parent's home. And, of course, he falls in love with a non-Jew—the blond, Presbyterian American Kitty Fremont. What Preminger presents, therefore, is one type of Jew found in Palestine, a nonreligious type with whom American audiences can easily identify because he reminds us of our own conceptions of military daring, battlefield valor, and bland ethnicity. "The image of the Jew as patriot, warrior, and battle-scarred belligerent is rather satisfying to a large segment of the American public," observes Philip Roth, who adds: "It fills any number of Jewish readers with pride...and Gentile readers less perhaps with pride than with relief." The glory of the Jewish military man wipes away the shame of the Jew as victim, implying that what happened in Germany will never occur again because now, at long last, the Jew can defend himself.

Ari's union with Kitty, however, is certainly not the total assimilation witnessed in earlier films about mixed romances. "People are the same no matter what they're called," Kitty lectures Ari, speaking the beliefs that underpin the majority of the mixed-marriage films of the past. "Don't believe it," he responds forcefully. "People have a right to be different." But in the union itself, even with Ari's steadfast refusal to be swept up in Kitty's

romantic universalism, eventually does echo the old silent film victory of democratic love over religious duty. For Preminger, Palestine functions as a kind of mini-America, the Jewish struggle for a homeland becoming suspiciously like our own western history. Ari and his compatriots are the explorers and settlers of a new land, the Arabs represent the heathens who seek to destroy them, the British become the cattle barons who refuse to share their land with the newcomers, and Kitty symbolizes the typical "Easterner" who comes West to civilize the wilderness. It's a Hollywood Western played out in the desert instead of on a prairie, a tale of brave men overcoming the dangers of a wild frontier to bring law, order, and civilization to a new land.

Another image of the Jew as fighter appears in *Cast a Giant Shadow* (1966), directed by Melville Shavelson. This screen biography of Colonel Mickey Marcus (Kirk Douglas)—a West Point graduate, lawyer, and World War II hero who became the first commander of the Israeli Army since Joshua—traces his growing commitment to the cause of Jewish freedom fighters in Palestine. Like Kitty Fremont early in *Exodus*, Marcus at first feels quite removed from the Jews' problems. "I don't feel like one of them" he tells his wife Emma (Angie Dickinson) after refusing the offer of some representatives to fight alongside them. Eventually, he changes his mind, more because of what Emma calls his "love of war" than because of any deep religious, or even moral, concerns. Dramatically this alteration in Marcus's feelings is conveyed via the rejection of his American wife for the charms of Magda (Senta Berger), a Jew in Palestine. Though he comes to feel comfortable with his comrades in arms, Marcus never makes a personal commitment to a Jewish state. The film even hints he may return to Emma, or at least to the United States, but is accidentally shot by one of his own men before he can make this decision.

The decade's most lavish attempt to confront the question of German guilt during the war years is director Stanley Kramer's *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961), about the famous postwar trials held in Germany; the film won an Academy Award nomination for Best Picture. The defense attorney, Herr Rolf (Maximilian Schell), sees the case



Mickey Marcus (Kirk Douglas) must decide whether or not to assume command of the Israeli army in CAST A GIANT SHADOW (1966).

against his client, Justice Ernst Janning (Burt Lancaster), as one in which all the German people are accused of complicity with the Nazis. "The brutality was brought about by a few extremists, the criminals, and very few Germans knew about what was going on," Rolf assures American Judge Dan Haywood (Spencer Tracy). "Men like Janning stayed in power to prevent worse things from happening." Rolf argues that "a judge does not make the laws. He carries out the laws of his country. To refuse to carry out laws would make him a traitor." Thus, the defense's position rests on two familiar excuses: "My country right or wrong" and "We didn't know." "Responsibility," declares another of the defendants on trial, "is not a cut and dried thing."

In order to support his charges of criminal brutality, U.S. Army prosecutor Colonel Lawson (Richard Widmark) draws on the infamous Feldenstein case, argued years ago before Judge Janning, in which a Jew was executed for having allegedly had sexual relations with an Aryan, Irene Hoffman (Judy Garland). He puts a pathetic victim of involuntary sterilization (Montgomery Clift) on the stand. He shows documentaries of the libera-



*Irene Hoffman (Judy Garland) relives the horrors of Nazi imprisonment on the witness stand in **JUDGMENT AT NUREMBERG** (1961)*

tion of Buchenwald and of the living dead housed there. The cruelty of these events is highlighted by the words of a jailed bureaucrat who calmly explains to a fellow prisoner that "It wasn't the killing that was a problem. We could kill them a thousand an hour. It was the disposing of the bodies that was the problem."

Finally, Haywood and the other judges arrive at a split decision; the majority finds all the defendants guilty of war crimes and sentences them to life imprisonment. Through Haywood, director Kramer and screenwriter Abby Mann sum up the complicated ethical issues at the core of this decision. The significance of the defendants' actions, as Haywood sees it, is that "under a natural crisis men can delude themselves into vast and heinous crimes. Janning, too, finally admits his own guilt, thus adding credence and support to Haywood's decision, as he explains to the American how the movement of events got beyond his control:

What difference does it make if a few political extremists lost their rights? What difference does it make if a few racial minorities lose their rights? It's only a passing phase. It's only a stage we are going through. It will be discarded sooner or later. Hitler will be discarded sooner or later. The country is in danger... What was going to be a passing phase became a way of life.

As Haywood is leaving, Janning gives him a written record of his judicial decisions for safekeeping because he admires the American judge's honesty and ethical integrity. The film, however, ends on a bitterly ironic note. The decisions arrived at so thoughtfully at Nuremberg are quickly reversed by a higher court, all the defendants pardoned, and then freed.

The Jew as victim in such films as *Judgment at Nuremberg* becomes an image expanded to almost archetypal proportions in director John Frankenheimer's 1968 adaptation of Bernard Malamud's book *The Fixer*. Malamud's novel, which won both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize in 1967, tells the story of Yokow Bok, a Jew in Czarist



*Rudolf Petersen (Montgomery Clift), a pathetic victim of an arbitrary sterilization, tells his story in **THE FIXER** (1968)*

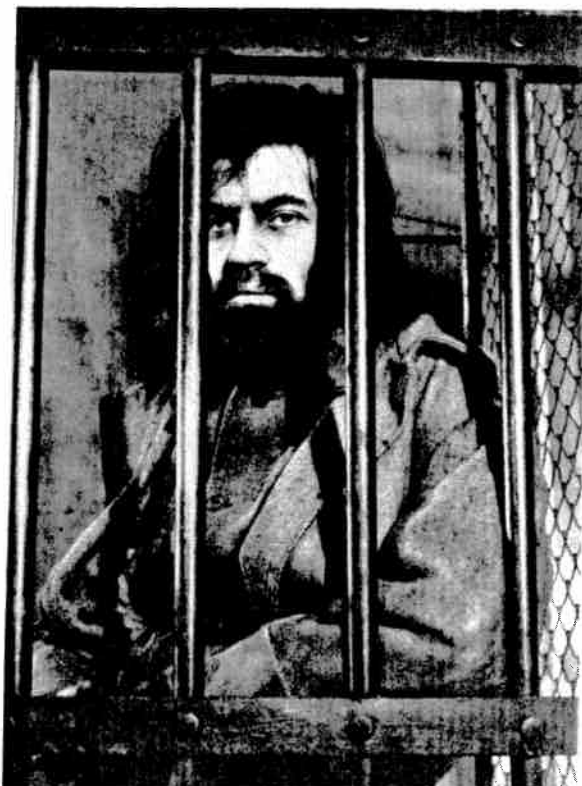
Russia accused of murdering a young boy and then forced to undergo a series of excruciating tortures when he will not confess to the crime he has not committed. Malamud based his tale on the story of Mendel Beiliss that became the subject of earlier films like *Accused by Darkest Russia* (1913). On one level, Frankenheimer simply tells Bok's story. On another level, however, his film raises some provocative questions about how American directors perceive anti-Semitism and its victims.

In an interview, Frankenheimer claimed that the movie "has nothing to do with the fact that Yokov Bok (Alan Bates) is a Jew. It could be any man, any time, anywhere." Apparently he missed the basic irony of Malamud's book "Yokov: Bok is persecuted for a ritual murder he could not possibly have committed because his religion forbids it. Bok, whose name means "goat" in Russian, becomes a scapegoat, a victim, because of the environment of hate that limits his opportunities for advancement and makes him an outsider. He is different not only in terms of his religion, a voluntary matter, but in terms of the social, political, and economic life he is forced to live because of his religious choice. Thus, his case has everything to do with being a Jew, with being trapped by forces that create an environment of prejudice which makes him a second-class citizen.

To concentrate, as Frankenheimer does, totally on the universal implications of Bok's situation is to see Bok's suffering as a kind of Jungian archetype and to ignore the specific elements that foster anti-Semitism. The potential for anti-Semitism is present in most societies at all times, but it takes a specific moment in history to bring it to the surface, a moment usually created by a public crisis, the need for a scapegoat to explain a country's ills, an economic imbalance, or an upsurge in religious fervor. Such hatred, therefore, is very different from simple racial prejudice or political persecution. Acts against Jews are not the same as those against Blacks or Communists, for anti-Semi-



Yakov (Alan Bates) and Raisl (Carol White) happily join the village dance in THE FIXER (1968).



Yakov (Alan Bates) denies the charge of ritual murder and becomes a victim of Russian anti-Semitism in THE FIXER (1968).



Sol Nazerman (Rod Steiger), one of the "living dead" in *THE PAWNBROKER* (1965).



Sol Nazerman (Rod Steiger) enjoys an idyllic family picnic before the Nazis murder his wife and children in *THE PAWNBROKER* (1965).

tism is usually the result of a unique fusion of religion, politics, and economics. Malamud understands that Bok is a Jewish Everyman, not an Everyman, and uses him as a metaphor for suffering, alienation, and loneliness within this particular context. Frankenheimer does not see this. His emphasis is on the suffering itself, not on why that suffering took place. The film confuses the symptom with the disease, allowing Bok's ordeal to be equated with the universal suffering endured by victims of persecution.

Bok's triumph, like his suffering, is Jewish. It cannot be equated with that of other passive resisters like Mahatma Ghandi, who protested specific civil issues, because Bok does not seek out a cause; it is thrust upon him. It resembles the quiet victory of the Jews who persevered in the concentration camps of Germany and the prisons of Russia. Unlike the soldiers in *Exodus* and *Cast a Giant Shadow*, Bok does not physically fight for Jewish freedom. Unlike the financial shrewdness that allows Nathan and his brothers to secure Jewish rights in *House of Rothschild* (1934), Bok possesses no economic power to bend society to his wishes. His victory comes from waiting and enduring. Such patience, itself, becomes an eloquent statement of the morality that defeats prejudice by holding it up to the light of ethical behavior. The ability to act like a human being in a world in which people are treated like animals is, in and of itself, an act of humanity, an ethical form of resistance which mocks a world of obscene cruelty. To say, as Frankenheimer does, that Bok's situation has nothing to do with his being Jewish is to be naïve; to say that his triumph is not the triumph of a Jew is to misunderstand the very reason for his persecution and thereby to disassociate his Jewishness from his victory.

Two films, *The Pawnbroker* (1965) and *The Producers* (1968), also show Hollywood's interest in Nazis, though they present this subject in very dissimilar ways. Directed by Sidney Lumet, the earlier movie remains the American cinema's most successful attempt to confront the pain and trauma of concentration camp survivors. In some ways, *The Pawnbroker* updates *Vengeance of the Oppressed* (1916), the powerful silent picture about the tragedy of allowing the past to dominate the



A cynical Sol Nazerman (Rod Steiger) unmoved by yet another sad tale of woe in THE PAWNBROKER (1965).

present. Lumet, however, handles the delicate interplay between past and present in the life of Sol Nazerman (Rod Steiger) with a highly refined series of modern techniques. The twenty-fifth anniversary of his wife's death forces Nazerman to confront the painful feelings about concentration camp experiences he has long suppressed. To indicate Nazerman's state of mind, Lumet employs so-called "shock cuts" that feed us tiny bits of information, almost frame by progressive frame, in a highly disjointed manner. Finally, the director brings these moments together to form an entire sequence. This technique functions like the memory itself, blocking out unpleasant information, injecting small moments of remembrance into our consciousness, and finally forcing a confrontation with the previously sublimated event. Also, Lumet juxtaposes sounds from Nazerman's present with visuals from his past: a memory will be seen while a present action is heard. This, in effect, allows the viewer to participate in the confused mingling of past and present experienced by Nazerman.

In the present segments of the movie, Lumet

often shoots Nazerman behind bars of one kind or another, emphasizing his emotional entrapment in the past. Ultimately, the past cannot be ignored. It intrudes on the present. For example, when several boys corner a youngster against a fence and beat him up, Nazerman flashes back to one of his most vivid concentration camp memories: a friend attempting to escape the camp is caught on the barbed wire fence surrounding it, and his legs are chewed off by vicious guard dogs. Later, on a subway ride home, Nazerman finds himself catapulted back to a cattle car on its way to the death camp. In this manner, Lumet demonstrates how Nazerman's refusal to deal with his past destroys his present. When the past finally forces its way to the surface, it erupts and totally disintegrates the life of a man intent on ignoring it. Slowly, the roles of past and present are reversed; memories control present actions.

Nazerman refuses to have his approach to life softened despite the social worker's efforts (Geraldine Fitzgerald and Rod Steiger) in THE PWN BROKER (1965)



It is a vicious cycle from which Sol Nazerman is powerless to escape: the present sparks memories of the past, the past memories force him to act in a specific manner in the present, which, of course, forces him to think even more about the past. For instance, Nazerman ultimately refuses to deal with a black gangster (Brock Peters) when he realizes how heavily the criminal is involved in a prostitution ring. This realization, along with an incident when a Black whore tempts him to trade money for sex, reminds Nazerman of his wife and her sexual humiliation at the hands of the sadistic Nazis; he can no longer close his eyes to his own part in the oppressive exploitation of other human beings.

Nazerman, as his name implies, has a bit of the Nazi within him. As a pawnbroker, he decides which of the desperate people who seek him out to trade their goods for money will receive funds and how much they will get. They curry favor with the pawnbroker the way camp inmates sought to ingratiate themselves with their guards. Nazerman can destroy people in less overt but equally deadly ways as the Germans. His realization of this fact brings Nazerman's latent guilt over having survived the horrors of the camp into the present. To purge himself of his pain, he forces a confrontation with the Black gangster that he is sure will result in his own death. When it doesn't, Nazerman is left with even more guilt and greater humiliation. In a moment of agony, he plunges his hand down on a sharp spindle, an eloquent and complex physical action that functions as penance, a recognition of his need to feel once again, and an acceptance of his pain.

Nazerman's relationship with his young, Puerto Rican assistant, Jesus Ortiz (Jaime Sanchez), further seals his spiritual doom. In the person of Jesus, as the name implies, Nazerman has a final chance for redemption, an opportunity to reach out and rescue something of value for the future out of the pain of the past. He is, however, too much a part of the "walking dead," too much concerned with his own tragedies, to recognize the humanity of others. Nazerman retreats from his responsibilities to Ortiz, hiding behind an unfeeling cynicism and a series of enigmatic responses. When Ortiz asks him if the numbers on his arm represent membership in some "secret society" and how he can



Max Budystock (Zero Mostel) and Leo Bloom (Gene Wilder) try to convince a Nazi (Kenneth Mars) to sell them his play in THE PWN BROKER (1965)



A scene from the Nazi musical "Springtime for Hitler" in THE PRODUCERS (1968).

join, Nazerman responds, "You learn to walk on water." Later, when Ortiz wants to know why "you people come to business so naturally," Nazerman plunges into a lengthy explanation of the wandering Jew and his transformation into a merchant that totally confuses the young man. Only when it is too late does Nazerman realize what Ortiz can mean for him: a possible son substitute who can bring about his redemption via love.

At the end of the film, Ortiz dies from a bullet meant for Nazerman. The distraught pawnbroker cradles the dead boy in his arms, rocks him like a father would a son, and mouths an agonizingly silent cry. There is no solace for Sol Nazerman, no spiritual victory to compensate for his pain. He is condemned to life, forced to remember the suffering of his wife and his friends in the camp, and now sentenced to absorb the death of Ortiz. For Nazerman, life is a fate worse than death. Lumet sees no triumph in simple survival. It is how one lives that remains important, not just the fact that one continues to live.

At first it may seem silly, or even sacrilegious, to lump *The Pawnbroker's* serious treatment of Nazi horrors together with *The Producer's* broad, farcical humor. A closer examination, however, reveals that both films are responding to the Holocaust's bitter legacy of pain and guilt. Because most of director/writer Mel Brooks's humor emanates from his Jewish roots, it would be surprising to find him totally ignoring the Holocaust. "He's urban, New York City Jewish," says James Monaco. "He has vaudeville in his blood and chicken fat in his head." Brooks, himself, seems to concur and locates the roots of his own comedy in Jewish pain:

Look at Jewish history. Unrelieved, lamenting would be intolerable. So, for every ten Jews beating their breasts, God designated one to be crazy and amuse the breast-



Max Bialystock (Zero Mostel) and Leo Bloom (Gene Wilder) admire the charms of their new secretary in THE PRODUCERS (1968).

beaters. By the time I was five I knew I was that one....You want to know where my comedy comes from? It comes from not being kissed by a girl until you're sixteen. It comes from the feeling that, as a Jew and as a person, you don't fit into the mainstream of American society. It comes from the realization that even though you're better and smarter, you'll never belong.

Brooks' revealing remarks provide further evidence of the mixture of pain and pleasure that characterizes much Jewish comedy, including his own and Woody Allen's.

Jewish laughter is usually bitter, often the only means available for a weak and impotent people to protest their oppression. As such, it inevitably springs from some sort of misfortune and follows the advice of the old Jewish sage: "When you're hungry, sing; when you're hurt, laugh." Jewish humor, more than any other type of ethnic comedy, often becomes self-aggression: the target of the joke is usually the Jew himself. Obviously, this

tactic functions as a defense mechanism to make the Jew seem innocuous, and therefore not threatening to the alien world that surrounds him. But another element in such a method cannot be ignored. Many observers note that oppressed people often come to see themselves through the eyes of their oppressors; they accept the attitudes of their oppressor as being at least partially true, thus incorporating a negative view of themselves as an integral part of their own self-image, i.e., Blacks who call themselves "niggers" and Jews who refer to each other as "kikes."

This tendency is clearly evident in *The Producers*. The protagonist, Max Bialystock (Zero Mostel), is a fat, vulgar, boisterous conniver anxious to seduce rich old ladies to obtain funds for his rotten plays. Leo Bloom (Gene Wilder), his reluctant partner, is a timid accountant given to fits of nervous hysteria that can be calmed only by caressing a fragment of his old baby blanket. Together, the two decide to find the worst possible play, finance it far beyond production costs, close the play to disastrous first-night reviews after one performance, and keep the extra money as a profit. Unfortunately for them, the play they chose, *Springtime for Hitler*, is a smashing success.

Brooks's characters are a compendium of ethnic clichés that, in the past, might well have been attacked as blatantly anti-Semitic: the cunning Jew who unscrupulously fleeces others, the money-hungry Jew who sacrifices all morality in his quest for riches, the manipulating Jew who trades on the finer emotions of others for his own gain, the garish Jew who flaunts his wealth at the least opportunity, the parasitic Jew who lives off the talent of others, the mild-mannered Jew who is easily bullied by more powerful personalities, the unethical Jew who cheats in business, the neurotic Jew who is unbalanced but brilliant, the sexually insecure Jew who exploits women, the ostentatious Jew who lavishly spends more than he earns, the smart Jew who becomes the victim of his own cleverness.

So why is all this so funny? What Brooks does in *The Producers* is to create a film in which the Jewish characters, however unappealing they may be, are far more attractive and loveable than the people they exploit. In particular, Brooks's merciless parodies of a talentless, homosexual director

(Christopher Hewett), a spacy rock star (Dick Shawn), and a sentimental Nazi playwright (Kenneth Mars) renders his two Jewish characters harmless by comparison. The Nazi, Franz Liebkind, receives the brunt of Brooks's satire, a bitter but hilarious diatribe against those who insist on perpetuating the Fuehrer's memory. Liebkind describes his play, *Springtime for Hitler*, as a "gay romp with Adolph and Eva in Berchtesgaden." He frequently longs for Hitler's resurrection, forcing Bialystock and Bloom to sing German war songs with him, and agrees to sell them his play only because he thinks it will be a "way to clear the Fuehrer's name" and to show once and for all that Hitler "was a nice guy who could dance the pants off Churchill."

