


Reverse Anti-Semitism in the Fiction of Bellow and Roth

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Jay L. Halio,

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Thematic Issue ***History, Memory, and the Making of Character in Roth's Fiction***
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Abstract: In his article "Reverse Anti-Semitism in the Fiction of Bellow and Roth" Jay L. Halio discusses anti-Semitism in Philip Roth's fiction that what might be called reverse anti-Semitism: the active reaction by Jews who are subjected to anti-Semitism. This aspect of Roth's work is not often discussed: it is not the same as philo-Semitism, which takes a different form entirely. Since Roth was an admirer of Saul Bellow, Halio begins by considering reverse anti-Semitism in Bellow's early novel *The Victim*. In the novel the protagonist, Asa Leventhal, is accused by a character named Allbee of costing him his job and his subsequent downfall because of some anti-Semitic remarks he once made involving a friend of Leventhal's. According to Allbee, Leventhal provoked Allbee's boss in such a way that he blamed Allbee for the altercation, which led to his being fired. To clarify more fully the nature of reverse anti-Semitism, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* is invoked to show how the Jewish moneylender Shylock takes revenge against his Christian antagonist, the Venetian merchant Antonio, who has scorned him repeatedly and in many ways. Finally, Halio focuses on Roth's treatment of reverse anti-Semitism in *Portnoy's Complaint*, where Alexander's actions with gentile women he seduces is prompted at least in part by feelings of revenge for the anti-Semitism his father has experienced over many years. Halio also discusses reverse anti-Semitism in Roth's novel *Operation Shylock*.

Jay L. HALIO

Reverse Anti-Semitism in the Fiction of Bellow and Roth

Rightly or wrongly—wrongly, in my opinion—early in his career Philip Roth was considered a self-hating Jew. The stories in *Goodbye, Columbus* (1969), like "Epstein" and "Defender of the Faith," outraged "establishment" Jews who felt that Roth was representing Jews in a very derogatory way (Cooper 41-42). That was nothing, of course, to the outcry that followed the publication of *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969). The critic Irving Howe, who had praised Roth's earlier stories, retracted his good opinion and attacked Roth as a transgressor against the Jewish community (Parrish 129). Roth's defense of his work appears in several essays collected in *Reading Myself and Others* (1975), especially "Writing about Jews." In the present study I explore not the charges against Roth, but what I call his reverse anti-Semitism, specifically in *Portnoy's Complaint*, the novel that so antagonized many Jewish readers. Note that reverse anti-Semitism is not philo-Semitism nor is it anti-Christianity. It is a Jew's reaction to anti-Semitism and the context is important. It sometimes, although not always, involves an element of revenge, as in the example of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Surprisingly, despite the attacks in *Portnoy's Complaint* against anti-Semitism and those who practiced it, little outcry has arisen against that aspect of the book, either from practicing Christians or anyone else.

Roth was and is a great admirer of Saul Bellow, to whom he dedicated *Reading Myself and Others*, noting in the dedication how much he gained from reading Bellow. I do not know how much he admired or was influenced by Bellow's second novel, *The Victim* (1947), which in a way turns anti-Semitism on its head. In Kirby Allbee's harassment of Asa Leventhal we find a kind of reverse anti-Semitism, or rather, the result of Allbee's *perception* of Leventhal's reverse anti-Semitism. While out of work and looking for a job in trade publishing, Leventhal met Allbee through his friend Dan Harkavy, who took him to parties at his friends the Willotsons where Allbee and his wife were also frequent guests. Employed then in New York at *Dill's Weekly*, a trade journal run by a Mr. Rudiger, Allbee arranged for Leventhal to have an interview with Rudiger. He did so partly at Leventhal's request, and partly because of some unpleasantness between them at one of the parties given by their mutual friends the Willotsons (*Victim* 41). The interview, however, went badly. To begin with, Rudiger kept Leventhal waiting for nearly an hour in the reception room and then for a few minutes in his office (42). When Leventhal entered the office, Rudiger's back was turned to him as he watched a few tugs pulling a big liner up the Hudson River. As soon as he turned around, Leventhal knew he had nothing to hope for. When Rudiger started speaking, Leventhal's observation was confirmed: "'No vacancies, no vacancies here. We're filled' Rudiger exclaimed. 'Go somewhere else'" (43). The interview quickly thereafter turned to mutual antagonisms: "a spell had been created, an atmosphere of infliction and injury from which neither could withdraw" (44). The air between them became "charged with insult and rage" (45) until Rudiger finally ordered Leventhal to get out in just those words.