Surely there is something going on here beyond the surface content of this absurd situation. Indeed, Brooks's comic intentions resemble Chaplin's in *The Great Dictator* (1940). Both filmmakers confront the Nazi menace and expose it the best way they can: they make people laugh at the obscene absurdity of the Master Race by turning its leaders into dumb stumblebums. Without arguing that *The Producers* reaches the level of *The Pawnbroker*; it is still possible to see both movies as arising from the same feelings of pain and as expressing similar senses of outrage. One may cry about the Holocaust but may also be reduced to bitter laughter when faced with a tragedy so enormous that it defies rational understanding. Truly, Brooks's tears mingle with his laughter. The sheer audacity to present a musical called *Springtime for Hitler*, and then have it become a hit, satirizes an American public willing to find humor, however grotesque, in the Third Reich. Bialystock and Bloom fail to find their flop because they underestimate their audience's deadened sensibilities.

Two of the decade's other films favor the black comedy so evident in *The Producers*, injecting it into a venerable old genre: the horror film. *The Fearless Vampire Killers* (1967), a film eventually disowned by its director, Roman Polanski, after disputes with MGM, contains a strange Jewish vampire, Yoine Shagal (Alfie Bass). After he is bitten by Count von Krolock (Perdy Mayne) and turned into a vampire, the lusty Shagal heads straight for the voluptuous blonde, Magda (Fiona Lewis), who has rejected him in life. When Magda



Yoine Shagal (Alfie Bass), the Jewish vampire in *THE FEARLESS VAMPIRE KILLERS* (1967).

tries to defend herself with a crucifix, Shagal gleefully exclaims, "Oy! Have you got the wrong vampire!" Though the character of the licentious Jewish vampire provides much of the film's humor, Polanski injects a few social comments on the class hierarchy present among the undead. For example, Shagal remains an outsider even in vampire society, much as he was in his former life. The Count and his ghoulish aristocracy ostracize him, and his coarse, wooden coffin is dragged out to the barn, segregated from the other vampires' resting places. The cleverness of the Jew, however, apparently extends into the world of the living dead, as Shagal whittles his way into the coffin of the count's son and sleeps obediently at his feet.

The Little Shop of Horrors (1960) provides an even stranger mixture of Jewish comedy and horror. Like its predecessor, *A Bucket of Blood* (1959)—which was also directed by Roger Corman and written by Charles B. Griffith—it focuses on the conflict between a Jewish schnook and the Gentile world that oppresses him. The film's protagonist is Seymour Krelboin (Jonathan Haze), a



Seymour Krelboin (Jonathon Haze), Mushnik (Mel Welles), and Audrey (Jackie Joseph) admire what they later discover is a man-eating plant in THE LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS (1960).

put-upon lackey for the greedy Mushnik (Mel Welles), a Lower East Side florist. Seymour loves Muchnik's dizzy daughter, Audrey (Jackie Joseph), who pays no attention to him. Early in the picture, Seymour becomes very disturbed over the droopy condition of a strange plant in Mushnik's shop. When he accidentally cuts his hand and some blood drips onto the plant's leaves, Seymour makes the startling discovery that the plant's natural food is human blood. The more blood it receives, the more the plant blooms—and the more blood it needs to keep it growing. "Feeeee Me! I'm hunnnngry!" it screams at Seymour, who dutifully goes out to locate new sources of nourishment for his newfound dependent. He finds it in the veins of his oppressive Gentile neighbors, whom he feeds to the demanding plant. As the

plant grows larger and larger, a horticulture magazine decides to do a feature story on the exotic specimen and the man who has made it thrive. But when its gigantic petals open during the interview, they reveal the faces of Seymour's hapless victims. Finally, after a wild chase, Seymour tumbles into the plant and becomes the last scrap of food for its carnivorous appetite.

Corman shot *The Little Shop of Horrors* in two days on an unused backlot set, and it looks it. Certainly, it scares no one over three. Horror is not Corman's point, and any fears quickly disappear beneath the film's dominant one of Jewish humor. But some social commentary remains. Seymour, the modern descendant of generations of Jewish schlemiels, becomes a coarse precursor of the persona Woody Allen will adopt in the next decade, though Allen uses the role with far greater effectiveness and meaning. In *The Little Shop of Horrors*, the schlemiel takes out his frustrations in a deadly manner, resorting to murder in order to attain and then to keep his social status, as well as

to capture the affections of the girl he desires. Obviously, these themes must strike a responsive chord in contemporary audiences, since the picture has been turned into a long-running off-Broadway musical and 1986 movie.

Chris Morris's essay in Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn's *Kings of the B's* (1975), suggests that Corman's film is "a satire of Jewish social climbing of the most ruthless sort," an observation supported by the film. But Morris's argument that the plant becomes a "surrogate Jewish mother" misses the point completely. It is Seymour who becomes the mother-figure in the film; the plant is the whining, parasitic, spoiled child. Seymour basks in the reflected glory of his "offspring," much as does Mrs. Kolowitz in David's theatrical debut (in Carl Reiner's *Enter Laughing*). But, of course, Seymour goes further than Mrs. Kolowitz: he kills to fulfill his "child's" demands. As such, the film becomes a parable of black humor that emphasizes the disastrousness of giving all to a child, of defining oneself by the achievements of others, and of losing any sense of moral values in a blindly desperate attempt to provide for a child's wishes. Such a course of action can lead only to one end: destruction by the very thing the parent has created, a monstrous dependent whose appetite remains forever unsatiated.

Another film using black comedy as a vehicle for social satire is director Sidney Lumet's *Bye Bye Braverman* (1968), based on Wallace Markfield's first novel, *To an Early Grave* (1964). Lumet claims that this movie is "the most personal picture I've ever made.... The four post-Depression Jewish intellectuals are everyone I grew up with. Me, in fact.... I knew all those neighborhoods like the back of my hand. It must have taken me about five minutes to scout locations for the whole works." The film depicts the comic odyssey of four friends seeking the funeral of their recently departed companion, Leslie Braverman, whose untimely death is likened to "leaving before the end of a Hitchcock movie." After a series of humorous mishaps, the four wind up at the wrong funeral. The focus is on the New York cultural scene, but these are second-rank intellectuals: reviewers and critics—poets and novelists *manqués*. Braverman, himself, was a limited writer and renowned



Barnet Weiner (Jack Warden), Holly Levine (Sorrell Brooks), Felix Ottensteen (Joseph Wiseman), and Monroe Reiff (George Segal) make peace with a black cab driver (Godfrey Cambridge) in BYE BYE BRAVERMAN (1968).



The Rabbi (Alan King) tries to comfort Monroe Reiff (George Segal) about his friend's death in a dream sequence from BYE BYE BRAVERMAN (1968).



Harold Fine (Peter Sellers) and Joyce Miller (Joyce Van Patten) set the date, once again, in I LOVE YOU, ALICE B. TOKLAS (1968).



Harold Fine (Peter Sellers) searches for peace and contentment as a hippie in I LOVE YOU, ALICE B. TOKLAS (1968).

whoremonger described by one of his surviving friends as "a second-rate talent of the highest order."

At its thematic center, *Bye Bye Braverman* speaks of the modern, wandering Jew condemned to alienation more by his psyche than by his heritage. The four central figures are victims of personal, not religious, problems, as they engage in a series of endless disputes with each other and with people they claim to love. Monroe Reiff (George Segal) fights with his wife about all things great and small, from why she won't attend Braverman's funeral to why she refuses to make him orange juice in the morning. Holly Levine (Sorrell Brooks), a fussy reviewer and pop-culture writer unable to complete his own monograph on John Ford, savages the work of better authors. Barnett Weiner (Jack Warden) argues constantly with his mistress, Myra Mandelbaum (Phyllis Newman), over whether or not to visit his nagging mother. Felix Ottenstein (Joseph Wiseman), an arrogant yet vibrant socialist, has such vicious battles with his son that he wishes the child dead.

Throughout their trip to find Braverman's funeral, all four friends alternately attack and embrace each other, never willing to forsake an opportunity for a sarcastic remark but not wishing to alienate each other permanently. For example, one moment Felix berates Holly for driving a Volkswagen ("This legacy from Hitler!"), and the next he is striving for something to rekindle their former closeness. Lumet juxtaposes the silly bickering of these lost, modern Jews with the peacefulness of their contemporary Hasidic counterparts. Neither Holly's writing, nor Felix's politics, nor Barnett's sexual exploits, nor Monroe's marriage provides any of the four with the security, contentment, and serenity of the Orthodox Jews. The film, in fact, attacks those American Jews who have forsaken traditional beliefs and have nothing with which to replace them. For the four friends, life is simply an extended argument.

Disturbing as is Lumet's portrait of contemporary Jews without meaning in their lives, his vision of the modern American rabbi, played by comic Alan King, is even more disquieting. The rabbi bears little resemblance to the revered figure so prominent in Jewish-American films of previous

decades. In the sixties, the rabbi has become, in effect, a standup performer. His speech of condolence turns into a comic vision of Jewish fate. "Have a little pleasure from the grandchildren," he lectures the mourners, "Get a coronary." In this manner, Lumet undercuts the authority and usefulness of the rabbi in America. His new role is to provide entertainment rather than comfort and enlightenment. Lumet's clean-shaven contemporary rabbi wears buttondown shirts and shiny silk suits; he is more of a businessman than a spiritual leader. His traditional roles have been usurped by therapists, psychiatrists, doctors, and self-help textbooks. The loss of this figure's authority and guidance becomes the bleakest element in the picture. "What can I tell you," mumbles Monroe to an attentive row of headstones in the cemetery that houses the remains of his friend, Braverman. "things have changed." These four friends share only memories and a vague attachment to a shared religious heritage they seem not to understand. In a world of shifting values and displaced traditions, Reiff finds only one thing to do when faced with his grief: he returns home and cries alone, not only for Braverman but for himself and his lost contemporaries as well.

Director Hy Averback's *I Love You, Alice B. Toklas* (1968), written by Paul Mazursky and Larry Tucker, is another film that deals with how "things have changed." Harold Fine (Peter Sellers), a successful lawyer, succumbs to the nubile charms of Nancy (Leigh Taylor-Young), a lovely hippie. This infatuation turns the uptight conservative Harold into a free-living hippie. Harold's journey from lawyer to hippie allows Averback to take several pot shots at various Jewish characters and institutions. Harold's brother, Herbie (David Arkin), a California beach bum, represents young Jews who search endlessly for meaning in their lives, totally ignoring the significance their own religion might play in their quest. Herbie, for example, attends a funeral dressed in the burial outfit of the Hopi Indians, but is completely unaware of the burial rituals associated with his own heritage. Harold's girlfriend, Joyce Miller (Joyce Van Patten), has one main goal in life: to marry Harold. As such, she is used by Averback to embody the Jewish girl whose life revolves around trapping a successful profes-



David Kolowitz (Reni Santoni) must somehow deal with his bistrionic mother (Shelley Winters) and ineffectual father (David Opatoshu) in *ENTER LAUGHING* (1967).

sional, no matter how unsuited he may be as a mate. Harold's mother (Jo Van Fleet) is a typical Hollywood version of the Jewish mother, who uses guilt to manipulate Harold and stocks his cupboards with Manischewitz products. Finally, Averback includes a stinging parody of the Jewish wedding ceremony, here performed by two cantors, and the lavish Jewish reception that follows, complete with a gigantic Jewish star atop a large mound of green jello.

The focus of the film, however, remains on Harold's inability to find peace and meaning either in the straight world or the hippie commune. Like the four modern wanderers in *Bye Bye Braverman*, Harold loses his way in a world devoid of traditions and ethical morality. Harold finds the straight world too confining, for he has the heart of a hippie, and the hippie culture too loose, for he has the head of a corporate lawyer. *I Love You, Alice B. Toklas* thus filters the marginal man syndrome through a comic Jewish perspective. When he is with Joyce, Harold longs for the freedom associ-

Natalie Miller (Patty Duke) and her mother (Nancy Marchand) attempt to overcome the generation barrier between them in MR. NATALIE (1969).



Natalie Miller (Patty Duke) the troubled teenager in MR. NATALIE (1969).



ated with Nancy. When he is with Nancy, Harold tries to lock her into a confining relationship more rigid than that Joyce demanded of him. Harold searches in vain for an alternative that will provide some independence and some responsibility, but at the movie's conclusion he is alone, able neither to marry Joyce nor to sustain his relationship with Nancy.

Enter Laughing (1967) follows the humorous misadventures of David Kolowitz (Reni Santoni), a star-struck Bronx adolescent who tries to break into show business despite the objections of his nagging, overly-protective Jewish mother (Shelley Winters) and his kind but ineffectual father (David Opatoshu). Carl Reiner, who directed the movie, draws on his own early experiences to endow the film with a personal, gentle touch. But it is not Reiner's alter ego, David Kolowitz, who dominates the film. This distinction goes to Shelly Winters's overbearing Jewish mama, one of the decade's most overacted embodiments of that much maligned figure. Unlike sarcastic Mrs. Brummel of *No Way to Treat a Lady*; Mrs. Kolowitz does not constantly berate her son; instead, she just "noodges" him to the point of exasperation, unable to understand why David wants to be an actor, a job she feels certain will end in starvation and homelessness. She is, however, eventually won over by David's persistence. Attending her son's stage debut, a bit part in an off-off-off Broadway theater, Mrs. Kolowitz loudly shushes the inattentive audience when David appears for his brief moment on stage. When the play continues, she interrupts the performance by proudly proclaiming to those around her, "That's my son. That's my son."

Mrs. Kolowitz's uneasy blend of caring and controlling, of fear for David's future and pride in his every accomplishment, shows the Jewish mother as part nurturer and part obstacle. Reiner never turns Mrs. Kolowitz into Mrs. Portnoy; his humor keeps Mrs. Kolowitz more human than harpie. In fact, her better qualities shine through in David's personality, making him a caring, sympathetic character. The important point here is that David does persist in doing what he thinks is right. He realizes his dream of theatrical involvement, though on an appropriately small scale.

Mr. Natalie (1969), a more painful and serious

film than *Enter Laughing*, presents the identity crisis from the perspective of another adolescent—the Jewish-American female. “Little girls with sweet faces like yours always grow up pretty.” These words spoken by her mother remain indelibly etched in the mind of Natalie Miller (Patty Duke), a plain-looking eighteen-year-old living in Brooklyn with her parents (Phil Sterling and Nancy Marchand). “Mother lied,” observes Natalie early in the film as she studies her face in the mirror, preparing for another blind date arranged by her popular friend, Betty Simon (Deborah Winters). Indeed, Natalie cannot even scrounge up her own date for the senior prom. She makes up a story about having to go down to the ferry landing to pick up her escort, an imaginary pre-med student from Staten Island, and actually begins to believe her lie: she journeys to the landing and scans the faces of those leaving the boat for her “date.” When he fails to arrive and she is faced with the reality of her loneliness, Natalie visits her only confidant, Uncle Harold (Martin Balsam), a sympathetic pharmacist who tells her it is the contents of a bottle that are important, not its attractive packaging.

Desperate to find her niche in life, Natalie leaves her parents’ home soon after high school and heads for Greenwich Village, where her life takes on several new dimensions. She secures a job as waitress in a topless-bottomless nightclub, buys a motorcycle, and most important of all, becomes romantically involved with a handsome architect-artist, David Harris (James Farentino). Her newfound confidence, however, is shattered after Natalie unexpectedly bursts into David’s apartment and finds a woman there—a woman he introduces as his wife. Depressed, Natalie ponders suicide. She goes to the East River pier and jumps off, but since the tide is out, her suicide attempt is unsuccessful. Returning to her apartment, Natalie finds a distraught David who tells her how much he loves her and vows to obtain a divorce. She rejects his offer because he has lied to her. The last scene shows Natalie returning to Brooklyn on her motorcycle, not in defeat but with a surer sense of her own self-worth and a confidence in her ability to survive.

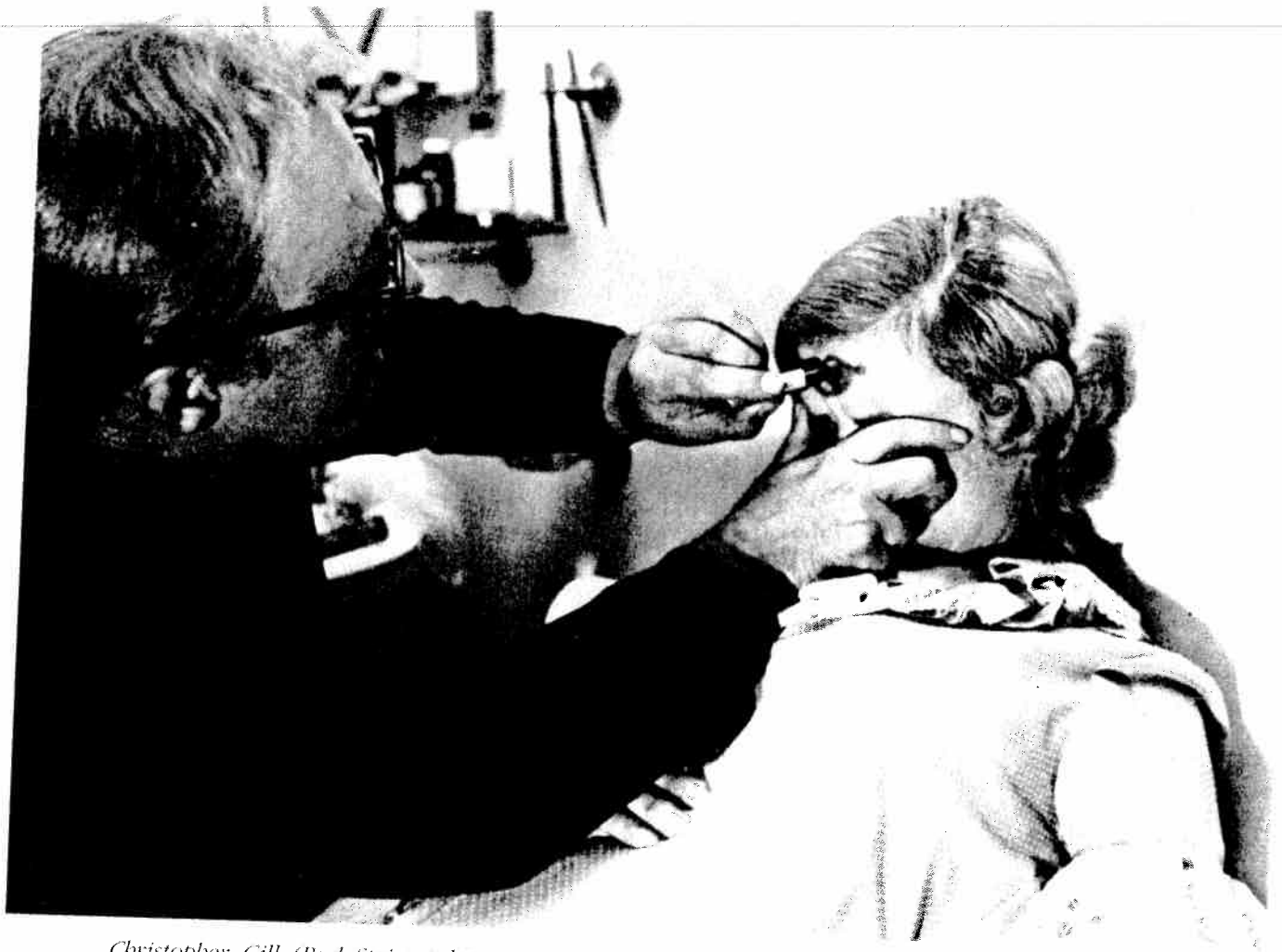
Me, Natalie, based on an original story of Stanley Shapiro and a script by A. Martin Zweiback,



Morris Brummel (George Segal) sizes up Kate Palmer (Lee Remick) in NO WAY TO TREAT A LADY (1968).

was directed by Fred Coe and has some very intriguing elements. Its emphasis on the problems of a plain girl makes it a kind of *Funny Girl* sans music and allows the movie’s creators to make some insightful comments about an American value system that stresses physical appearance above inner values. From her contact with Betty Simon, a popular girl who eventually marries out of desperation because she is pregnant, and Uncle Harold, who preaches inner values but marries for beauty, Natalie comes to understand the hypocrisy of a system that claims to admire integrity and brains but is really obsessed with looks and clothes. Natalie is an outsider in this world. Her rejection of Betty Simon’s marriage-at-any-cost philosophy, represents her triumph over these superficial concerns as she searches for a love based on honesty, mutual respect, and affection.

No Way to Treat a Lady (1968) also deals with a Jewish/Gentile romance, but in a far more complicated and interesting way. It has, however, excited little critical attention since its release. Most critics simply dismiss the film as an excessive ego trip for Rod Steiger, claiming that the actor overplays all six of his roles using overdone accents for each. Such comments ignore the film’s intricacies and insights. On the surface, *No Way to Treat a Lady* offers a witty, sardonic murder story featuring a



Christopher Gill (Rod Steiger) leaves his gruesome trademark on one of his victims in NO WAY TO TREAT A LADY (1968).



Jewish detective, Morris Brummel (George Segal), a psychotic theater owner, Christopher Gill (Rod Steiger); and a flippant working girl, Kate Palmer (Lee Remick). The three are drawn into a dangerous triangle when Kate observes the disguised killer before he commits a gruesome murder and Morris becomes the homicide officer assigned to investigate the case. But director Jack Smight is not concerned with creating a typical murder mystery. He even robs the film of any "whodunit" suspense by unmasking the killer in the opening scene.

A look beneath the film's crime elements reveals Smight's real concern: a study of American momism. He develops his theme through a complex series of image patterns, visual motifs, and dialogues, and he mixes these elements together within the alternating Jewish and Gentile perspectives of Brummel and Gill. Through a carefully developed pattern of images and incidents, Smight relates the murderer to his pursuer, a Doppelgänger structure that centers on the relationship between the killer, the cop, and their respective mothers.

Christopher Gill (Rod Steiger) delivers his dramatic dying speech in NO WAY TO TREAT A LADY (1968).

The film opens with Gill's first murder. Disguised as a Barry Fitzgerald-like priest, and calling out "top of the morning" to everyone he meets, Gill makes his way to the cramped apartment of Mrs. Molloy, a middle-aged widow and lapsed Catholic. After talking a bit, Mrs. Molloy offers the priest a glass of port. Gill stares at the red liquid and remarks to the widow how its color is "like the blood He shed for you and me." He then walks behind the unsuspecting Mrs. Molloy and chokes her to death. After dragging her lifeless body into the bathroom and depositing it on the toilet seat, Gill takes her lipstick and paints a garish red kiss on her forehead. This mark becomes part of Gill's murder ritual, a grotesque signature that eventually helps Brummel capture him.

Smight's initial scene immediately unites religion and murder, two of the film's most important elements, in the first of many moments when the two are fused. For example, as Gill lies dying in the film's final scene, he ironically begs Morris to forgive him, to give him "Christian charity." The Jewish policeman refuses. Rebuffed, Gill grasps the bloody wound on his side and loudly cries out, "Sweet Jesus, save me. O my beloved Savior, please save me." On a metaphoric level, the murderer's every name ties him to Christian symbology: his first name, Christopher, contains Christ within it, and the entire name recalls the patron saint of travelers; his last name, Gill, evokes the image of fish, commonly associated with Christian symbolism. Smight firmly establishes Gill as one part of his delicate balance between Judaism and Christianity, an association that becomes even more evident in the relationships between Gill, Brummel, and their mothers.

Throughout the film, Smight slowly reveals Gill's total obsession with his deceased mother, Amanda Gill, a famous actress who had little time for her son. Often, he integrates Christopher's mother fixation with the film's religious imagery. The walls of Gill's theater, which is named in honor of his mother, contain large portraits of Mrs. Gill in various madonna-like poses. At other times, Smight associates Amanda with sexuality. The theater contains various busts and portraits of Mrs. Gill in her most famous role: Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen who seduced men to her will. All the

women Gill murders are his mother's age, and all are left half-naked on their toilet seats, a symbol of Gill's disgust for them once they have been "violated." Before he murders the kindly Mrs. Molloy, Gill talks with her about his mother using a combination of religious and sexual references. He calls her his "sainted mother" who had such a "voluptuous figure" that when she walked down the street "like a queen, men would pursue her with their eyes." Notice his choice of words to describe how men related to his mother. He uses "pursue" rather than "follow" or even "stare," implying a hunted, violent quality to the male/female relationship. Later in the film, Morris infuriates Gill by telling a reporter that the murderer is clearly a mother-hater. Enraged, the killer calls Morris and, for once, drops his phony accent, an extreme reaction that provides Morris with another clue he will use to trap Gill.

The kiss Christopher leaves on his victims' foreheads shows the combination of repressed sexual longing and murderous disgust he feels toward his mother. In a perverted manner, Gill's killing of these women is an act of revenge on a mother he claims to revere but whom he secretly hates because she neglected him. Symbolically, the lipstick kiss he paints on the dead women's foreheads shows Gill's sublimated desire to have a physical relationship with his mother. He murders his "partners" partially to assuage his guilt over these feelings and particularly to act out his hatred for his mother.

The policeman's side of the story, the Jewish side, emphasizes comedy as Smight juxtaposes Gill's obsession with his mother to Morris's problems with Mrs. Brummel (Eileen Heckart). Initially, Mrs. Brummel epitomizes the castrating Jewish mother so common in sixties literature and culminating in Philip Roth's vitriolic portrait of Sophie Portnoy. Mrs. Brummel berates her son for eating too little, for not finishing college, and for not marrying so she can have grandchildren. In particular, she holds up the accomplishments of her other son, Franklin, the doctor, who earns "a thousand dollars a day." Even Morris's profession is not safe from her constant attacks. "Who ever heard of a Jewish cop?" scolds Mrs. Brummel derisively. "Everyone knows you gotta be Irish to



Gambler Arnold Rothstein (David Janissen) taken to task by his respectable father (Joseph Schildkraut) in KING OF THE ROARING TWENTIES: THE STORY OF ARNOLD ROTHS-TEIN (1961).

get ahead on the force."

Given Mrs. Brummel's overbearing attitude and sarcastic badgering, it seems strange to find Morris dating Kate, a girl with similar traits. When they first meet, Kate pokes gentle fun at Morris's nose and makes humorous comments about how little resemblance the plainly dressed cop bears to his namesake. Moe Brummel is certainly no Beau Brummell. Kate takes almost total control of their relationship throughout the film. She is the aggressor who pursues Morris. On the police tug where the two first declare their feelings for each other, it is Kate who tells Morris he can kiss her. Later, Morris is overjoyed because Kate warns him "to be careful," much as a mother might warn her son to wear his overshoes in case of rain. For the Jewish male, warnings and prohibitions denote caring and love. Though he yearns to free himself of his mother's smothering attention and sarcastic manner, Morris is attracted to a woman with many of the same qualities.

The best example of Kate's ability to manipulate others successfully occurs when she visits Morris's apartment, which—naturally—he shares with his mother. Initially Kate enters the flat and stands on the upper steps leading down to the living room, dominating Mrs. Brummel who has come to greet her. She then steps down to Mrs. Brummel's level, a physical gesture that foreshadows her future assumption of that role in Morris's life. As the evening progresses, Kate wins over the skeptical Mrs. Brummel, who has fretted about the relationship because Kate is not Jewish. She does this by agreeing with, indeed participating in, Mrs. Brummel's attacks on Morris. "Morris is only good for two things," Kate tells her: "Yelling at and ordering around. Oh, I only wish I had met Franklin first." She proves her point by telling Morris to get his feet off the living room table, by ordering him to light her cigarette, and by demanding that he fetch her things throughout the entire evening. In fact, Kate metamorphoses into a younger version of Mrs. Brummel, though she does so with a sly wink to Morris, implying it is a game the two are playing on his mother. Game or not, the implication of Kate's actions are that Morris is trading one mother for another. "She's a gem," declares Mrs. Brummel at the end of the evening, "and she's very much like me." Indeed she is. Thus, Smight slyly comments on the Jewish male's emotional masochism: he fights to overcome the suffocating attention of his mother and then marries a girl just like her.

Smight overtly unites Morris and Christopher throughout the film. Gill calls Brummel after each murder and discusses his crime with the distraught policeman, hanging up before the call can be traced. He even forces the police department to put Morris back on the case, after he has been dismissed for not finding the killer, by threatening to murder another woman if Morris is not reinstated. In the last scene, after Morris shoots Gill and mortally wounds him, the killer summons up one last burst of strength to knock the cop unconscious. Dying, the murderer crawls upon the breast of the policeman, which is how Morris's partner finds the two men. In its own sometimes confusing manner, therefore, *No Way to Treat a Lady* endorses the cloying, hovering Mrs. Brummel over

the detached, distant Mrs. Gill. One motivates neurosis, the other psychosis. The film searches for a middle ground between the two mother images it presents, but finds none. Even the strongest female character, Kate, is reduced simply to imitating one model, Mrs. Brummel. So while the picture presents two negative portraits of mothers and their children, it fails to offer anything resembling a wholesome mother/son relationship.

The differences between the films created by new sixties producers and those of their predecessors is apparent in all movie categories. Most earlier film biographies, for example, spotlighted popular Jewish entertainers (Al Jolson, Benny Goodman, Eddie Cantor), role models of decency and courage (Alfred Dreyfus) or success stories (the Rothschilds, Benjamin Disraeli). The sixties, however, widened the area of Jewish screen biographies to include some far less savory characters. In *King of the Roaring Twenties: The Story of Arnold Rothstein* (1961), the Jewish gangster makes his first screen appearance. David Singer, in his essay "The Jewish Gangster," observes, "The American Jewish establishment—the defense agencies, the scholars, the historical societies—have systematically denied any awareness of this important aspect of Jewish history whose major figures constitute a veritable *Who's Who* in the annals of American crime." Hollywood, prior to this film, had tacitly cooperated in this effort by denying the existence of Jewish thugs, but after the Rothstein picture other Jewish gangsters—Lepke Buchalter, Bugsy Siegel, Meyer Lansky—appeared on the screen.

Director Joseph M. Newman traces Rothstein's (David Janssen) early criminal tendencies back to his childhood rivalry with his brother, Harry. Many of Arnold's boyhood crimes result from his desire to make himself look superior to Harry. Arnold's father (Joseph Schildkraut) intensifies the family tension by continually asking Arnold why he "can't be more like his brother." When he finally curses his brother and wishes him dead, after which Harry suddenly dies, Arnold spends the rest of his life feeling guilty for having caused his brother's death.

Arnold's family problems only partially account for his life of crime. His desire to attain the riches



Arnold Rothstein (David Janssen) plays his last hand in KING OF THE ROARING TWENTIES: THE STORY OF ARNOLD ROTHSTEIN (1961).

and power promised in the American Dream of success motivates many of his actions. "You have no faith in anything but money" his father lectures Arnold, and the story bears out his observation. Arnold's lifelong dream is to have a royal flush in a no-limit game. He leaves his wife on their honeymoon to fix a horse race. He turns on his boyhood friend, Johnny Burke (Mickey Rooney), humiliates him, has him framed, and arranges his murder so



Nicky Arnstein (Omar Sharif) tells Fanny Brice (Barbra Streisand) how much he loves her in *FANNY GIRL* (1968).

he cannot squeal on him. He even goes so far as to fix the world series, an act which disgusts his fellow criminals. Only a Jewish gangster, so it seems, would desecrate the national pastime.

Though not a major part of the story, Arnold's Jewishness does become important in several crucial scenes. When he first brings home his girlfriend, Carolyn (Diane Foster), to meet his parents, Arnold's father asks the girl if she is "of their faith." She answers "no" and then explains she will not convert because she believes strongly in her own religion. "It does you honor" replies Mr. Rothstein, ending the entire issue of intermarriage on a conciliatory note. Arnold's religion also figures in his criminal career, since his main rivals are Irishmen Phil Bulter (Dan O'Herlihy) and Tim O'Brien (Jack Carson). In this way, the film contains remnants of the old Irish versus Jewish competition so prevalent in silent and early sound movies. Rothstein must make his fortune in a business dominated by Irishmen, so he remains an

outsider even in this world of outsiders.

The most lavish biography of the decade, and the one that finally puts Jews into the musical, is director William Wyler's *Fanny Hill* (1968), the story of Fanny Brice. Barbra Streisand's name and nose in their unaltered state represents a turning point in the cinematic portrayal of Jews, one that shows Jewishness as something to be proud of, to exploit, and to celebrate. Streisand revels in the role of the Henry Street comedienne, making her face and body a constantly changing collage of characteristic ethnic expressions and movements. Her phrasing and accent highlight her actions. Here, for once, is the Jewish performer being Jewish, instead of hiding behind a neutral name or twisting his/her features out of shape to conform to a standard of WASP beauty. Unlike gross caricatures such as in the "Cohens and the Kellys" series, the Jewishness of *Fanny Hill* becomes a source of strength as well as of humor. It is, indeed, not only limited to a particular character but forms the emotional, and often the thematic, core of the picture. With the predominance of Jewish writers, the growing ethnic pride heightened by the 1967 Israeli War, the new Hollywood filmmakers' feelings of confidence, and the lessening fears about American anti-Semitism in the Jewish community, it was "in" to be Jewish, and Streisand was as "in" as one could get.

The concern of the Jewish-American community about its own self-image surfaced in regard to *Fanny Hill* in a rather unexpected way, one that had nothing to do with Streisand. The casting of Omar Sharif, an Egyptian, as Brice's gambler-husband Nicky Arnstein aroused some heated debate, not unlike that occasioned by the casting of Vanessa Redgrave, a PLO sympathizer, as a concentration camp survivor in the television production "Playing for Time" (1980). Photos of Sharif in what appeared to be an Egyptian Air Force uniform, later discovered to be stills from a film in which he played an airline pilot, added fuel to Jewish demands for Sharif's dismissal from the picture. Wyler labeled such demands as "ridiculous" and refused to be intimidated. Streisand, too, was angered by the protests. "Because he is Egyptian," she asked, "are we supposed to fire him—or hang him?" The furor died down with Israel's victory in the 1967 war, but it proved at least

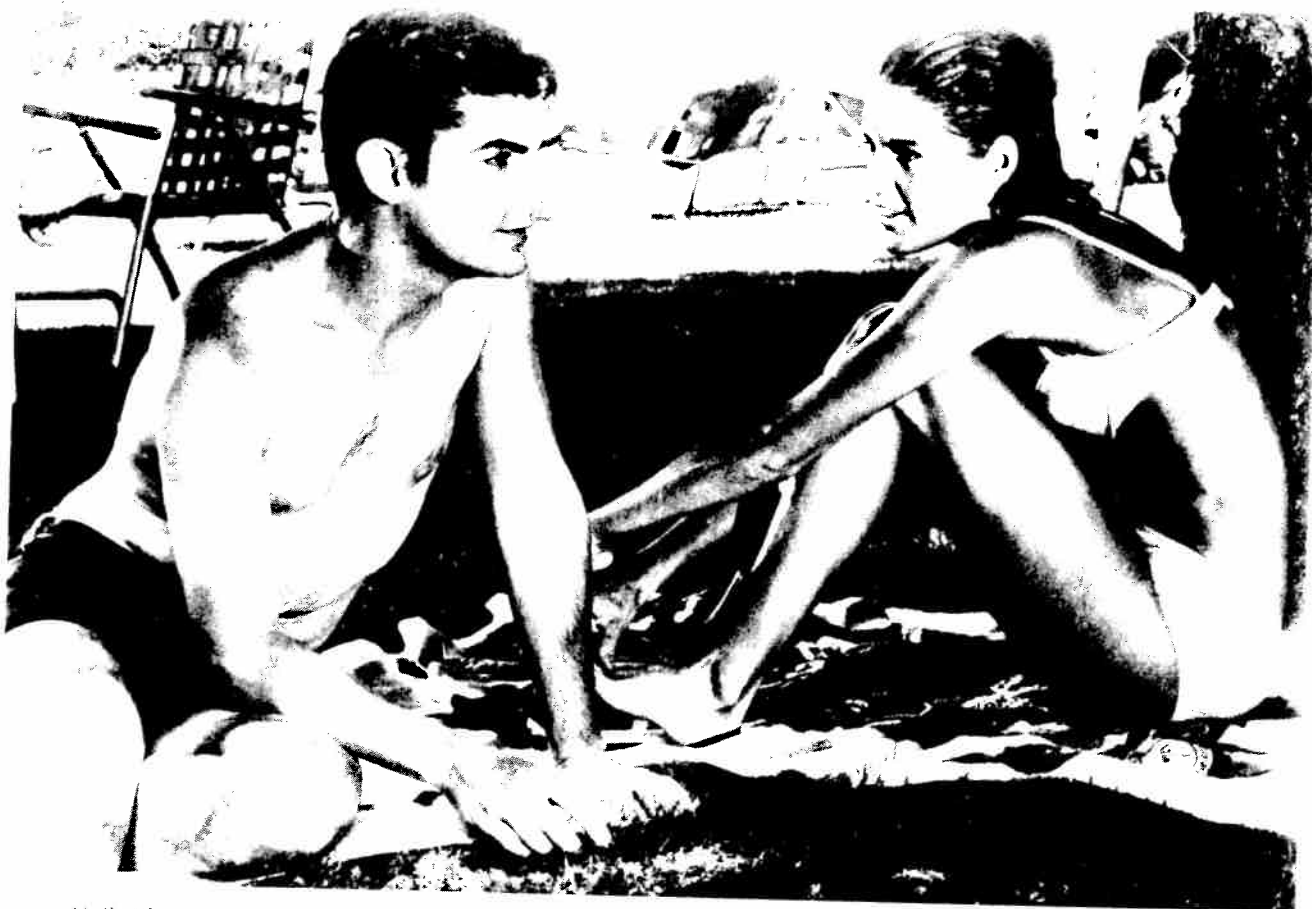


one thing: Hollywood filmmakers finally recognized that how they wrote, played, and directed a Jewish role would have offscreen repercussions. The protest over Sharif's part demonstrated the growing concern of Jews around the country about how they were portrayed on the screen.

"Hi, gorgeous." Those are Barbra Streisand's first words on film, and they give a good indication of the mixture of self-consciousness and self-conceit that dominates *Funny Girl*, and to some extent the rest of her career. Because Streisand usually plays opposite handsome but not specifically ethnic-looking leading men, such as Robert Redford,

A klutzy Fanny Brice (Barbra Streisand) skates out of control in FUNNY GIRL (1968).

James Caan, Ryan O'Neal, Michael Sarrazin, and Kris Kristofferson, her own nontraditional beauty becomes quite evident. In a society where Farrah Fawcett and Suzanne Somers set beauty standards, Nefertiti has to strike out on her own. Streisand does just that, making an issue of her looks while simultaneously eliminating any "problem" because of them. Any audience reservations about her as a romantic lead opposite such standard handsome men vanish when it becomes obvious that they



Neil Klugman (Richard Benjamin) and Brenda Patimkin (Ali McGraw) converse at poolside in *GOODBYE, COLUMBUS* (1969).

find her overwhelmingly attractive, often because her looks are so original.

Streisand's talent, perserverance, aggressiveness, and humor more than compensate for any lack of the traditional idea of beauty that has long dominated America's movie screens. Even the semi-satirical song in *Fanny Girl*, "When a Girl Isn't Pretty," answers the unspoken question with its rhetorical line: "Is a nose with a deviation a crime against the nation?" The film encourages us to accept the belief that talent is what counts, and with enough of it anyone can succeed. The careful mixture of self-mockery and self-confidence established just the right tone, easing the path for other performers whose offbeat appearances might have denied them leading roles, such as Richard Benjamin, Richard Dreyfuss, Bette Midler, and Walter Matthau.

Fanny Girl treats Fanny Brice's Jewish roots kindly and gently, seeing them as partially responsible for her remarkable resilience and zestful approach to life. A sanitized Lower East Side houses

a happy collection of immigrant Irish, Poles, Italians, and Jews all enjoying a marginal life on Henry Street and all joining Mrs. Brice as she celebrates Fanny's theatrical successes. Brice gets her big break in *The Ziegfeld Follies* early in her career. However, her Jewish sensibilities rebel. "It's too easy," she moans looking up at her name in lights on the theater marquee. "Where's all the suffering?" Too easy or not, Brice cleverly capitalizes on the unconventional looks that make her an outsider in the glamorous world of show business. Costuming herself as a pregnant bride, she counteracts the silly, syrupy lyrics she's forced to sing and which seem ridiculous given her physical appearance. Later, she gets laughs as she skates, quite disastrously, through the midst of a chorus line of typically attractive showgirls, playing on her own klutziness to win over the audience.

Throughout the film, Brice keeps in touch with the commonsense training she received in a loving, immigrant Jewish household, never abandoning her Jewish sensibilities or her Jewish pride. In one of the film's most famous musical numbers, "Don't Rain on My Parade," she sings as her tugboat steams past the Statue of Liberty, a symbol of her

own immigrant roots, in search of the totally assimilated Nicky, a symbol of her future. But, unlike Nicky, Fanny never stops being Jewish. She dissolves into Yiddish expressions in Arnstein's suave arms. When he introduces her to first-class life aboard a luxury cruise ship, she notes that the fancy paté is just chopped liver. She marries the worldly Arnstein and, as she exuberantly notes, becomes "Sadie, Sadie, married lady." In fact, the picture hints that one reason Nicky is so attracted to Fanny is precisely because she is so natural, so unpretentious, and so real. Arnstein falls for exactly the kind of girl who reminds him of his own roots now carefully hidden beneath expensive clothes and sophisticated manners.