Talking with his friend Harkavy afterwards, Leventhal feared that Rudiger might blacklist him and thus prevent him from getting any other jobs. In fact, he was turned down by firm after firm until he eventually got a job with another trade paper and "his suspicions faded and he ceased to fear Rudiger" (47). He is therefore all the more surprised when, years later, Allbee turns up and begins to harass him relentlessly. By then Allbee is down and out, having lost his job at *Dill's Weekly* and after that his wife and his money. The reason he begins tormenting Leventhal is that he attributes his downfall to him, owing to an unfortunate situation that occurred at the Willotsons' party they both attended before Leventhal's meeting with Rudiger. At the party Harkavy and his girlfriend were singing some spirituals and old ballads, to which Allbee, deep in his cups, strongly objected. "'Why do you sing such songs,' he [Allbee] said. 'You can't sing them.' 'Why not, I'd like to know?' said the girl. 'Oh, you, too', said Allbee ... 'It isn't right for you to sing them. You have to be born to them. If you're not born to them, it's no use trying to sing them'" (40). Mrs. Willotson tried to smooth things over and get Harkavy and the girl to continue, but Allbee persisted in objecting, again arguing that "you have to be bred to them," that is, to the spirituals and old ballads. Leventhal joined his hostess in urging Harkavy

to continue singing, whereupon Allbee said: "Sing a psalm. I don't object to your singing. Sing one of the psalms. I'd love to hear it. Go ahead. I would" (40). When Harkavy demurred, saying he did not know any psalms, Allbee said: "Then sing any Jewish song. Something you've really got feeling for. Sing us the one about the mother" (40).

Obvious to everyone present—even to his wife, who tried to dissociate herself from him—Allbee's remarks were anti-Semitic. The Willotsons, embarrassed, tried again to smooth things over and even made excuses for Allbee. Leventhal was angry but not for long and shrugged the whole thing off. In fact, it was some time later that he managed to get Allbee to arrange the interview Rudiger, which ended so badly and to which Allbee now attributes his downfall. Leventhal is astonished to think that something like the incident at the Willotsons' party would make him go so such lengths, as Allbee believes he did, on purpose to get revenge. "'He overestimated the magnitude of the insult and his power to be insulting', Leventhal says to himself" (41). On the other hand, Leventhal further reflects, the fact that he had later asked Allbee for an introduction to Rudiger should have shown Allbee how little importance he attached to the incident. But Allbee, his wife dead by then and himself quite destitute, is hardly rational. He firmly blames Leventhal for his decline and believes that Leventhal deliberately provoked Rudiger to make him, Allbee, look bad and cost him his job. To make matters worse, even Willotson later tells Leventhal that, while he does not believe Asa actually set out to harm Allbee through the interview with Rudiger, he must nevertheless assume some responsibility for what has happened to him, partly as a result of the disastrous interview.

Allbee's harassment of Leventhal from the very start makes his conviction about the reverse anti-Semitism quite clear. He accosts Leventhal on the street one night as he is walking home after work, claiming he sent Leventhal a letter to meet him. Leventhal denies receiving it and tries to walk away, but Allbee prevents him and makes him sit down with him on a nearby bench. He wants to talk, he says, and what he wants to talk about surprises Leventhal—the business with Rudiger, the "main thing," as Allbee refers to it. "'It was through Rudiger', he tells Leventhal, 'that you got at me'" (32). This astonishes Leventhal, who remembers the incident but not how it was used to "get even" with Allbee. So Allbee continues, reminding Leventhal that it was he who got him the interview with Rudiger, which Leventhal concedes, allowing Allbee to continue: "'Then you went in and deliberately insulted Rudiger, put on some act with him, called him filthy names, deliberately insulted him to get me in bad. Rudiger is hot blooded and he turned on me for it. You knew he would. It was calculated. It worked out just as you thought it would. You were clever as hell. He didn't even give me a week's notice. He turned me out'" (33).

Leventhal denies the charge and says Allbee is mistaken, that it could not be his fault, except possibly indirectly. But Allbee insists that Leventhal is "entirely to blame" (33). When Leventhal asks why, Allbee replies: "For revenge" (33). He refers back to the incident at the Willotsons' party and to "another Jewish fellow," whom Leventhal identifies as Harkavy, who was also there. "'You were sore at something I said about Jews,'" Allbee continues (34). But after some discussion about Allbee's being drunk and Jews' attitude toward Gentiles' drinking, Leventhal has had enough and gets up to leave, arguing "'I had nothing to do with your losing your job. It was probably your own fault. You must have given Rudiger a plenty good reason to fire you, and I can imagine what it was. I'm not the sort who carries grudges. It's all in your mind. I remember all about that night at Willotson's, but you were drunk and I didn't hold it against you'" (34-35). Allbee persists in repeatedly troubling Leventhal, turning up at different times and places, until Leventhal finally begins to reconsider the events that have led up to the present moment. All of them (along with other events in his personal family life) combine to effect a change in Leventhal, making him feel like a more responsible human being. Whether consciously or unconsciously motivated, the reverse anti-Semitism—the revenge that Allbee sees lying behind Leventhal's actions—did have an impact, and Leventhal eventually owns up to it, however reluctantly. But by then Allbee has gone too far, moving into Leventhal's apartment briefly, even bringing a woman into his bed while he is away, and later trying to commit suicide. Leventhal successfully gets rid of his tormentor and resumes his normal life, but he has changed, much for the better. So has Allbee when many years later they accidentally run into each other during the intermission of a Broadway play they attend. Allbee, who has found a new life in radio advertising, says: "I've made my peace with things as they are" and admits that he is now "enjoying life" (294). He is not the type, he adds, "that runs things ... I'm the type that comes to terms with whoever runs