Neil Klugman in *Goodbye, Columbus* (1969) also searches unsuccessfully for the midpoint between two mutually exclusive worlds, a position that incorporates the most positive values of each environment. Philip Roth's 1959 novella, upon which director Larry Peerce based his film, ignited a stormy controversy about the so-called self-hatred and anti-Semitism many claim dominates the book. In defense of this and subsequent works, Roth argues that his fiction, unlike that of other Jewish authors such as Bernard Malamud and Saul Bellow, rejects the simplistic equation of Jews with "restraint and righteousness" so common in American literature. Instead, Roth says he deals with the "libidinous and aggressive actions that border on the socially acceptable.... The solution to prejudice and persecution," he continues, "is not to convince people to like Jews so as not to want to kill them; it is to know that they cannot kill them even if they despise them." Be that as it may, Roth remains something of a pariah within conventional Jewish circles, a man accused of transgressing the unspoken covenant between all American Jews: never admit to the Gentile world that there are greedy, dishonest, despicable Jews. When the film *Goodbye, Columbus* reached American movie screens ten years after the novella's publication, Roth had just completed *Portnoy's Complaint*, a novel (and ultimately a film in 1972) destined to receive even more vitriolic criticism than his earlier books. Neil Klugman's observations seem rather tame when compared with Alex Portnoy's disturbed memories



A pensive Mr. Patimkin (Jack Klugman) ponders the future of his beloved children in GOODBYE, COLUMBUS (1969).

and outlandish sexual fantasies, but *Goodbye, Columbus* remains one of the most important films in the Jewish-American cinema of the sixties.

The movie's relatively simple plotline revolves around the summertime love affair between Neil Klugman (Richard Benjamin), a discontented Bronx librarian, and Brenda Patimkin (Ali MacGraw), a beautiful college girl home on vacation. Director Larry Peerce opens the picture with an extreme close-up of a jiggling, slippery navel. The camera then pulls slowly back to reveal a lush suburban country club filled with bronzed girls, athletic boys, heavily made-up women, and potbellied men. Throughout the film, Peerce juxtaposes these denizens of the spacious houses and luxurious country clubs of suburbia with the people who live in the crowded streets and cramped houses of Neil's Bronx neighborhood. The congested apartment Neil shares with his Aunt Gladys (Sylvie Straus), seems to shrink even more when compared with the abundant openness of the Patimkin estate. But what have the Jews lost in

their journey from ghetto to country club? What has been the cost of obtaining "refrigerators that grow fruit" and "trees that drop sporting goods?"

These questions rest at the center of Roth's novella, and Peerce admirably captures their spirit in his film. Though disgusted by the parochial crudeness he feels in the Bronx, Neil is equally repelled by the materialistic tastelessness he finds at the Patimkins. "I can't go all the way on either side," he admits to Brenda, "they both seem so ridiculous to me." In that statement lies the complex ambiguity of the movie, and one may assume, of Roth himself. Missing in the Bronx is the fulfillment of the American Dream of economic success. Missing at the Patimkins is a sense of tradition to fill life's hollow spots. Leaving a place at the table for Mickey Mantle, as does Brenda's brother Ron (Michael Meyers), is no substitute for leaving a place for Elijah at the Passover Seder. The Bronx reeks of failure, the Patimkins of spiritual emptiness.

The inability of American Jews to avoid spiritual failure as they attain economic success is at the heart of the relationship between Neil and Brenda. While most commentators center their attention on Brenda, accusing her of being a spoiled little Jewish American Princess unable to see through the sham and pretentiousness of her life, it seems equally important to analyze Neil. In reality, he is nothing but a wishy-washy wimp without a moral center of his own. He condemns and criticizes but never creates. Obtaining Brenda is a triumph for Neil, a sign that he, too, has grasped a piece of the American Dream through securing Brenda's affections. But he always views their affair as a contest. When he makes love to Brenda for the first time, Neil equates it to winning the elusive twenty-first point against her bratty little sister, Julie (Lori Shelle), who always quits the ping pong game when it appears she will lose. Sex with Brenda is aggression for Neil, symbolic compensation for his dull life at home and at the library. Neil not only wants to have Brenda, he wants to dominate her, to take out his various frustrations on her.

The issue which brings these elements to a climax is Neil's demand that Brenda obtain a diaphragm, a symbolic admission of her sexual

activity. The diaphragm becomes an obsession with Neil, part of a complicated power struggle in which he strives to prove his superiority over her and all she represents, by engaging in domineering sexual politics. When Mrs. Patimkin later discovers the diaphragm Brenda has reluctantly purchased, she bans Neil from the house. He angrily accuses Brenda of betraying him to her parents and using his banishment as an easy way to end their relationship. But is it entirely her fault? Most critics say it is, and, indeed, Brenda is not one for confrontations or unpleasantness. But Neil, too, cannot escape culpability for the demise of their love affair. He must have Brenda on his own terms or not at all. His drive for dominance over her to compensate for his own failures in life forces Brenda to reject him. Neil's inability to integrate moral values into the suburban world of vulgar materialism or to find any ethical significance in his gloomy Bronx environment dooms him to exist unhappily in both settings: he remains part of the Bronx while envying, and simultaneously despising, the Patimkins.

The only figure in the film who successfully blends ethical values and material success is Mr. Patimkin (Jack Klugman), Brenda's good hearted father. Unlike his brother Leo, a pathetic light bulb salesman trapped in the past, Mr. Patimkin has been financially successful, and unlike his crass wife (Nan Martin), he has kept his humanity, expressed chiefly through his genuine concern for family. Though proud of his bumpy nose, he is equally happy to fix Brenda's. Displaying his own sense of moral priorities, he lectures Neil on the smugness of the new generation that looks down on their parents because they earn a good living and provide for their families. Willingly, Mr. Patimkin finds a place "in the business" for the dumb but kindly Ron, and he even offers Neil a job if things work out with Brenda. Unlike Mrs. Patimkin, who feels Neil's status makes him unworthy of her daughter, he is unconcerned with Neil's low financial and social status.

Mr. Patimkin's concern for his family manifests itself most clearly at his son Ron's elaborate wedding, a scene of gross gluttony and conspicuous consumption that many in the Jewish American

community found particularly offensive. Such criticism, however, totally ignores the sense of joy and caring expressed by Mr. Patimkin throughout this sequence. At one point, he sits crying with Brenda, spinning out his hopes and his love for her. His offer to buy her a new fur coat is not a bribe, not a form of manipulation, but rather a concrete demonstration of his love and protection. Commentators have argued that such gestures and the sentimental nurturing they symbolize are precisely what have turned the Patimkin children into pampered complainers who expect the world to provide them with whatever they desire. Such is not totally the case. Mr. Patimkin never loses sight of his children's faults and never rejects them because of their failings. His material success is used to support his ethical concerns. Family, not finances, are paramount for Mr. Patimkin, and as such he functions as the moral center of the film.

Goodbye, Columbus shows American Jews struggling to find ways of uniting past values and present demands. Roth offers no solution to this problem. Neither do the films of the sixties. What they do offer, however, is a growing ethnic sophistication and cultural consciousness. No picture containing minorities will ever be the same after the scrutiny provided by sixties filmmakers. It will be up to the seventies and eighties to develop and deepen the way America's filmmakers portray the country's Jews.



Young Lovers with problems, Neil Klugman (Richard Benjamin) and Brenda Patimkin (Ali McGraw) in GOODBYE, COLUMBUS (1969).



Sophie Portnoy (Lee Grant) gives her son Alexander (Richard Benjamin) another of her many lectures in PORTNOY'S COMPLAINT (1972).

Chapter 7

The Seventies

Continuing the diversification in Jewish screen roles begun during the sixties, the films of the seventies present Jewish characters in an even wider variety of parts. The decade's genre films, in particular, demonstrate how seventies filmmakers fit Jewish figures—sometimes in central roles—into conventional characterizations, positions rarely occupied by screen Jews in earlier decades. Previously, for example, relatively few identifiable Jewish characters appeared in Hollywood Western, musical, detective, horror, or gangster films. When they did crop up in such traditional stories, Jews

mainly cavorted comically, beat their breasts histrionically, or fought heroically. Occasionally, specific "Jewish issues" such as anti-Semitism and the founding of Israel engaged filmmakers.

The complex currents of love and hate, of praise and guilt, that characterize many Jewish families became the source of much speculation and dissection during the seventies. One of the hallmarks of Jewish-American life, of course, is the emphasis on family, highlighted by large, noisy rites of passage like bar mitzvahs, weddings, and religious holidays. Children have important roles in such

celebrations, and the Jewish home has always been child-centered. As much as he is babied and protected, however, the Jewish child is expected, encouraged, nagged, and chastised to excel. The guilt inherent in the child's failure to meet his parents' expectations—not to measure up to what the Goldbergs' son achieved or what the Cohens' daughter accomplished—is such stuff as Jewish jokes are made of. Yet it has a serious side. It creates a sustained tension between children and their well-intentioned parents who smother them with gifts and love, while they drive them onward with guilt and cajolery. Eventually, many children come to resent such mixed messages, rebelling against those who "only want the best" for them.

The archetypal cajoler, smotherer, guiltlayer, and castrater is Philip Roth's immortal Sophie Portnoy, who arrived on the screen in director/writer Ernest Lehman's *Portnoy's Complaint* in 1972. Its protagonist, Alexander Portnoy (Richard Benjamin),

presents himself to the world as an urbane, competent city administrator. However, his personal life is in shambles. His suffocating mother, Sophie (Lee Grant), loads him with so much guilt, fear, and frustration that it drives him to a psychiatrist's couch. In desperation, and partly because he knows it will horrify his mother, Alexander takes up with The Monkey (Karen Black), a sexy, Gentile fashion model who fulfills his bizarre sexual fantasies. Like Roth's book, Lehman's movie stirred up a storm of controversy. Fred Hechinger called it "a truly anti-Semitic film...also an unforgivably vulgar one." The film, however, is barely worth the effort to attack it. Lehman totally fails to catch the comic flavor of Roth's novel, and Lee Grant's Sophie Portnoy never comes close to capturing her literary counterpart's complexity.

A frustrated Gordon Hocheiser (George Segal) reproaches his unsavory mother (Ruth Gordon) in WHERE'S POPPA? (1970).



The decade's most vicious screen portrait of a Jewish mother is not Lehman's Sophie Portnoy; rather, it is senile old Mrs. Hocheiser (Ruth Gordon) in director Carl Reiner's *Where's Poppa?* (1970). In notes that accompanied a 1976 screening of the film at the Museum of Modern Art, Leonard Maltin called *Where's Poppa?* "one of the most controversial comedies of the 1970s" and told how the film's initial showing occasioned "violent reactions" from the assembled press and industry members. Such hostility caused Reiner to change the movie's ending, to give it a more upbeat, romantic conclusion, but his alterations failed to stem the heated critical debate that followed the picture's general release. *The New Yorker's* film critic, Pauline Kael, called the movie "full of talent" but then went on to decry that "it all goes down the drain.... The trouble with this sort of unlimited, omni-destructive humor is that there's nothing for our laughs to bounce off, nothing to hold on to—not even an idea behind the movie, or a dedication to the craft of comedy." Vincent Canby of *The New York Times* argued that "the movie works beautifully.... When you come down to it, *Where's Poppa?* is, at its slyly cheerful heart, optimistic." Stanley Kauffmann's review in *The New Republic* offered still another point of view: "The vein is farce-comedy, vaguely surrealistic, in the newly liberated areas of sex and social reference and vocabulary. But Reiner and Klane [the scriptwriter] are drunk on the new freedom and think the mere use of it self-justifying."

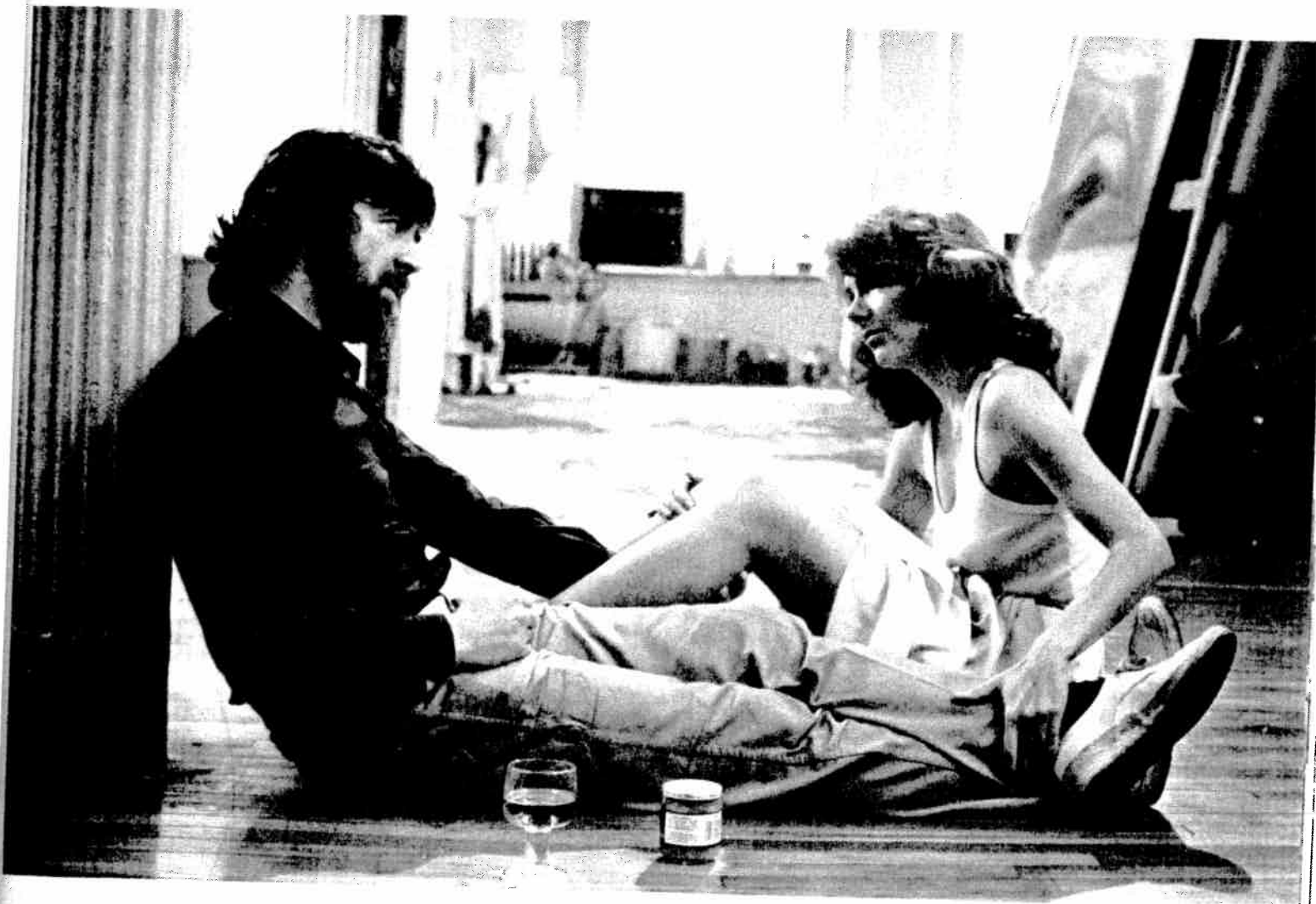
At its center, *Where's Poppa?* is about Jewish son-Jewish mother problems cast in a particularly ugly light. Thirty-five-year-old Gordon Hocheiser (George Segal) promises his dying father to keep his mother out of a nursing home. This pledge results in a series of mother-son clashes that render Lehman's *Portnoy* tame by comparison. Gordon grows to hate his mother so violently that he dreams of throwing her out a window, all the while acceding to her dietary whims (she likes her orange sliced six ways and her cereal soaked in Pepsi) and her domineering orders. At every turn, Mrs. Hocheiser humiliates Gordon: she falls asleep during dinner with her face buried in mashed potatoes; she pulls off his pants and bites his buttocks when he brings home a girl to dinner; she watches television and ignores him when he tries

to talk to her. Reiner's Mrs. Hocheiser possesses none of the saving graces his earlier Jewish mother, Mrs. Kolowitz (Shelley Winters), displayed in *Enter Laughing* (1967). Finally, in desperation, Gordon lugs his mother off to a nursing home, deposits her there, and runs away with his girl friend (Trish Van Devere). The nastiness of this film's Jewish parent-Jewish child relationship is unmatched throughout the decade. It insensitively finds humor in senility and fun in the plight of America's aged. With absolutely nothing to balance her negative qualities, Reiner's Mrs. Hocheiser becomes the most unsavory portrait of a Jewish mother in the history of the Jewish-American cinema.

The most interesting film made during the seventies about mother-son relationships is director-writer Paul Mazursky's *Next Step, Greenwich Village* (1976). Film critic Richard Corliss calls Mazursky "the Horace with the heart of gold," and goes on to note:

Paul Mazursky is likely to be remembered as *the* filmmaker of the seventies. No screen-writer has probed so deep under the pampered skin of this fascinating, maligned decade; no director has so successfully mined it for home-truth humor and quirky human revelations.... Mazursky has created a body of work unmatched in contemporary American cinema for its originality and cohesiveness.

Mazursky's probings come through a distinctly Jewish perception of the world, and one senses that many characters in his films, even some not identified as such, are Jewish. *Alex in Wonderland* (1970) contains a secondary character who, after searching for an identity in hippiedom and drugs, finally accepts his own heritage and becomes an Orthodox Jew. *Blume in Love* (1973) features a Jewish lawyer (George Segal) who does not discover how much he loves his wife until they are divorced. In *Harry and Tonto* (1974), Art Carney portrays a Jewish old man on the road to discovery and independence. Erica's (Jill Clayburgh) lover in *An Unmarried Woman* (1978) is a Jewish painter Saul Kaplan (Alan Bates). A bearded sensitive artist, Kaplan discovers abstract art when his mother "throws a jar of pickled herring at his father and it



splatters on the wall." Mazursky, himself, has said about his work: "I'm Jewish. I was brought up in a Jewish neighborhood. So, it's natural that my films show that part of my personality."

Mazursky's most explicitly Jewish film, as well as his most autobiographical, is *Next Stop, Greenwich Village*. It's the story of Larry Lapinsky's (Lenny Baker) move away from a suffocating homelife with his parents toward independence in his own Greenwich Village apartment. Mazursky opens the picture with Larry packing his suitcase, the final step in leaving his parents' Brooklyn home. He takes a yarmulke out of his dresser drawer, contemplates it for a moment, and then throws it back in the dresser. Later, on the subway ride to the Village, Larry puts a beret on his head.

Saul Kaplan (Alan Bates), a sensitive Jewish painter, becomes Erica's (Jill Clayburgh) lover in AN UNMARRIED WOMAN (1978).

The new has replaced the old, and Greenwich Village is no place for religion. His parting, however, is made difficult by his overbearing mother (Shelley Winters), who forces Larry to feel intensely guilty over "deserting" his parents. When she refuses to kiss him goodbye, Larry erupts in anger: he swears, storms out of the house, and makes his way to "fame and fortune" in a new environment. But he can't leave his mother totally behind; a bit of her still clings to him like unwelcome lint. "Oh boy, am I guilty" mutters Larry in front of his new apartment house, admitting to himself what he won't tell his mother.

Larry Lipton (Lenny Baker) journeys from his Brooklyn home to his Greenwich Village apartment in *NEXT STOP, GREENWICH VILLAGE* (1976).



A Jewish mother in full cry: Lenny Baker and Shelley Winters in *NEXT STOP, GREENWICH VILLAGE* (1976).



Once in Greenwich Village, Larry collects an odd assortment of bohemian friends, but he remains faithful to his girl friend in Queens, Sarah (Ellen Green). Now that he has an apartment, the two are free to make love any time they want, but Sarah seems more interested in washing her hair and keeping her makeup fresh. "Don't you love me?" asks the confused Larry after she rebuffs his advances. "I'm getting a diaphragm aren't I," responds Sarah, as though in answer to his question. When they finally do make love, Sarah tells him "You were fine," as if commenting on a new play. Later when Sarah becomes pregnant, Larry offers to marry her. She says she will think about it, but instead has an abortion without first informing Larry. At the film's conclusion, Sarah still lives at home and continues lying to her parents about where she spends her nights. She, unlike Larry, is unable to break free from her restrictive environment, preferring hypocrisy to direct confrontation with her parents. Indeed, as the picture progresses she seems more and more an unlikely match for Larry's expanding sensibilities: "I think about suicide once or twice a day," he tells her. "That's natural," she responds calmly, "thinking about suicide makes you feel talented."

Larry also has problems with his friend Robert (Christopher Walken), a self-styled poet and intellectual. Mazursky constantly compares and contrasts the dark, very Jewish Larry with the blond, very Gentile Robert, whose intellectual brilliance, good looks, and introspective sensitivity clashes with Larry's ebullient, and far coarser, personality. But Robert is eventually revealed as a superficial, egotistical, and weak character who preys on the feelings of lonely older women to obtain a living. His intelligence, so admired in the earlier segments of the movie, is seen as a weapon that allows him to destroy other people. He even seduces Sarah with no thoughts about his "friend" Larry or about the girl's feelings for him. Robert becomes the most negative character in *Next Stop, Greenwich Village*. His intellectual affectations are simply a disguise for his cruelty: he draws people to him, exploits them, and then refuses to take responsibility for the damage he has caused. He is all show and no substance.

Larry's conflicts with Robert and with Sarah, however, are far less heated than his clashes with his mother. Though he leaves his parents' home for the free, bohemian life of Greenwich Village, Larry never fully leaves his mother behind. Indeed, the film becomes a virtual compendium of Jewish son/Jewish mother conflicts, with enough pop Freudian psychology thrown in to delight any armchair psychiatrist. The weekly visits paid by Larry's parents to his new apartment betray the lack of communication which plagues this family. The three sit silently: the father (Mike Kellin) reads his newspaper, the mother listens to her opera records, and the son stares out the window wishing he were somewhere else. When his uninvited parents show up at his rent party, Larry seethes in quiet embarrassment. His fears that his mother will make a fool of herself—and therefore of him—give way to anger when his friends readily accept Mrs. Lapinsky and she becomes the life of the party. In particular, her semi-seductive dance with Bernstein, the homosexual Black man whose mother named him after her Jewish employers, infuriates Larry, perhaps because he harbors a hidden resentment at seeing her with another "child."

Larry's fantasies about his mother contain these elements of suppressed sexuality and anger. In one, he is reciting Shakespeare before a hostile audience that pelts him with pies. His mother joins them, shouting, "Be a doctor!" In another dream, Mrs. Lapinsky actually takes over Larry's acting class, reciting Shylock's famous "Hath not a Jew" speech to the enthusiastic applause of his classmates. Larry's most clearly Oedipal fantasy has him playing a romantic scene with his mother. At one particularly passionate moment, he grabs her, bends her over backward, and kisses her on the lips. All these dreams speak of Larry's love/hate relationship with this powerful figure whom Mazursky describes as "my own mother [whose] energy was not used, not plugged in. So it fizzled all over the joint. The silver cord tremendously overdone is bad. But no cord is worse."

To Mazursky's credit, he never turns Mrs. Lapinsky into a raging Sophie Portnoy. She is no crass castrater. Her sensitivity reveals itself as she weeps while listening to her opera records, tearfully telling Larry how her one desire is to go to the



Paul Mazursky, director of ALEX IN WONDERLAND (1970), BLUME IN LOVE (1973), HARRY AND TONTO (1974), NEXT STOP, GREENWICH VILLAGE (1976), and AN UNMARRIED WOMAN (1978), frames a shot for his cameraman.



Duddy Kravitz (Richard Dreyfuss) talks with his surrogate father figure Mr. Farber (Joe Silver) in *THE APPRENTICESHIP OF DUDDY KRAVITZ* (1974).

Metropolitan Opera House and actually see her favorite opera singers. When Larry prepares to leave New York for Hollywood, where he has been offered an acting job, Mrs. Lapinsky tells him about his roots, although in serio-comic form: "You come from good stock. Your grandmother snuck across the Polish border buried under sacks of potatoes. The guards put bayonets into the sacks, but she never cried out. That's where you came from." She then hands Larry some apple strudel to eat on the plane to California. By the film's conclusion, Larry, unlike the still resentful Alexander Portnoy, has learned to accept his mother's foibles. "I'm not angry any more," he tells his long-suffering father. "I'm crazy, not angry." Larry recognizes what his mother has done to him, but he also understands her actions were misguided expressions of her love.

Mazursky's loving remembrance of his own past in *Next Stop, Greenwich Village* is much like Fellini's gentle *Amarcord* (1974). In the Village, Larry finds the intellectual and emotional fellowship

missing at home. His sojourn allows him to accept his mother more readily, opening him to a very real humanism that converts his anger to mature compassion. Unlike Portnoy, Larry is not crippled by his life within a "Jewish joke." Though it creates problems, such a life also strengthens Larry and provides him with confidence in his own talents, whereas Robert is driven to cruelty to "prove" his superiority.

Mazursky never loses sight of the feelings of insecurity, guilt, and frustration that are part of his background. But he never becomes either a totally assimilated Groucho Marx or a bitter, cynical Lenny Bruce. He turns his aggressions and frustrations into warm comedy. Because his films present us with portraits drawn from his Jewish roots and lessons learned from his Jewish perspective of the world, they are high points in the history of the Jewish-American cinema.

Director Ted Kotcheff's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1974) also focuses on family tensions, but this time on son/father relationships. Throughout the picture, Duddy (Richard Dreyfuss) obsessively searches for a father figure he can admire. Ambitious, he quickly outgrows his biological father, Max (Jack Warden), a taxicab driver part-time pimp, and replaces him with the "Boy Wonder," Jerry Dingleman (Henry Ramer). At first Dingleman's apparent financial success dazzles the young Kravitz, but he soon sees Dingleman for what he is: a relatively small-time wheeler-dealer who exploits Duddy by having him smuggle heroin across the border into New York. Duddy eventually gains his revenge on Dingleman. In one of the film's most brutal scenes, Duddy savagely humiliates the severely crippled Dingleman, mocking his now-defeated rival. In so doing, Duddy ignores his own spiritual paralysis. He has become the new boy wonder, but at what price? Along the way, he has abandoned those characters who represent the film's ethical center, his girl friend Yvette (Micheline Lanctot), his best friend Virgil (Randy Quaid), and his grandfather. The gross materialism of Dingleman's world has overwhelmed Duddy Kravitz. He, too, has become a cripple by destroying the people and things that could have made him whole.

The second father substitute Duddy finds is Mr.



Farber (Joe Silver), a wealthy junk dealer. A nouveau riche Jew who stages a lavish bar mitzvah for his son, Farber takes Duddy into the steam bath—a traditional place where Jewish fathers held man-to-man talks with their sons—to teach him the realities of the business world. Amid the hellish environment of heat and steam, Duddy confesses to Farber his guilt about an accident in which the epileptic Virgil, whom he has unscrupulously employed as a driver, is crippled for life. Farber warns Duddy that he must get the paralyzed Virgil to release him from all liability, noting that he himself had let his own partner go to jail rather than take responsibility for a death in his junkyard. “It’s war Duddy; it’s war,” Farber lectures Duddy. “If you want to be a saint, go to Israel and plant orange trees.” Farber’s ruthless pragmatism becomes Kravitz’s credo, his way of dealing with all business and personal relationships. Later, Duddy heeds Farber’s advice by

Tevye (Topol) holds one of his frequent conversations with God in FIDDLER ON THE ROOF (1971).

forging Virgil’s name on a check and taking his friend’s last scrap of money to purchase a valuable piece of property.

Duddy also seeks masculine guidance from his revered grandfather, his beloved *zaida*. “A man without land is a nobody,” the patriarch tells his grandson. But Duddy understands the old man’s statement simply on a literal level; he totally misses the moral implications of his *zaida’s* words, the emphasis on family and on roots. In a sense, Duddy attempts to unite the old world values of his grandfather with the new world economics of Mr. Farber via the purchase of beautiful Laurentian farmlands that he will develop in Kravitzville. But the grandson loses his *zaida’s* respect by forging Virgil’s name to obtain the land. Ultimately, the



Golde (Norma Crane) consults Yente (Molly Picon), the village matchmaker, about her daughter's chance for a good marriage in FIDDLER ON THE ROOF (1971).



"Do you Love Me?" asks Golde (Norma Crane) of Tevye (Topol) in FIDDLER ON THE ROOF (1971).

zaida refuses Duddy's offer of a home on his property because he despises his grandson's shady dealings. To the old man the process of achieving a goal is as important as the goal itself, a moral consciousness totally ignored by the rapacious Kravitz. For Duddy, the land is not important for its pristine beauty or for the center it can provide his disjointed life. Instead, it becomes just another way of making money, an investment devoid of human values or ethical meanings.

So Duddy's search for a surrogate father figure fails. At one point in the movie, Duddy himself assumes the role of father in a strange family setup with Yvette as mother and the crippled Virgil as their helpless child. But the peace and comfort inherent in this lifestyle fails to satisfy the money-hungry Kravitz. As the film concludes, we are aware of Duddy's hollow victory. The itch so much a part of his physical demeanor becomes an objective correlative for the constant yearning for money that no amount of scratching will ever relieve. His head convinces his heart that he has become a success, even though the film's most positive figures—Yvette, Virgil, his *zaida*—reject him. There is no one but the dumb, admiring Max to share Duddy's land with him. We last glimpse Duddy running to the left of the screen, and then back again to the right, and then to the left once again. Devoid of moral or ethical guidance, he lacks any direction. We have no doubt that Duddy Kravitz will "make it" in the world of business, but we mourn what he has left behind rather than envy what lies before him.

The most popular Jewish musical of the seventies was *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971), an idealized and nostalgic version of *shtetl* life that received an Academy Award nomination for Best Film of the Year. The picture's plotline follows the trials and tribulations of an old-world patriarch, Tevye, forced to confront a changing world: his three daughters marry against his wishes, his poverty condemns him to a life of want, and his fear of the alien, Gentile world surrounding him affects his every act. Despite his troubles, Tevye maintains his dignity, humanity, sense of humor, and ethical strength. But he is trapped in a time of shifting values, a man of tradition assailed by a world of rapid changes. In this figure of the put-upon

dairyman, director Norman Jewison offers his audience a strong vision of Jewish family life, community involvement, and religious devotion.

Beneath this nostalgic surface, *Fiddler on the Roof* presents a rather conservative message, probably more as a result of Sholem Aleichem's tale, upon which it's based, than of Jewison's direction or Joseph Stein's script from his stageplay. On this subtextual level, the movie becomes a series of warnings about the price one pays for abandoning his heritage. It opens with Tevye's lusty rendition of "Tradition," a song about his people who, perched like a fiddler on the roof, have been able to survive for centuries because of a strong sense of tradition inherent in their religious and cultural prohibitions. Ironically, the rest of the film deals with a breakdown of these traditions and the disasters that result. All three of Tevye's daughters marry against his wishes, and the wedding of each is coupled with tragedy. Tzeitel (Rosalind Harris) marries a struggling tailor (Leonard Frey) instead of agreeing to an arranged match with a wealthy butcher (Paul Mann); her wedding is interrupted by a pogrom. Hodel (Michele March), Tevye's second daughter, weds a penniless student (Michael Glaser); he is soon jailed for his revolutionary activities and sent to Siberia. Chava (Neva Small) marries a non-Jew (Raymond Lovelock); shortly after, the entire Jewish community is evicted from Anatevka. In varying degrees, Tevye comes to accept all three marriages, all three deviations from tradition, even forgiving his supposedly "dead" daughter by muttering "God be with you," as she and her Gentile husband leave Russia with the departing Jews.

Clearly *Fiddler on the Roof* sides with love rather than tradition, a foreshadowing of what values await the immigrants in the new world to which they are forced to move. Because he ultimately accepts love over principle, Tevye resents the assimilationist ethos so common in Hollywood's Jewish-American films from the silent days onward. But by juxtaposing negative events with these triumphs of love over tradition, the film creates an implicit cause and effect relationship between the breakdown of religious prohibitions and the arrival of destructive events. Tevye's acceptance of new ways over traditional customs topples



Lila Kalodny (Jeannie Berlin) and Lenny Cantrow (Charles Grodin) embark on a disastrous Miami honeymoon in THE HEARTBREAK KID (1972).



Kelly Corcoran (Cybil Shepherd) flirts with Lenny Cantrow (Charles Grodin) during his honeymoon in THE HEARTBREAK KID (1972).

Katie (Barbra Streisand) and Hubbell (Robert Redford) share a tender moment during their marriage in THE WAY WE WERE (1973).



the fiddler from his perch; he is seen walking alone at the film's conclusion, following Tevye to a new land. Whether or not Jewison consciously intended his film's subtextual message is debatable, but perhaps not finally important. Underneath its assimilationist exterior *Fiddler on the Roof* shows a real concern for traditions, an element which adds an oblique criticism to the film's apparent acceptance of new-world, democratic choices. To miss this level of the film is to ignore its insistent, though understated, message: a place for tradition must be found in contemporary life.

Another film about the dangers of ignoring "tradition" is director Elaine May and screenwriter Neil Simon's *The Heartbreak Kid* (1972), one of the most interesting and unjustly overlooked screen versions of the Jewish-Gentile romance. May opens the movie with a shot of Len Cantrow (Charles Grodin) in a jaunty sports car—the Jew playing WASP playboy right down to his unlit pipe, nifty hat, and driving gloves. Nevertheless, Len marries Lila Kalodny (Jeannie Berlin) in a traditional Jewish wedding. Throughout this marriage sequence, May emphasizes family ties and Jewish traditions. The wedding takes place in Lila's home, not a huge rented hall. In the scene's warmest moment, Len and Lila, safely buffered from the outside world by a protective circle of relatives and friends, dance an enthusiastic hora.

Len and Lila are hardly out of New York and on their way to a honeymoon in Miami Beach when trouble develops. Their sexual relations range from horrible to boring, as Len's fantasy of married life clashes with the very real woman in rollers and face cream asleep beside him. Lila keeps repeating how nice life will be together "for forty or fifty years," pointing out old couples who totter by arm in arm. Such a thought fills Len with dread, as does the distasteful vision of Lila with egg salad dripping from the corners of her mouth as she drones on and on in a seemingly endless monologue of trivia.

Once in Miami Beach things get worse, particularly after Len meets Kelly Corcoran (Cybill Shepherd), the spoiled little rich daughter of a wealthy Minnesota businessman (Eddie Albert). May emphasizes the differences between the cool WASP and the unhappy Jewish bride in a series of crosscuts that juxtapose Kelly frolicking in the surf

with Lila lying in bed covered with cream to soothe her outrageous sunburn. At first, Kelly flirts with Len just to annoy her bigoted father who moves his family out of the plush Miami Beach hotel because he doesn't like the "element" there. As the relationship between Kelly and Len develops, he begins talking with her about being together for "forty or fifty years," symbolically assuming Lila's subservient role in this new union with Kelly. Finally, Len can stand no more of Lila. He tells her he wants out of the marriage, and in an orgy of guilt, gives her everything but nine hundred dollars which he uses to pursue Kelly back to Minnesota.

Once there, Len's "otherness" becomes evident. The cold whiteness of the Minnesota landscape contrasts with the hot sun of Miami and the colorful warmth of New York City. Dressed in a skimpy overcoat, one fine for New York but woefully inadequate for Minnesota's bone-chilling winters, the desolate Len shivers and freezes in his lonely motel room. All he has left is his Jewish cleverness. After outsmarting the blond, Nordic footballers who hover around Kelly, Len convinces her to take him to her father's mountain retreat. Once there, Kelly remains a tease. She says they can undress and look at each other, but cannot touch. Kelly firmly controls their sexual contact; she determines whether, when, and where they will make love.

After several trying incidents, Len finally convinces Mr. Corcoran that he is serious about Kelly, even refusing a hefty bribe offered by the exasperated father who feels this is not a suitable match for his daughter. The second wedding stands in sharp contrast to the first. May ties the two celebrations together by inserting strains from "Close to You" and "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing" within each segment. This time, however, the marriage couple take their vows in a large Christian church, not in the intimate surroundings of a private home. Len's best man is someone he barely knows and doesn't like, one of the dumb jocks he outsmarted to win Kelly. The wedding ceremony is as cold as the Minnesota winter and as formal as the uncomfortable outfits worn by the participants. At the reception that follows, the wedding guests talk and mingle politely. There is no dancing, no



A distraught Katie (Barbra Streisand) tries to convince an unbelieving Hubbell (Robert Redford) that their marriage can be saved in THE WAY WE WERE (1973).

joyous outpouring of love and tenderness. Len is left almost completely alone at the reception. A few guests talk to him now and then, but he is soon abandoned to some children, who eventually find him as boring as do the rest of Mr. Corcoran's friends.

Finally, Len sits by himself on a large, overstuffed sofa, an outsider at his own wedding left to contemplate what life will be like in this new world he cannot possibly ever fully enter. He has won the Irish sweepstakes. He has captured the heart of the Irish princess, the golden *shiksa* goddess deemed the ultimate prize in previous intermarriage movies. But *The Heartbreak Kid's* final, silent moments force us to examine what Len has lost. Kelly represents the romanticized American dream made flesh. To capture this dream, Len gives up his family, friends, and heritage, a poor bargain in the eyes of May and Simon.

In *The Way We Were* (1973), director Sidney Pollack also explores Jewish/Gentile romance, but from a different perspective. On its simplest level, *The Way We Were* represents another Streisand

reversal of the typical inter-ethnic romance, this time the prize being the archetypal golden boy, Hubbell Gardiner (Robert Redford). The first meeting between Katie Moroski (Streisand) and the perfectly groomed Hubbell reveals how different from each other the two really are. He is the typical college fraternity boy with his snazzy convertible, crewcut, and v-neck tennis sweater. She is already the dedicated political activist, passing out leaflets against Fascist Spain. When Hubbell questions Katie about her cause, she dismisses him as another callous hypocrite, telling him contemptuously: "Go eat your goldfish. I won't try to make a Jew out of Hitler." While Katie addresses a rally, the rebuffed Hubbell lounges with his head in the lap of a more cordial partner: a blond sorority girl who cares nothing for Katie's "innocent women and children being blown to pieces in Spain at this very moment."

As time passes, however, Katie and Hubbell draw closer together. She admires his autobiographical short story, "The All-American Smile," in which Hubbell's protagonist admits that "everything came easy for him." Later, he asks if she is angry all the time because she's Jewish, or poor, or first-generation. "All three," she replies. Though they have little in common, Hubbell and Katie grudgingly start to respect each other. For her, he represents all she claims to despise: "impossibly handsome, e. impossibly invulnerable, impossible." For him, she becomes the only glimmer of truth in a world of "long American legs" and cashmere sweaters. Katie is the belligerent outsider embarrassed by her fleeting desire to be part of the "in" crowd, while Hubbell is the insider who longs for something more. Each possesses an intriguing spark of "otherness" that sets them apart.

Years after they graduate from college, during World War II, Katie and Hubbell accidentally meet again, this time in a New York City nightclub. Hubbell, resplendent in his snow-white summer uniform, dozes drunkenly on a barstool, a beautiful blonde caressing him. When the blonde abandons Hubbell, Katie takes her place on the barstool. But it is not the same Katie Hubbell remembers from college. Her hair is now straightened and she is smartly dressed. Eventually, Katie takes Hubbell home and into her bed, though their

sexual activity is less than memorable as Hubbell passes out in the middle of it. The next morning, he tries to tell her why she attracts him:

You hold on and I don't know how. And I wish I did... Maybe you were born committed... I can't be negative enough. I can't get angry enough. And I can't be positive enough.

To keep Hubbell, Katie must give up precisely what attracts him the most: her commitment. In effect, she becomes what she has always hated, one of those giggling airheads for whom "the war and the world are largely a frame of reference for jokes and quips and funny stories." She trades in her Jewish conscience for WASP blandness. Even Hubbell recognizes the futility of her gesture:

You're unhappy unless you do something. Because of me you've been trying to lay out, but that's wrong. Wrong for you, I'm wrong for you... Commitment is part of you. Part of what makes you attractive, part of what attracted me to you.

Katie, however, will not admit this.

Ultimately, they marry and move to the lotusland of dreams and illusions, Hollywood, where Hubbell becomes a successful screenwriter and Katie dedicates herself to looking "as though she has always driven in convertibles with the top down." They finally part over the HUAC hearings. Hubbell wants to "sit it out," but Katie cannot. She fights back with all the tools at her command, eventually alienating Hubbell. Commitment in the abstract is fine for him; but when it threatens to have consequences in the very real world he inhabits, Hubbell backs away, frightened about his job and his reputation. The strain proves too much for both of them. She loses respect for him; he can't tolerate her activism. In the film's last scene, Katie has become Mrs. David Cohen, has allowed her hair to return to its natural frizziness, and is handing out anti-bomb leaflets for SANE in New York City. They meet for a moment by chance on a city street. Katie touches Hubbell's hair in a loving gesture, but they realize their life together is past history. Hubbell

cannot even summon up the courage to see their daughter, leaving her to grow up as Cohen and not Gardiner.

In his perceptive discussion of this film, critic Barry Gross argues that Streisand's Katie Moroski becomes a new type in the American cinema, "a Jewish American Princess that is not the usual spoiled rich bitch Ali McGraw plays in *Goodbye, Columbus*." Even more, he notes, *The Way We Were* is one of only a handful of Jewish-American pictures that opposes assimilation. Katie overcomes the lures of a blond, glittering Gentile world to emerge as her own person. In so doing, she rejects the price of success paid by so many Jewish characters from Jakie Rabinowitz (*The Jazz Singer*) to Len Cantrow (*The Heartbreak Kid*): a loss of heritage, personal identity, and Jewish traditions. Her commitment is not only to political causes, but also to herself as a worthwhile human being and as a Jew, dramatically represented by the fact that she doesn't force her irregular curls into a straightness currently demanded by a homogenized society. To fit in, to become "respectable," Katie temporarily forsakes the parts of her personality that make her so compelling a character. Ultimately, she refuses to do this. Being accepted as a woman is part of her triumph. Being accepted as a Jew is equally important. Because it rejects the stifling "melting pot" mentality that characterizes the vast majority of Jewish-American films, *The Way We Were* becomes an anti-assimilationist picture that proclaims the virtues of the one over those of the many.