things" (294). But when Leventhal asks him his idea of who it is that runs things, the intermission is over preventing any reply. This is the end of the novel.

The problematic situation Bellow narrates in *The Victim* is hardly of the same magnitude as the reverse anti-Semitism that motivates Shylock's revenge against Antonio in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, but it is of the same order. In that play, the ne'er-do-well Venetian nobleman Bassanio appeals to his friend and benefactor, the merchant Antonio, to help him woo the rich heiress Portia, who lives in Belmont. Antonio, unfortunately, has most of his liquid assets tied up in overseas trade. Nevertheless, he tells Bassanio to try to borrow money using Antonio's credit as a wealthy Venetian merchant (1.1.177-85). Of course, that amounts to getting a loan from a money-lender, or usurer. Consequently, Bassanio goes to the Jew Shylock to try to arrange for a loan in Antonio's name (money-lenders, or usurers, in Shakespeare's time were often, but not always, Jews, and were despised for their profession as well as for their religion. Although Jews were not permitted to live in England, they did live in Italy and elsewhere, and in any case stage Jews in England were invariably usurers).

There is no love lost between Antonio and Shylock; on the contrary, Shylock complains that Antonio has treated him badly, spitting on his "Jewish gabardine" (1.3.109) and in other ways offending him, but far worse causing him to lose profitable loans by lending money out gratis (1.3.41-2). He carefully mulls over the loan Bassanio wants—3,000 ducats for three months—until Antonio appears on the scene. A change then comes over Shylock, who seems to want to make friends with the merchant in spite of everything. He even goes so far as to offer the requested loan at no interest—an extraordinary gesture for a usurer to make. All he asks for is some collateral, of which he makes a joke. He asks Antonio to agree, if he fails to repay the loan on time, to forfeit a pound of flesh, "taken / In what part of your body pleaseth me" (1.3.147-8). Not daunted, Antonio, sure of a good return from his ventures at sea, agrees at once to the deal. When Bassanio demurs, Antonio reassures him, and Shylock continues his joke. Speaking to Bassanio, he says: "Pray you, tell me this: / If he should break his day, what should I gain / By the exaction of the forfeiture? / A pound of man's flesh taken from a man / Is not so estimable, profitable neither, / As flesh of muttons, beeves, or goats. I say, / To buy his favour, I extend this friendship. / If he will take it, so; if not, adieu. / And, for my love, I pray you wrong me not" (1.3.159-67). Bassanio's concerns notwithstanding, Antonio accepts the offer. Thus, the young lord is equipped to go to Belmont and woo his rich heiress.

In the meantime, a secondary plot develops, when Lorenzo, another young Venetian, also a Christian and a friend to both Antonio and Bassanio, woos Shylock's daughter, Jessica. Jessica is unhappy at home, bemoaning her father's stingy ways and austere household. At one point she even says "Our house is hell" (2.3.2) and longs for a different kind of life, one that Lorenzo seems to offer. Hence, despite their different religions, she elopes with him, taking a goodly portion of Shylock's fortune with her and determining to become a Christian. Shylock at first is overcome with grief at his losses and cries out: "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter! / Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats! / Justice! The law! My ducats and my daughter! / A sealéd bag, two sealéd bags of ducats, / Of double ducats, stol'n from me by my daughter! / And jewels, two stones, two rich and precious stones, / Stol'n by my daughter! Justice!" (2.8.15-21).