As the seventies witnessed the emergence of the strong woman protagonist, so too the decade saw a forgotten figure in Jewish-American films appear: the elderly Jew. The American cinema, in general, has never been particularly receptive to presenting older characters in leading roles. Filmmakers feared it would fail to interest the young moviegoers who were their steadiest customers in a culture that is almost totally youth-oriented. In the seventies, however, increasing attention was paid to the plight of the elderly, and the result is a series of pictures that examine old age from the perspective of sexuality, poverty, love, and death.

Two films featuring older Jews, *The Angel Levine* (1970) and *Lies My Father Told Me* (1975), were directed by Jan Kadar, the Czechoslovakian-born

Morris Mishkin (Zero Mostel) retreats in the face of his black angel's (Harry Belafonte) rage in THE ANGEL LEVINE (1970).



David (Jeffrey Lynas) helps his grandfather (Yossi Yadim) collect junk in LIES MY FATHER TOLD ME (1975).



David Rosen (Lee Strasberg) confronts some black toughs in *BOARDWALK* (1979)



Becky (Ruth Gordon) and David (Lee Strasberg) Rosen share a dance on their fiftieth wedding anniversary in *BOARDWALK* (1979)



director who had previously made *The Shop on Main Street* (1965) in his native land. Based on a short story in Bernard Malamud's outstanding *The Magic Barrel* (1958), the earlier film partakes of the old Jewish mystical tradition critic Irving Malin says occurs when "the supernatural and the trivial jostle each other." Certainly Morris Mishkin (Zero Mostel) needs a miracle. His only daughter has run off with a "nogoodnik," his beloved wife Fanny (Ida Kaminska) is dying day-by-day before his eyes, and his back is so sore it keeps him from working at his sewing machine to earn a living. The kindly neighborhood doctor (Milo O'Shea), who represents the limits of rational thought and scientific accomplishment in the face of death, can do little to help Fanny recover, though he assures the old man she will.

Mishkin's miracle arrives in the form of a Black man (Harry Belafonte) who claims to be not only a Jew but also an angel. Sent from heaven, he must get Mishkin to believe in him within twenty-four hours or lose his powers. Only when Mishkin believes can his miracle occur. Mishkin's early suspicions about this Black man's claims turn to complete disbelief when the angel's very earthy girl friend (Gloria Foster) shows up, insisting that he marry her in light of their four-year courtship. Eventually the white Jew who needs to believe in miracles and the black angel who needs someone to believe in him sit and argue over inconsequential, as the clock ticks away. Only in the terrible twenty-fifth hour does Mishkin come to accept that the Black man is an angel, but by then it is too late to save Fanny.

In his later film, *Lies My Father Told Me*, Kadar sets his tale during the late twenties in Montreal. The Herman family are first-generation Russian Jews. David's (Jeffrey Lynas) parents—Harry (Len Birman) and Annie (Marilyn Lightstone)—were born in Canada, but his *zaida* (Yossi Yadin) emigrated from the old country in 1880. Conflicts between the old and the new dominate the Herman household. Harry, a modern man, dreams of designing "the inventions the world is waiting for," while Zaida, a junk dealer, is content to buy and sell old rags while he waits for the world of love that will come with the arrival of the Messiah. David gets caught between his father's dream of material

success and his grandfather's vision of love. But neither Zaida's world of miracles nor Harry's world of money can spare six-year-old David the pains of growing up. His problems range from acceptance of a new baby brother who robs him of his mother's undivided attention, to conflicts with annoying neighbors who demand that Zaida remove his beloved horse, Ferdeleh, because the animal smells up the neighborhood. After Zaida dies, David climbs up to the loft in their small barn, desperately and vainly waiting for one more glimpse of the old man.

In both his films, Kadar treats older characters with dignity and respect. Both Morris Mishkin and Zaida come dangerously close to stereotypes at moments, but Kadar skillfully pulls back before they develop into clichés. When, for example, Fanny suffers a particularly acute attack, Morris does not dissolve into pathetic weeping. Instead, he begins sewing to relieve his pain, a much more moving gesture than crying would be. Similarly, Zaida's refusal to remove Ferdeleh becomes an eloquent "no" to a world that insists on enforcing arbitrary codes of behavior. When David rejects his father's logical explanations of the world, the "lies" of the film's title, he opts for Zaida's world of quiet love and miracles over Harry's vision of materialism and rational thought. In both these pictures, Kadar's elderly characters suggest a sense of life beyond our daily existence.

The most detailed presentation of Jewish old age in the seventies is director/writer Steven Verona's *Boardwalk* (1979), in which an aging Jewish couple face the crumbling realities of their Brooklyn neighborhood. From his opening montage of old people walking aimlessly around Coney Island, to his last image of David Rosen (Lee Strasberg) sitting alone, Verona fills his film with the joys and sorrows of aging. David is a vibrant, seventy-nine-year-old who still puts in a full day's work at his restaurant, ogles *Playboy* bunnies, and has a loving—and very physical—relationship with his wife Becky (Ruth Gordon). Married forty-nine years and living in the same house, David is a survivor. Unlike his neighbors the Friedmans, who commit suicide rather than "live in fear" of the world surrounding them, David is not intimidated by anyone. His wife is equally independent. Becky,



The Jew as gangster, vicious Márty Augustine (Mark Rydell) in THE LONG GOODBYE (1973).

who dies at home on the day of her fiftieth wedding anniversary, remains a spunky woman right up to the end. Though her beloved piano students have deserted her for younger teachers in newer neighborhoods, she keeps busy by collecting clothes for Israeli children. Together, David and Becky represent a caring Jewish couple for whom old age has added luster to love.

One of *Boardwalk's* notable attributes is Verona's attention to David's heritage. The old man faithfully attends near-empty synagogue services. At one point in the picture, he cleans the entire deteriorating temple as part of a bargain with God to save his wife's life. After Becky's death, the Rosen family sits *shiva* (seven days of mourning) and David responds philosophically to his loss: "God gives and God takes away. We must learn to live with it. Age is a series of losses and death a



*The old-world father (Milton Berle) pleads with his new-world son (Tony Curtis) to change his criminal ways in **LEPKE** (1975).*



*The final moments of Lepke Buchalter (Tony Curtis), president of Murder, Inc., in **LEPKE** (1975).*

member of the family. Surviving, that's my career." His emphasis on Jewish traditions, in deeds as well as in words, makes David the moral center of the picture, a man who reaches out for others while not losing himself.

One aspect of David's reaching out for others is the strong ties of kinship which unite the Rosen family. David and his three children all work in the family restaurant. The entire family spends Sundays at David's house. In his role as family patriarch, David soothes the bruised egos of his daughter (Janet Leigh) and her son (Michael Ayr) after they engage in a number of bitter quarrels that threaten family unity. After a disastrous love affair, the boy chooses to come live with his grandfather—a decision that reflects his respect and affection for the old man. David's compassion reaches beyond his immediate family to a young Black child whom he bails out of jail after the boy is caught stealing food from David's restaurant.

Though *Boardwalk* succeeds in presenting the triumphs and tragedies of old age through a Jewish perspective, it lacks balance in its depiction of Blacks. Despite a scene in which David advises his prejudiced daughter to judge their new Black neighbors by their deeds alone, the film's portrait of Blacks stands as one of the most unpleasant instances of celluloid racism on record. Verona shows Blacks almost exclusively as mindless forces of violence intent on destroying anything that crosses their paths. The Black gang leader wears an Iron Cross. The gang needlessly desecrates David's temple and destroys David's home. Roaming bands of Black youths rape elderly women and rob defenseless old men. The inclusion of David's decent Black neighbors does little to mitigate the film's racism, for these minor characters appear in one short, ineffectual scene that adds little to the movie. Also, the movie's ending, though dramatically appropriate, is quite improbable: the frail David chokes the gang's Black leader to death. The point is, of course, that the Jew is no longer a victim, but his victory seems sadly hollow. One admires Verona's skill in handling the film's Jewish characters but wonders why he cannot create equally compelling, complex Black portraits instead of resorting to simplistic stereotypes.



Criminal mastermind Roth (Lee Strasberg) confers with Michael Corleone (Al Pacino) in THE GODFATHER, PART II (1974).

The seventies also saw the emergence of unattractive Jewish gangsters in a series of crime movies. Important Jewish gangsters appear in *The Long Goodbye* (1973), *Lepke* (1975), and *The Godfather, Part II* (1974). In the first film, director Robert Altman presents a Jewish hoodlum, Marty Augustine (Mark Rydell), who is a rich and powerful underworld boss. Early in the picture, Augustine seeks to frighten detective Philip Marlowe (Elliott Gould) with his capacity for cruelty. He points to his beautiful mistress, JoAnne (JoAnne Brady), and proclaims his love for her to Marlowe. The camera slowly tracks in on JoAnne's angelic face, allowing the viewer to admire her sensual beauty. Suddenly, and for no apparent reason, Augustine smashes a Coke bottle into the girl's serene face, its pieces ripping her skin in agonizing slow motion. Altman quickly cuts around the room, emphasizing the brutal insanity of the moment by

capturing the looks of disgust and amazement on the faces of Augustine's own hoods. Even they shrink in the face of his cold sadism, one of the most horrifying pieces of cinema violence since Lee Marvin hurled scalding coffee into Gloria Grahame's face in *The Big Heat* (1951). "You see that?" Augustine asks the stunned Marlowe, "that's someone I love, and you I don't even like." Marlowe, though revolted by the incident, is powerless to counteract the evil and violence in the world surrounding him and symbolized by this Jewish thug.

Besides the obvious violence he represents, Marty Augustine becomes Altman's clearest symbol of corruption in *The Long Goodbye*. He tells Marlowe he lives next door to Richard Nixon,

emphasizing how crime has become socially acceptable in the seventies. For Altman, Augustine embodies the sudden violence which permeates Marlowe's world. At times, the Jewish hood seems like an affable character: his obsession with physical fitness, his gang of ineffectual buffoons, and his amusing eccentricities are more a target of Altman's humor than of his rancor. Even as a sadistic murderer, the screen Jew acts like something of a clown. But he is more. By disfiguring someone he loves to make his point, Augustine shows the brutality that informs all the characters and situations in Marlowe's seedy world, as well as the suddenness with which violence can strike.

Another Jewish gangster who appears on the screen in the seventies is Louis (Lepke) Buchalter in Israeli director Menahem Golan's *Lepke* (1975), an attempt to create a Jewish godfather film. Hollywood dealt with Buchalter before in *Murder, Inc.* (1960) but never discussed his ethnic roots, nor those of his cohort, Mendy Weiss. The more recent film, however, contains various references to Buchalter's (Tony Curtis) Jewishness, including his Yiddish expressions, his wedding to an Orthodox girl (Anjanette Comer), and his electrocution-day visit from a rabbi. *Lepke* even features a bizarre performance by Milton Berle as Buchalter's old-world father-in-law. The film traces Lepke's career from his adolescent days in Brooklyn to his adult years as leader of the famous Murder, Inc. Throughout the film, Buchalter is clearly identified as a Jew, though the movie provides little insight into what turned him into a cold-hearted killer. Finally, Lepke is betrayed by his own people, is captured by the FBI, and gains the dubious distinction of becoming the only major Mafia mobster ever executed.

The most intriguing Jewish screen gangster of the decade is Hyman Roth (Lee Strasberg), the fatherly criminal so important in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather, Part II* (1974). Roth, a fictitious character, is based on one of the most powerful Jewish criminals in American history—Meyer Lansky. Roth, like Lansky, rules his underworld empire more by brains than brute force. Since he is not the focus of the film, Roth's life beyond his criminal activities is not explored as fully as that of his Italian counterpart, Michael

Corleone (Al Pacino). But what scraps there are prove interesting. At first, Roth is seen in his modest Miami house, munching on a sandwich and watching a baseball game on television. "I've loved baseball since Arnold Rothstein fixed the World Series in 1919," he tells Michael, the young don who has come to negotiate an alliance with the Jewish branch of the mob. In this initial meeting, Roth seems like a gentle old *zaida* (grandfather) who gives Michael advice and understanding. In fact, he resembles the most important person in the young man's life, his dead father (Marlon Brando), and at times during the film Roth consciously plays on Michael's need for a father figure.

But the innocuous-looking old man puttering around his Miami house is not to be taken lightly. Later in the film, Michael and Roth meet in the latter's plush Havana hotel to discuss a merger: Roth wants Corleone to invest in Cuban enterprises with him. As they sit on the hotel terrace, Hyman boasts of his power: "We're bigger than U.S. Steel," he tells the young gangster, repeating a claim once made by Meyer Lansky. Indeed, the mob controls the island. In one scene, Roth and ITT representatives join Cuba's corrupt dictator, Fulgencio Batista, for dinner to discuss how they will divide the spoils obtained at the expense of the Cuban people.

Once back in his hotel, Michael witnesses violence in the streets of Havana and becomes convinced that Batista's regime is doomed. He understands that Roth has made a bad decision by underestimating the people's desire to rid themselves of Batista. For this reason, he backs out of his deal with Roth. Michael looks over the course of the Cuban Revolution that follows and makes the following observation: "If history has taught us anything, it's that you can kill anyone." No one is safe in the world of Michael Corleone; no one can escape violence. Proving this point, Michael orders Roth assassinated when he seems most protected—surrounded by FBI agents. Roth's death leaves Michael the most powerful man in the underworld organization. His new-world business tactics, learned while a student at Harvard, triumph over the old-world manner of Roth. A new generation has taken over the underworld, and it has no room for Hyman Roth.

Lee Strasberg, the legendary head of the famous Actors Studio, endows Roth's character with a complexity far beyond the written words of the script. He emerges as an intriguing figure who looks like a cuddly grandfather but who has the instincts of a rattlesnake. Though he prefers to cajole rather than murder, Roth clearly understands the limits of persuasion. His soft-spoken manner is simply a cover-up for his murderous designs. Coppola makes at least two points in his portrait of the Jewish gangster within this predominately Italian environment. First, Roth has tremendous power, but he underestimates his own vulnerability. Eventually, the aging hoodlum falls prey to the newer business methods Michael employs with far superior skill. Second, the Jew, unlike his Italian counterpart, has no sense of personal honor. He violates the implicit code of Mafia loyalty and becomes an outcast even among this band of outsiders. The Jewish gangster is somehow different. As Carlos Clarens notes, atonement is such an inherent part of the Jewish ethos that the major Jewish gangsters to merit film treatments are all made into scapegoats of one form or another, something rarely seen in Italian gangster pictures.

During the seventies, several Jewish-American films featured contemporary problems like Black/Jewish relations and feminism. Other movies, however, sought to recreate the past. Among these was director Joan Micklin Silver's *Hester Street* (1974), an overly sentimental adaptation of Abraham Cahan's *Yekl, A Tale of the Ghetto* (1896). Cahan, editor of America's largest and most influential Yiddish newspaper, the *Jewish Daily Forward*, was himself an immigrant who harbored few illusions about the difficulty of life in the old country but was aware of the price that adjustment to American life extracted from his fellow immigrants. As a dedicated socialist and a perceptive observer of Lower East Side life, Cahan recognized the positive and negative effects of Americanization, the losses and gains this new land offered its incoming Jews. Silver, however, lacks Cahan's grasp of this complex situation. In place of his open-ended questions about life in America, she offers a series of either/or positions. In her world, one must either reject the past or the present, the new

Yankel Podkownik (Steven Keats) goes from Greenhorn to Yankee in HESTER STREET (1974).



Gitl (Carol Kane) tries to become a "modern" girl to please her Americanized husband in HESTER STREET (1974).





Oskar Werner, a distinguished Jewish doctor who has been dismissed from his university post, and his aristocratic wife (Faye Dunaway) dress for dinner in VOYAGE OF THE DAMNED (1976)



Wendy Hiller and Luther Adler as an elderly Jewish couple who hope to find freedom outside Germany in VOYAGE OF THE DAMNED (1976)

or the old, the European or the American. Nowhere is there a recognition of the need to find a healthy blend between two alternatives, a middle ground that will provide the Jewish newcomer with some sense of traditional Jewish values and still allow him to adjust to the new realities of American life.

Hester Street follows Cahan's basic storyline: Yankel Podkovnik (Steven Keats), a Russian Jew, emigrates to America, changes his name to Jake, shaves off his beard, sheds his orthodox ways, and becomes involved with Mamie Fein (Dorrie Kavanaugh). Along the way to becoming an American, he forgets about his wife, Gitl (Carol Kane), and his son, Yossele, back home in the old country. Shaken by his father's death, Jake finally sends for his family. When Jake comes to Ellis Island to fetch them, he is repelled by his wife's traditional wig and his son's earlocks. He hurriedly hustles Gitl and Yossele back to a small flat on Hester Street, which they share with Mr. Bernstein (Mel Howard), a scholar in the old country but now an embittered sweatshop worker. Gitl's attempts at Americanization fail to satisfy Jake, and she turns to the gentle Bernstein for solace. When Mamie offers her a bribe if she will divorce Jake, Gitl, now thoroughly disgusted with her insensitive husband, accepts the money. She then prods Bernstein into marriage, telling him how she will use the funds to buy a grocery store, run it for them, and let him sit in the backroom and study. Jake and Mamie, now broke, must start over again.

The clear clash of values in *Hester Street* is personified in the characters of Jake and Bernstein. Jake plunges into American life, totally divorcing himself from his past. He strives to be a "Yenkee" right down to his ill-fitting new clothes, his name change, and his attempt to teach his son baseball. Bernstein, on the other hand, retreats to the past via his books. He hates his job and the satanic sweatshop owner who exploits him, he despises the customs of the new world, and he refuses to integrate more than is necessary for survival. "A Jew is a Jew," he lectures Jake, summing up his parochial attitudes. Neither Jake nor Bernstein seem able to unite past and present. The former rejects history and the latter rejects present reality. Using the differences between Jake and Bernstein,

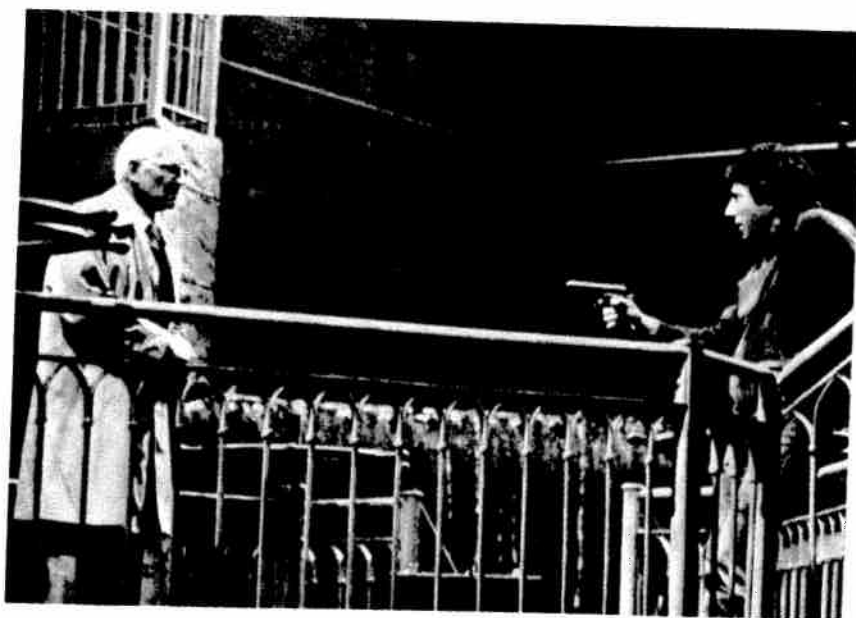
Silver makes her point. All the characters who adopt American values and accede to the demands of modern life are negative. Bernstein, however, becomes the positive center of the film's value system; his past traditions are seen as more solid than the hollowness of present values.

It is in Silver's treatment of the past and the present, rather than in her evocation of the Lower East Side milieu, that *Hester Street* becomes the most sentimental Jewish-American film of the decade. It forces us to reject the present in favor of a dimly remembered past. Even Gitl, who possesses the intellectual and emotional potential to unite the intellectual and emotional demands, fails to accomplish much worthwhile. Her dream of operating a grocery store while Bernstein, symbol of the past, sits in the back room reading his books, merely continues the *shtetl* tradition of supporting the scholar. Bernstein's heritage and learning will not enhance the present. Gitl's running the store will have nothing to do with Bernstein, and will not alter his derisive attitude toward anything in the new world. Bernstein may as well be sitting in Kiev as in New York City. Thus, *Hester Street* fails to incorporate Cahan's complex vision of life in America, but offers only mutually exclusive alternatives that fail to satisfy.

The preoccupation with the past seen in Jewish-American genre films such as *Hester Street*, *The Frisco Kid*, *The Big Fix*, and *Fiddler on the Roof* is also evident in the decade's movies that deal with Nazis and Jews. Some like *Cabaret* (1972), *Voyage of the Damned* (1976), and *Julia* (1977), actually set their action in an historical context. Others, such as *The Man in the Glass Booth* (1975), *Marathon Man* (1976), and *The Boys From Brazil* (1979), transport Nazis into contemporary times and pit them against modern Jews. Almost all the pictures represent something of a response to the pro-German feelings prevalent during the seventies, both on and off the screen. Film critic John Mariani's discussion of this phenomenon in *Film Comment* (1979) concludes that "an understanding of man's inhumanity to man is one thing; hero worship is another.... Those who do not learn from the past generally make movies about it." Certainly, films like *The Eagle Has Landed* (1977) put the



Natalia Landauer (Marisa Berenson) and Fritz Wendel (Fritz Wepper) celebrate their wedding in *CABARET* (1972).



Bebe Levy (Dustin Hoffman) finally triumphs over Szell (Laurence Olivier), a sadistic Nazi dentist, in *MARATHON MAN* (1976).



Dr. Mengele (Gregory Peck) trapped by Nazi hunter Ezra Lieberman (Laurence Olivier) in *THE BOYS FROM BRAZIL* (1979).



The infamous Nazi geneticist Dr. Josef Mengele (Gregory Peck) displays no repentance for his horrible experiments in *THE BOYS FROM BRAZIL* (1979).

audience squarely on the side of the Nazis. For example, it encourages the audience to cheer a group of Nazi commandos sent to capture Winston Churchill, ostensibly to allow Hitler to negotiate a peace with the Allies. The Germans in this film, with the exception of Himmler (Donald Pleasance), are all well-behaved and courteous. One commando (Michael Caine) even spares a Jewish Polish woman from some unnecessary roughness.

The perverseness of *The Eagle Has Landed* is undone by the self-righteous mawkishness of director Stuart Rosenberg's *Voyage of the Damned*. The historical events which inspired Steven Shagan and David Butler's script remain compelling today. In May 1939, the German liner *St. Louis* set sail for Havana carrying 937 Jews who had paid their government for the right to emigrate to Cuba. They proved to be pawns in an elaborate propaganda exercise. Hitler wanted to demonstrate that none of the countries—including the United States—protesting against his anti-Semitic policies would be willing to provide sanctuary for the refugees. He was right. Most of the Jews were forced to return home and many later died in concentration camps.

Rosenberg's star-studded spectacular jettisons any real examination of this event by creating a series of melodramatic vignettes that exploit the very real tragedies of the doomed Jews. Oskar Werner plays a distinguished doctor who has been dismissed from his university post, and Faye Dunaway plays his elegant wife. Sam Wanamaker depicts the mental collapse of a prominent German lawyer disbarred after Hitler comes to power. Nehemiah Persoff and Maria Schell portray a middle-class couple who have sold all their possessions to raise the fare for their trip to Cuba. Wendy Hiller and Luther Adler appear as a frail, elderly couple who hope to spend their final days together in freedom. Unfortunately, the plot is overloaded with stories treated in a fashion that robs them of any true dramatic impact. We never get to know these characters as real people; they remain merely types, as the actors and actresses deliver what, in effect, are a series of cameo roles.

German Jews also play a part in director Bob Fosse's *Cabaret*, a powerful evocation of Germany in the thirties that remains the cinema's most

socially conscious musical. Though the protagonists, Brian Roberts (Michael York) and Sally Bowles (Liza Minnelli), become aware of the Nazi menace early in the film, they ignore the signals that spell danger, letting personal pleasure blind them to political realities. The brutality of the Nazi regime, evident in the beating of Sally's boss at the Kit Kat Klub where she sings, and the anti-Semitic slant of the musical number "Two Women," seem of little interest to the earnest British student and his kookie American neighbor at Schneider's Rooming House. In the film's most powerful scene, however, even the two hedonists are forced to face the world. Brian and Sally stop at a country beer garden when an angelic-faced young German begins to sing "Tomorrow Belongs to Me." The camera slowly pulls back to reveal more and more Germans rising to their feet and singing along with the boy. Slowly, but steadily, the music becomes stronger and more militant, almost everyone in the beer garden joining the youth.

Anti-Semitism strikes closer to home when Sally and Brian's friends, Fritz Wendel (Fritz Wepper) and Natalia Landauer (Marisa Berenson), become potential victims of the Nazis. Fritz and Natalia meet when Brian gives them both English lessons. After Fritz declares his love for her, Natalia shyly reciprocates. But with the Nazis becoming increasingly more of a dominant force in German life, she refuses to marry him because he is not Jewish. Apart, the two lovers remain miserable, until Brian prods Fritz into making a dramatic revelation to Natalia: he admits he is a Jew trying to pass as a Gentile in these troubled times. Together, Natalia and Fritz flee Berlin to escape the Nazi brutality.

In the films of the seventies, the Nazis' brutal treatment of Jews was not confined to the past. In several movies it surfaces in contemporary times and its victims are modern Jews. *Marathon Man*, for instance, features a sadistic ex-Nazi (Laurence Olivier) who tortures a Jewish graduate student (Dustin Hoffman) to obtain information the boy does not have. Eventually, the Jew turns the tables on his German tormentor, forcing him to feel some of the pain he caused others, and finally killing him. *The Boys From Brazil*, in which Olivier switches roles from Nazi to Jew, advances the

science-fiction notion that rich ex-Nazis living in South America have placed clones of Hitler among ninety-four families throughout the world. They hope to recreate Hitler's childhood in the lives of these boys and thus bring into the world their ultimate product: another Adolf Hitler.

Heading this nefarious venture is the infamous Dr. Josef Mengele (Gregory Peck), who supervised the gruesome medical "experiments" at Auschwitz and was called "The Angel of Death" by the inmates there. A Holocaust survivor, Ezra Lieberman (Olivier)—a character based on the famous Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal—learns of the plot and sets out to foil the Nazis. He confronts Mengele at the home of one of the clones where the doctor has gone to murder the boy's father, thus duplicating the death of Hitler's father when he was fourteen. Ultimately, Mengele is ripped apart by a pack of killer Dobermans.

At the film's conclusion, director Franklin Schaffner has Lieberman burn the list showing where the clones have been placed, rather than allow a young, militant anti-Nazi to kill all the children. "We're not in the business of killing children," he tells the Jewish radical who demands the list, "any children." Lieberman also points out that it was not only genetics that accounted for a Hitler, but also a specific historical situation at a particular time in Germany's, and the world's, evolution. His instinctive morality, however, is far more important than his intellectual reasoning. Not blinded by the hatred that motivates the young Jewish radical, Lieberman understands that to kill the innocent children would put him in the same class as the Nazis: murderers who execute their atrocities by claiming a higher purpose. His refusal to allow the young anti-Nazi to kill the children breaks the chain of violence and shows the Jew as ethically superior to his fanatical oppressors.

The most thematically complex of the modern horror stories about Nazis and Jews is director Arthur Hiller's *The Man in the Glass Booth*. Its central figure, wealthy real-estate dealer Arthur Goldman (Maximilian Schell), is a strange and secretive tycoon obsessed with overwhelming feelings of guilt and paranoia. Much to the surprise of his loyal secretary, Charlie Cohn (Lawrence Pressman), Goldman is arrested by Israeli secret agents



Arthur Goldman (Maximilian Schell), who may be the sadistic SS Col. Karl Adolph Dorff, captured by Israeli secret agents in *THE MAN IN THE GLASS BOOTH* (1975).



Miriam Rossen (Lois Nettleton), the chief Israeli prosecutor, listens as Goldman/Dorff graphically describes how he murdered thousands of Jews in *THE MAN IN THE GLASS BOOTH* (1975).



Displaying no contrition, Goldman Dorff (Maximilian Schell) tells an Israeli courtroom how he delighted in torturing Jews in *THE MAN IN THE GLASS BOOTH* (1975).

and accused of really being Karl Adolph Dorff—a former SS colonel, sadistic torturer, and brutal killer. Goldman, who never denies the charge, demands the right to wear a Nazi uniform at his trial and be addressed as colonel. Later, he tells an Israeli courtroom full of survivors how he delighted in torturing Jews and then delivers an impassioned hymn to Hitler. All through his trial, Goldman Dorff spars condescendingly with the Israeli prosecutor, Miriam Rosen (Lois Nettleton). Suddenly, the case against Goldman Dorff falls apart. The prosecution's key witness recants his testimony and asserts the man on trial is really a Jew who survived the camps. When he hears this, Goldman Dorff locks himself inside his glass booth, sinks into a trance, and dies. The truth of his true identity is never revealed.

The Man in the Glass Booth shows how difficult it is to assign guilt and/or innocence in a world of complex realities. Throughout most of the film, only Charlie Cohn steadfastly maintains that his employer is not a Nazi, arguing he must be Jewish because he has a dark sense of humor, speaks Yiddish, and hates Jews. Others are equally sure that Goldman and Dorff are the same man. Is Goldman really the sadistic Dorff? Is he a pathetic victim driven insane by his treatment at the hands of the Nazis? Is Goldman a Jew so mortified by the failure of his people to rise up against "a fate beyond their imagination" that he assumes the burden of atonement himself? Unlike *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961), which at least offered a qualified conclusion about guilt and innocence under the Third Reich, *The Man in the Glass Booth* leaves the viewer with more questions than answers.

Questions also rest at the heart of the seventies most important Jewish-American filmmaker. Woody Allen is a writer-director whose Jewish background and point of view are central to his art. In the seventies, Allen emerged as the Jewish filmmaker *par excellence*, and one of the finest director-writers ever to work in the American cinema. Laughter is Allen's shield, his protection against an oppressive world. In much the same way as other Jewish comics, Allen's wit functions as a defense mechanism, a form of self-aggression, and a cry of defiance. But at its best Allen's humor goes

further. What critic/writer Isaac Rosenfeld observed in a 1962 essay about Sholem Aleichem holds equally true for Woody Allen: his comedy is built on "the incongruity between man's ambitions and his impotence to achieve them." Such a statement defines tragedy as well as comedy, and therein lies the essence of Allen's delicate mixture of the serious and the comic: he laughs at man's ineffectual attempts to obtain what he desires.

The Allen screen persona, therefore, is admired for his dreams while he is simultaneously mocked for his failures. Novelist Saul Bellow writes in his introduction to *Great Jewish Short Stories* (1963) that in much Jewish literature "laughter and trembling are so curiously mingled that it is not easy to determine the relations between the two. At times the laughter seems simply to restore the equilibrium of sanity; at times the figures of the story, or parable, appear to invite or encourage the trembling with the secret aim of overcoming it by means of laughter." Similarly, Allen's comedy blends laughter and trembling, pain and pleasure, into a unified, organic whole. To do so, he assumes the screen role of a modern day Menashe Skulnik, the greatest *schlemiel* (luckless creature) of the Yiddish stage, though with a sense of the absurd and a knowledge of contemporary philosophical thought Skulnik never demonstrated.

All of Allen's films contain Jewish humor and identifiably Jewish characters. In *What's Up, Tiger Lily?* (1966), he takes a routine Japanese spy picture (*Key of Keys*, 1964), re-edits it, and then dubs in his newly written, English dialogue. The resulting parody has Jewish detective Phil Moskowitz, played by an oriental actor (Tatsuya Mihashi), searching to recapture the recipe for the world's greatest egg salad, which has been stolen by the evil Wing Fat (Susumu Kurobe). Allen peppers the picture with various Jewish words and jokes. For example, Wing Fat tells Phil his egg salad is so delicious "you could *plotz* [split]," and the man who originally hires Phil is called the "high *macher* [big shot]." A dying character, Shepherd Wong (Tadao Nakamaru), informs his rabbi that, instead of being buried, he wants to be stuffed with crabmeat. Later, a shocked Wing Fat discovers his mother in a boatload of prostitutes, and her explanation would do any Jewish mother proud: "I decided to take an ocean



Miles Monroe (Woody Allen) wins the Miss Universe contest in a dream sequence from SLEEPER (1973).

voyage because you never write." *What's Up, Tiger Lily?* functions as an early film exercise for Allen, allowing him to test his wings before taking a full flight on his own. It also contains, albeit in embryonic form, the type of Jewish figures and humor that will characterize all his screen works.

In *Take the Money and Run* (1969) and *Bananas* (1971), Allen begins to develop as a filmmaker. The earlier picture parodies the documentary, cinema verité format so popular in the sixties and seventies. Allen uses this style to trace the crime career of Virgil Starkwell (Allen), a klutzy criminal who aspires to a career as a daring bank robber. Virgil represents Allen's first screen outsider, a figure who in most of his later movies will inevitably be Jewish. *Take the Money and Run*, like *What's Up, Tiger Lily?*, uses Jewish words as in-jokes. In one scene Starkwell assigns an ex-con, who was once a filmmaker, to "direct" the bank holdup. His plans for the "*shtick*-up," however, go awry when a rival

gang decides to rob the bank at the same time.

In *Bananas*, Allen stars as Fielding Mellish, a lovable nebbish who falls for a student activist (Louise Lasser) he discovers demonstrating against the dictatorship in San Marcos. Eventually, after the girl dumps him, Fielding goes on a vacation to San Marcos, gets involved in that country's revolution, and winds up as the nation's new president. Returning to the United States to obtain foreign aid, Fielding is charged with treason (our government thinks the new country is Communist) and thrown into jail. Finally, Fielding is re-united with his student love, and their wedding night is detailed in a play-by-play manner by none other than sports announcer Howard Cosell.

Allen's Jewish wit makes some telling comments. At one moment in the film, San Marcos's ruthless dictator, General Vargas (Carlos Montalban), contacts the United Jewish Appeal for funds instead of the CIA. Politics and religion are mixed as Allen shows the UJA as a political organization as well as a religious one. But Jews are not the only target of Allen's satire; he also takes dead aim at Christian materialism. A television commercial for New Testament cigarettes pitches the cancer-producing product with the following logo: "You stick with New Testament and all is forgiven." With this one statement, Allen simultaneously pokes fun at revivalist rhetoric and lampoons the union of commercialism and religion that characterizes American life.

Allen concentrates even more heavily on Jewish jokes in his next film, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex* (But Were Afraid to Ask)* (1972) based—improbably enough—on Dr. David Reuben's very popular sex manual of the same name. The movie features seven comic vignettes, short stories really, in which the comedian satirizes modern America's obsession with sex. In one segment, "What are Sex Perverts?," Allen lampoons television game shows. *What's My Perversion?* features a panel of guest stars who try to guess their guests' sexual perversions. One contestant, old Rabbi Baumel (Baruch Lumet), actually gets to act out his perversion on the air: he is bound to a chair, a gorgeous girl whips him, and his wife sits beside him eating pork. For Baumel, watching his wife eat pork, a routine activity for most Americans, is a forbidden activity, a perversion.

In 1972 Allen scripted and starred in *Play It Again, Sam*, directed by Herbert Ross and based on Allen's own successful Broadway play (1969). He plays Allan Felix, a neurotic Jewish film reviewer trying to recuperate from a painful divorce. Unhappy with his own personality, the insecure Allan tries to adopt his idol Humphrey Bogart's sophisticated, tough-guy screen persona, an impossible feat for the balding, timid little Jew. His best friends, Dick (Tony Roberts) and Linda (Diane Keaton) Christie, also try to help the depressed Allan by arranging a series of blind dates for him; each new encounter proves a disaster, as Allan attempts to act like Bogart rather than himself. One night Dick is away on a business trip; Linda and Allan, who have grown closer together as the movie progresses, make love, and Allan is overcome with guilt and shame. Eventually, all is resolved when Linda decides to stay with Dick and Allan meets the girl of his dreams.

Throughout *Play It Again, Sam* there is a constant underlying tension between the successful young executive, Dick, and the unhappy film critic, Allan. Dick's last name, Christie, leads us to see this tension in Jewish-Gentile terms. Allan never quite fits into the world represented by Dick, symbolizing how the Jew never finds his place in Gentile society. Allan's desire for Linda Christie, who is part of Dick's world, shows the side of his personality that yearns for acceptance in that non-Jewish world. In spite of mutual attraction, however, Allan and Linda eventually return to their own worlds.

Allen returned to directing with *Sleeper* (1973), a parody of science-fiction movies. The central character in this picture, Miles Monroe (Allen), is the proprietor of The Happy Carrot Health Food Store. Put into suspended animation in 1973, he wakes up in 2173 to find himself thrust into an alien, totalitarian world. Ethnic jokes, many of them about Jews, abound in *Sleeper*. At one point, two robot tailors—Cohen and Ginsberg—try to make Miles a contemporary outfit. The machines argue constantly with each other, and their finished product is ridiculously large for their diminutive customer. But for all their incompetence, the two robots display a life and charm conspicuously absent in most of the inhabitants of this bland new world. After Miles is captured by government agents and programmed into a near comatose state, his girl friend, Luna (Diane Keaton), and her

friends try to recreate his past to shake him out of his drugged condition. Some futuristic Gentiles fake horrible Yiddish accents to help create the moment Miles told his parents he was getting a divorce. Unfortunately, they confuse the meanings of the Yiddish words: the woman playing Miles's mother tells him "stop whining and eat your *shiksa*." In another recreation from Miles's past, Allen lampoons Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, having the actors speak with heavy Jewish accents. Nowhere in his work is Allen's vision of the Jew as outsider clearer than in *Sleeper*: Miles is an alien in the world of 2173, a man whose Jewish sensibilities are literally out of time and place. Allen envisions a futuristic society that forces its citizens into a uniform blandness, the ultimate extension of the "great melting pot" concept. Miles brings a few sparks of life to this dystopia in which people act like programmed robots.

Allen's art took a major leap forward in *Love and Death* (1975), a film which clearly displays his growing visual sophistication and thematic complexity. Basically, the movie is a visualization of a Russian novel through a comic, Jewish perspective. Allen plays Boris Dimitrovitch Semyonyovitch Grushenko, a cowardly Jewish peasant forced to fight in the Napoleonic Wars in order to save his family's good name and to win the heart of his lovely cousin, Sonia Petrovna Pavlovna Volkonska (Diane Keaton). Once again, Allen's passive Jewish intellectual is out of place, this time in a society dedicated to drinking, dancing, whoring, and fighting. Unsuccessful at all four of these activities, Boris turns philosophical, questioning the existence of God throughout the picture. Early, he dares God to reveal his presence by working some miracle, such as "making Uncle Sasha pick up the check." Sounding much like a put-upon Job, Boris asks Sonia, "If God is testing us, why doesn't he just give us a written?" Boris's obsession with God culminates during his imprisonment for trying to assassinate Napoleon. An angel visits his cell and tells Boris that Napoleon will not execute him. Of course, he is wrong, and Boris is shot in the morning. As the film ends, Boris's spirit tells us that "If it turns out there is a God, I don't think he's evil. The worst you can say about him is that basically he's an underachiever."



An unemployed actor (Zero Mostel) tells Howard Prince (Woody Allen) how the blacklist works in THE FRONT (1976).



Howard Prince (Woody Allen) chases a script he will sell for his blacklisted friend Alfred Miller (Michael Murphy) in THE FRONT (1976).



A romantic boatripe in Central Park is interrupted for Isaac Davis (Woody Allen) and Mary Wilke (Diane Keaton) in *MANHATTAN* (1979).



Aly Singer (Woody Allen) and Annie Hall (Diane Keaton) walk through the streets of New York City as friends and lovers in *ANNIE HALL* (1977).

In *The Front* (1976), which he neither wrote nor directed, Allen plays the straight dramatic role of Howard Prince, a small-time Jewish bookie who becomes a front for some television writers blacklisted during the fifties. Initially, Howard is a man without much of a conscience or a political consciousness, one who thinks the biggest sin is "to buy retail." As the film develops, however, Howard is forced to abandon his noninvolvement and take a political stand. His friend, blacklisted writer Alfred Miller (Michael Murphy), tells Howard: "You always think there's a middleground you can dance around in. I'm warning you, this time there is no middle." The film proves Miller correct. Harold is hauled before a committee investigating the role of Communists within the television industry and must either inform on his friends or give up his job. By refusing to inform, Howard becomes a *mensch*—a real person. He stands up for his new-found principles, supports his friends, and refuses to buckle under to the committee's intimidation. In Prince, director Martin Ritt shows a Jew to whom history has taught the value of circumspection. Ritt shows his conversion into a man ready to take a stand and fight for his ideals.

Allen's next film, *Annie Hall* (1977), is his most successful, winning four Academy Awards (Best Picture, Screenplay, Actress, and Director), as well as numerous other prizes. Like Paul Mazursky, who brought many of his thoughts about his own heritage together in *Next Stop, Greenwich Village*, so too Allen's *Annie Hall* ties up many of the loose strands about the comic's Jewishness into one artistically satisfying package. The film starts with Allen facing the camera, alone, and delivering a stand-up comedy routine to the audience in the movie theater. He begins with a joke about a Catskill Mountain hotel guest complaining to her friend about how terrible the food is at the resort. "Yes," replies her friend, "and such small portions." He ends the picture with a similar joke. A man complains to his psychiatrist that his brother thinks he's a chicken. "Why not have him committed?" asks the puzzled doctor. "Because we need the eggs," responds the man. Allen turns both jokes into parables, short tales which convey a sense of spiritual truth beyond their comedy. Like the friend in the first story, Allen understands that

life is "full of loneliness and misery and suffering and unhappiness and it's all over too quickly." Like the patient in the second joke, he thinks that relationships are "totally irrational and crazy and absurd. But I guess we keep going through them because we need the eggs." Allen thus frames *Annie Hall's* story between two Jewish jokes, and in fact, the entire film presents an almost uninterrupted series of jokes that have meaning far beyond the obvious humor.

Allen's protagonist in *Annie Hall*, comedian Alvy Singer (Allen), is the most Jewish of all his screen characters, a man obsessed with paranoia, guilt, sexual hangups, death and childhood fantasies. He claims, for example, that the Federal government's refusal to support fiscally ailing New York, the city of "leftwing, Communist, Jewish, homosexual pornographers," is clearly an anti-Semitic act: he tells his friend Rob (Tony Roberts) such a refusal is "a matter of foreskin, not economics." Alvy's personal relationships are also dominated by his paranoia. He feels television executives have it in for him because he is Jewish. "Did Jew go to lunch yet?" he imagines them saying, when all they really ask is "Did you go to lunch yet?" Though he sums up life as a mixture of the "horrible and the miserable," Alvy, like the Catskill Mountain hotel guest, absurdly wants a larger portion.

Alvy's bittersweet love affair with the archetypal WASP dream girl, Annie Hall (Diane Keaton), is doomed to failure because of their cultural and emotional differences. She is a blond *shiksa* from Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, whose favorite expression is "La De Da," who orders pastrami on white bread with mayo and lettuce, and who tells Alvy he's what her Grammy Hall would call a "real Jew." He is the cynical New York Jew, the morbid intellect who only reads books with death in the title. It is through Annie, this refugee from a "Norman Rockwell painting," that Alvy finally comes to accept his own alienation, his own separateness from Gentile America. Of course, Alvy has had trouble with women before. His first marriage ended in divorce when he refused to make love to his wife (Carol Kane) because he was too obsessed with the John F. Kennedy assassination theory. His second marriage disintegrated when his preten-

tious mate would no longer tolerate Alvy's boorish behavior at literary cocktail parties. Even the hippie *Rolling Stone* reporter (Shelley Duvall) describes sex with Singer as a "Kafkaesque experience."

Like many other Jewish screen characters, Alvy Singer displays an obsession with his past. The whole film, of course, is about a love affair now over; about how he won and ultimately lost Annie Hall. Alvy, however, plunges ever deeper into his own personal background. At one point, a frustrated Mrs. Singer (Joan Newman) drags her son to see the family physician, Dr. Flicker. Little Alvy has stopped doing his homework because he has read that the earth will explode millions of years from now. When Flicker tells Alvy, "We've got to enjoy ourselves while we're here, don't we?" the supposed rhetorical question hangs in the air unanswered. Allen also related several other incidents from Alvy's childhood, much of which was spent in a cramped apartment located directly beneath an amusement park roller coaster; but these journeys into the past are not simple flashbacks: the director mixes past moments with Alvy's adult consciousness. For example, at one point Alvy finds himself back in his grammar school classroom, where a teacher punishes him for kissing one of his schoolmates. A grown-up Alvy watches the scene, sitting comfortably at a small elementary school desk.

The scenes of Alvy's past give us some indication of how his Jewish childhood influenced his life. Alvy's Thanksgiving Day dinner at the Halls, however, becomes the film's ethnic highlight, and Allen locates it prominently at the picture's halfway point. There, in beautiful heartland America, amid baked ham and under Granny Hall's menacing stare, Alvy turns into a Hasidic Jew. Allen's visual representation of his character's sense of strangeness. Splitting the screen, the director shows the differences between the quiet, refined Halls at their ham dinner and the raucous, noisy Singers arguing over a brisket. Allen endows the scene with even greater impact by allowing Mrs. Hall (Colleen Dewhurst) to discuss the issue of guilt with Mrs. Singer, as we eavesdrop on their conversation:

Mrs. Hall: How do you plan to spend the

Griffith), Joey (Marybeth Hurt)—who barely hide their dislike for Pearl. To the girls, she represents an outside force. They fail to see the life she gives their father and the warmth she is capable of bestowing on this stuffy, New England family. Allen highlights Pearl's "otherness" in a number of different ways. Her bright red dresses, for example, clash with the rest of the film's frozen white interiors. Everything about Pearl and Arthur's first wife, Eve, is dissimilar: Pearl collects slightly erotic black ebony figures, Eve gray vases; Pearl enjoys dancing, Eve visiting old churches. Allen even has Pearl literally breathe life into the family. She gives Joey mouth-to-mouth resuscitation after the girl is dragged from the ocean. Indirectly, the film continues Allen's concern for Jewish vs. Gentile tensions and the role of the outsider in society.

Allen's final film of the decade is *Manhattan* (1979), a visually stunning, black-and-white tribute to New York City and the people who inhabit it. Allen plays a Jewish television writer, Isaac David, faced with a variety of problems. His ex-wife (Meryl Streep) has become a militant lesbian and written a book about their relationship that exposes Isaac as an insensitive boor. His best friend, Yale (Michael Murphy), has left his wife, Emily (Anne Byrne), to have an affair with Isaac's ex-girlfriend, Mary (Diane Keaton). Isaac, himself, is in love with a seventeen-year-old nymphet, Tracy (Mariel Hemingway). The film focuses on the shifting relationships between Yale, Emily, Mary, Tracy, and Isaac. At one point Isaac says, "People in Manhattan are constantly creating these really unnecessary, neurotic problems for themselves to keep them from dealing with more unsolvable, terrifying problems about the universe."

Maurice Yacowar's insightful book about Allen's career, *Loser Take All* (1979), shows how the comic's Jewishness shapes the often contradictory aspects of his movie personality: wise-cracking onlooker, persecuted victim, anxiety-ridden weakling, eternal outsider, guilty paranoid, stand-up comic, hopeless but unbowed lover, figure of moral rectitude. Like Chaplin's immortal tramp, Allen's put-upon little Jew usually finds himself locked into conflict with the alien world surrounding him. Only in his latest movies does Allen allow his Jewish personas some respite from their constant struggles against the alien environment they



Isaac David (Woody Allen) confronts his ex-wife (Meryl Streep) over a book she has written about their marriage in MANHATTAN (1979).

inhabit, perhaps a sign that the offscreen Woody Allen has grown more comfortable with himself.

For Woody Allen, the paranoia, sexual inadequacies, guilt, and fears of his Jewish characters are preferable to the truly scary instability and intolerance that one often sensed in other milieus. In a serious moment, Allen told interviewer Frank Rich that "life is like a concentration camp. You're stuck here and there's no way out. You can only rage impotently against your persecutors." For Allen, that rage takes the form of an unceasing stream of half-comic/half-serious jokes that speak to our fears and uncertainties while they poke fun at our inadequacies. Through his unique blend of laughter and trembling, of horror and of humor, Allen has become the comic conscience of the seventies, a master of sardonic humor that places him in a league with Jonathan Swift and Laurence Sterne.

With the explosion of Jewish gangsters on the screen during the seventies, it was inevitable that Jews would eventually appear on the side of law and order as well. A Jewish cop surfaced earlier in *No Way To Treat A Lady* (1968), and in 1978 Hollywood presented its first Jewish detective: Moses Wine (Richard Dreyfuss) in director Jeremy Paul Kagan's *The Big Fix*. Though I have usually



Private Investigator Moses Wine (Richard Dreyfuss) enjoys a light moment with Lila Shea (Susan Anspach), his former girlfriend in THE BIG FIX (1978).

refrained from delving into the backgrounds of the moviemakers who wrote, directed, produced and performed in Jewish-American pictures, it seems necessary to pay at least passing attention to this factor in relation to *The Big Fix*. Kagan, the film's director, is the son of a rabbi and was brought up in a religious household. During a recent visit to Syracuse University, Kagan told me:

My interest in alienated figures, in outsiders like Moses Wine, comes from my background as a Jew and as the son of a rabbi. The Moses Wine character in *The Big Fix* represents the kind of commitment I associate with Jews. There's an admiration I have for Jews based on the fact that they've been in the forefront of social movements that have tried to equalize the civilizations they've been in. I guess if you get fifteen hundred years of being burned at the stake and being fried in ovens because you're not a Christian you begin to have tolerance for other people. We've been getting the stick for a long time, so I have an identification with those people who are getting the stick now.

Richard Dreyfuss has also commented on his own Jewishness, claiming:

I am immensely proud of being Jewish, to the point of bigotry...I was raised in Bay-side which is ninety percent Jewish. I went every week to Temple Emanuel from the time I was nine until I was sixteen....In a sense, everything I do has to do with my being Jewish.

With its director and its star so aware of their Jewish heritage and how it influences their art, it is no wonder that *The Big Fix* is permeated with a Jewish consciousness that accounts for its tone and feeling, as well as its thematic content.

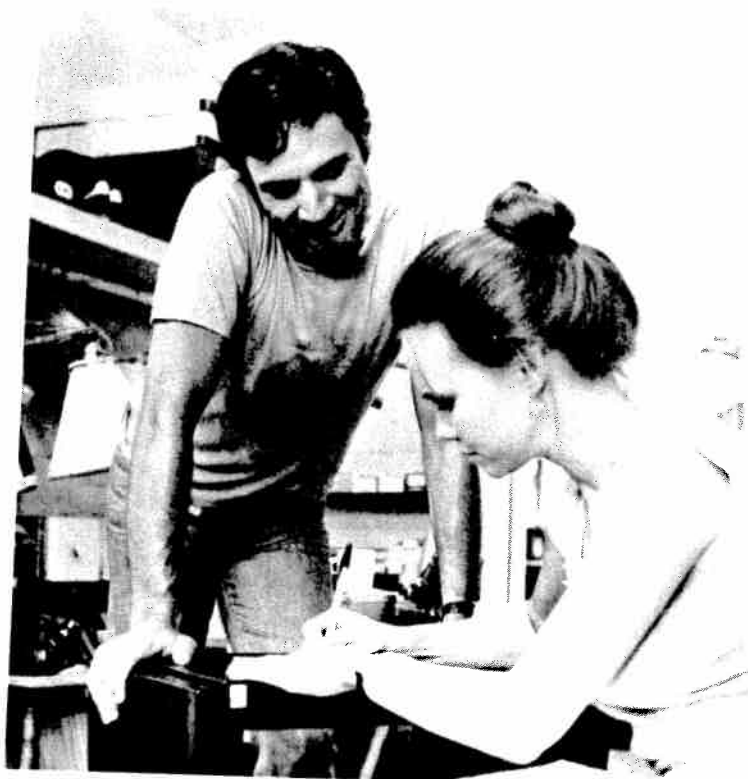
Dreyfuss's Moses Wine is a kind of counter-culture Philip Marlowe. A former sixties radical at Berkeley, Moses is now saddled with a complaining ex-wife, a pair of precocious kids, alimony payments, and a feisty socialist aunt who keeps trying to radicalize her senior citizens' center. He has, however, left his political past behind him. Disenchanted by the failure of sixties activist movements to alter American society, he is now totally apolitical. All this changes when a former lover, Lila Shea (Susan Anspach), re-enters Moses' life. Lila, a worker in the Hawthorne-for-Governor campaign, asks Moses to investigate some dirty political tricks that threaten her boss's election hopes: someone is distributing a flyer that shows Hawthorne with a notorious underground fugitive, thus suggesting an endorsement that could ruin Hawthorne's political future. Once drawn into the case, Moses finds himself on a bittersweet voyage into his political past, a journey that leads him deeper and deeper into a labyrinth of violence, murder, and betrayal. Finally, he unmasks the film's villain, a wealthy businessman (Fritz Weaver) who will go to any lengths, even murder, to keep the class he represents in power.

Like the Jewish characters from *Vengeance of the Oppressed* (1916) to *The Pawnbroker* (1965) to *The Frisco Kid* (1979), Moses Wine is obsessed with the past, in this case his college activist days. His attempt to repress the impulses set free in those times results in a mundane life of boredom. Mostly, his cases are routine. Early in the film, for example, Moses stands counting turkeys outside Poppy's

Poultry as part of an industrial investigation. His private life is no better. He sits waiting for something to happen or he drags his children with him on his silly assignments. But when Lila comes back into his life, Wine suddenly rejoins the living, like a somnambulist snapped out of his trance. Long-dormant romantic feelings spring to life, as the relationship between Lila and Moses blossoms. His political consciousness also returns. As Wine researches the case, he views some television footage of the riots at the 1968 Democratic Convention. In one of *The Big Fix's* nicer moments, Kagan cuts to Dreyfuss's face as he watches these events, tears rolling down his cheeks in a painful, silent tribute to the idealism that once motivated a generation.

Clearly, Moses Wine is not the hardboiled Sam Spade or the cynical Philip Marlowe. He represents a new breed of private eye: the sentimental shamus. How appropriate that such a deviation from the traditional detective's approach to life comes in the form of a Jewish gumshoe. Usually, the screen detective has no past and no future; he exists only in relation to his present case. Here, however, Moses is haunted by his past and frightened by his future; he is a Jew in the sense that he recognizes his place within time. As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Herschel, the leading philosopher of conservative Judaism, once wrote, "Judaism is a religion of history, a religion of time. The God of Israel was not found primarily in the facts of nature. He spoke through events in history." The political case Moses undertakes unites the past with the present and provides hope for the future.

Through the character of Moses Wine, Kagan calls out to the disenchanted sixties activists, beckoning them back to life and castigating the ennui that has turned America's best and brightest into apolitical nebishes. Though they failed to reorder the world, the ideals of the sixties must be turned into a new kind of action in the seventies. If they are not, warns Kagan, then the sixties were simply an aberration and the people who gave the decade its life merely children unable to sustain their faith in the midst of adversity. In a sense, then, Kagan calls to the children of the sixties who became Jewish marginal men when their inner ideals clashed with society's outward demands. Moses, as



Reuben Warsborsky (Ron Leibman) and Norma Rae (Sally Field) go over union strategy in NORMA RAE (1979).

his name implies, functions as a kind of exemplar for these disaffected persons, one who leads himself out of the bondage of inaction, through the desert of confusion, to the promised land of activity, a place defined by each individual through his role in bettering society.

Though some screen Jews of the seventies, such as Duddy Kravitz and Len Cantrow, abandon so much of their heritage that little of consequence remains, other Jewish figures like Reuben Warsborsky in director Martin Ritt's *Norma Rae* (1979) maintain their unique individuality. Reuben (Ron Leibman) enters a totally alien environment and changes it for the better. In the sleepy little Alabama town of Henleyville, a Southern Baptist community dominated by the local textile plant, Reuben finds Norma Rae (Sally Field), an intelligent and spunky woman oppressed by her life of drudgery in the plant. Reuben shows Norma Rae a

better way. He inspires her with his zeal for unionizing, a natural extension of her basic sensitivity for others. In spite of the differences between them, Reuben and Norma Rae become friends, people who care about and respect each other. Together, they become the sparks which ignite the downtrodden textile workers into action, into doing something about their exploitation at the hands of the plant's owners.

Though Norma Rae is clearly the focus of this film, Reuben serves as its intellectual force, an outsider with an alternative vision of life. At times, he undergoes slanderous anti-Semitic attacks by the textile plant's managers—though Ritt downplays this overt form of bigotry—even Norma Rae finds his Jewishness curious. "Are you a Jew?" she asks him early in the film, adding: "I never met a Jew before. Heard you all had horns, but you don't look different from the rest of us." To this, Reuben responds, "We are. History makes us different." Indeed, Reuben is a man with a sense of history. His knowledge of the oppression suffered by his people makes him more sensitive to that experienced by all exploited people. But unlike Duddy, Reuben never abandons his basic morality in his quest for a goal. At the end of the film, Norma Rae and Reuben win their victory: the textile workers overcome their fears of the plant's managers and vote to join the union. Ritt, however, does not let *Norma Rae* drift into simple-minded romanticism. Norma Rae and Reuben part as friends, not as lovers. Each has learned something from the other. Neither will be the same again. Both remain individuals who have not subverted themselves to anyone, or anything, else.

The Western is a particularly good example of the way seventies filmmakers tried to infuse traditional genres with ethnic appeal, adding Jews to the typical cast of villains and heroes usually present in such movies. Historically, Jews and other minorities were among the early settlers of the West. San Francisco's Temple Emanuel was founded during the Gold Rush. Jim Harper, a rabbi, traveled throughout the New Mexico territory serving small towns and earning extra money as a rider in Wild West shows. Otto Meers, known as "The Pathfinder of San Juan," was a prospector, Indian fighter, railroad worker, horse trader, and mountain

climber; he was also a Talmudic scholar and founder of a frontier synagogue. According to James Yaffe, Meers was the only western hero who spoke Indian languages with a Yiddish accent.

The most elaborate treatment of Jews in the Old West is director Robert Aldrich's *The Frisco Kid* (1979), which features Gene Wilder as a gullible Polish rabbi, Avram Belinski, and Harrison Ford as a soft-hearted, rough-talking outlaw who helps Belinski adjust to frontier life. The film traces the growing relationship between the two comrades as they journey from Pennsylvania to California, where Belinski is to assume the leadership of a San Francisco congregation. Their trek becomes paradigmatic of America's westward migration, and for the first time, the Jew shares the frontier adventures so important in molding America's national character. In *The Frisco Kid*, he contributes to the development of American values, dramatically conveyed via the mutual exchange of values and knowledge between Belinski, the foreigner, and Ford, the native Westerner. This Old West odd couple teach each other wisdom, ethics, and even figures of speech: Ford learns "Oy Veh" and Wilder "She-it."

The most interesting part of the film is Aldrich's handling of the put-upon Polish rabbi who graduated eighty-seventh out of his class of eighty-eight. Early in the movie, Belinski is simply the butt of humor. His naïveté results in his being robbed and stripped, symbolically entering this new land like the helpless babe he is. But Aldrich never robs Belinski of his morality. When, for example, Ford involves the unsuspecting Belinski in a bank robbery, the horrified rabbi promptly sends back his share of the loot, much to the annoyance of the outlaw. In addition, Belinski never forsakes his traditions. He refuses to ride on Saturday, even though he risks getting caught by a posse sent to capture them after the robbery. Finally, Belinski risks death at the hands of Indians by refusing to abandon the Torah he has carried from Poland to place in the San Francisco synagogue he is to lead. This demonstration of his courage and dignity impresses the Indians, and they welcome him as a brother. Belinski, acting like a Borscht Belt social director, seals their brotherhood by teaching the Indians to dance a hora. In the film's climactic

showdown, Belinski stands up to a murderous villain, showing an ethical courage that equals Ford's skill with a sixgun.

For all its positive qualities, *The Frisco Kid* is no model of historical authenticity. There is, for example, the too perfect democracy of the Western frontier folk. In his journeys westward, Belinski never encounters anti-Semitism, even at the hands of the villain. His strangeness is by and large accepted, except for a few harmless jokes about his accent made by people who speak English less clearly than he does. In addition, Belinski's observance of religious customs is somewhat selective. He won't ride on Saturday, but he seems unconcerned about the lack of kosher food and eats everything put in front of him. But these are relatively unimportant points. What remains central in *The Frisco Kid* is the way America transforms the Jew and how the Jew, in turn, enhances American life. Helped by the engagingly sympathetic performance of Wilder, Aldrich successfully walks the thin line between amiable sentimentality and mawkishness. Belinski emerges as a person worthy of respect because he respects himself and his own traditions, not because he forsakes his beliefs for American customs. In this sense, the film finds a workable middle ground between heritage and necessity. Belinsky comes to understand and then accept the demands of his new world, while he manages to infuse it with his own sense of morality and tradition.

Seventies filmmaker's paid more attention to the heritage and religion of Jews than did their predecessors. With the emergence of Paul Mazursky and Woody Allen as major American directors whose films demonstrated a consistent Jewish sensibility, the Jewish-American cinema became far more complex and engaging than it had been previously. In addition, the films of the seventies presented a diverse series of Jewish portraits across a vast spectrum of Jewish experiences. Jewish characters now inhabited almost every film genre, possessed both positive and negative traits, and participated in most American occupations. The Jewish-American cinema validated Jews as an integral part of American life; indeed, America could not conceive of itself without its Jews.



Rabbi Avram Belinski (Gene Wilder) finds it difficult to maintain his innocence upon meeting his buxom seatmate in THE FRISCO KID (1979).



Rabbi Avram Belinski (Gene Wilder) frantically holds onto his bat as his horse rears out of control in THE FRISCO KID (1979).