For Solanio and Salarino, two of Antonio's other Christian friends who have heard Shylock, his wail is a source of merriment. But the context of this scene contains another misfortune, not for Shylock, but for Antonio. His several ships at sea carrying his fortune in trade, through which he planned to repay his debt to Shylock, have all foundered and are lost. When Shylock meets Solanio and Salarino the next day, they joke about his losses and then unexpectedly they ask if Shylock has heard about Antonio's misfortunes at sea. The juxtaposition of events is terribly meaningful, at least to Shylock, who cries: "There I have had another bad match ... Let him look to his bond" (3.1.41-4). Indeed, more than once he repeats his warning, menacingly: "Let him look to his bond." When Salarino asks, "What's that good for?" he gives Shylock the opportunity to proclaim his quest for revenge: "To bait fish withal. If it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million; laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies. And what's his reason? I am a Jew" (3.1.50-55). Shylock follows this explanation with the famous lines that, often quoted out of context, defend the humanity of a Jew. But it is in the specific context that Shylock's words have meaning as a formula for reverse

anti-Semitism. Concluding his speech, he says: "If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction" (3.1.60-9).

Shylock is as good as his word and becomes adamant in seeking to cut the heart out of his erstwhile antagonist, Antonio. In the famous court scene (4.1), Shylock rejects vehemently every plea for mercy. Even Bassanio's offer to repay the loan many times over Shylock refuses. It is only the intervention of Portia in disguise as Dr. Balthasar, a doctor of law, who saves the day for Antonio. Acting like the angel in the biblical story in Genesis, the Binding of Isaac, and citing a legal technicality in the bond, she prevents Shylock from carrying out his inhuman act. Moreover, citing another point of Venetian law, Portia indicts Shylock for attempted murder (4.1.343-59), the penalty for which is loss of life and fortune. The Duke, who presides over these events at court, however, shows more mercy than Shylock did earlier. Sparing the Jew's life, he appeals to Antonio also to show mercy. He does, but the "mercy" Antonio affords Shylock for his foiled diabolical attempt depends entirely upon his conversion to Christianity. Valuing his life and at least part of his fortune allowed to him more than his religion, Shylock accepts the terms Antonio offers him for his reprieve. He leaves, sick and embittered, and is never heard from again.

Roth knows his Shakespeare, surely as well as he knows Bellow's fiction, although I cannot claim a direct connection between *The Merchant of Venice* and *Portnoy's Complaint* as regards Roth's use of reverse anti-Semitism. But reverse anti-Semitism, as I describe it, is surely there, if not in abundance or as outrageously as in Shakespeare's play, then in several distinct passages. Let me cite first the most obvious example. It occurs late in the novel, although not late in the adult life of Alexander Portnoy, who throughout his young life, even as early as his teens, he is repeatedly attracted to non-Jewish women. Although brought up in a Jewish household, and even going through bar-mitzvah, Portnoy finds himself unable to connect meaningfully with a Jewish woman. Partly, or perhaps even mainly, this may be because of his domineering mother, Sophie Portnoy, Roth's caricature of the typical "Yiddische Momma." But however attractive he finds gentile women, he is also unable to conceive of marriage to them. Seduction, yes; his libido, which seems almost fully in control of his social life, is part of the reason; but there is another reason, too, which brings us to reverse anti-Semitism.

On the psychiatrist's couch, where all of the novel's narrative occurs, Alex describes his affairs with various young women. One of them is Sarah Abbott Maulsby, whom he meets while serving as an attorney in Washington, D.C. and whom he dubs "The Pilgrim" because she can trace her lineage back to the early seventh-century settlers in America. Except for her irritating preppy slang and calling her friends by their absurd nicknames, like "Poody and Pip and Pebble" (*Portnoy's Complaint* 233), Sarah seems to be a lovely, bright, attractive young woman, far more suitable than Mary Jane Reed ("The Monkey") with whom Alex links up later on. Why then doesn't Alex marry her? One reason—the very reason he has trouble proposing to any other woman (except Naomi in Israel)—is his inability to commit to a woman, the same problem that David Kepesh has in a later novel, *The Professor of Desire* (1977). Sarah's failure to satisfy Alex sufficiently in their sexual intercourse is likely another reason. But Alex recognizes the main reason during one of their sexual involvements, which he describes in his monologue to Dr. Spielvogel: "'I rocked her, I teased her, I made her laugh, for the first time I said, 'I love you too, my baby', but of course it couldn't have been clearer to me that despite all her many qualities and charms—her devotion, her beauty, her deerlike grace, her place in American history—there never could be any 'love' in me for The Pilgrim. Intolerant of her frailties. Jealous of her accomplishments. Resentful of her family. No, not much room there for love. No, Sally Maulsby was just something nice a son once did for his dad. A little vengeance on Mr. Lindabury for all those nights and Sundays Jack Portnoy spent collecting down in the colored district. A little bonus extracted from Boston & Northeastern, for all those years of service, and exploitation'" (240-41). Mr. Lindabury is Jack Portnoy's boss in the insurance company he works for who fails to promote his Jewish employee, though he is clearly one of the best agents working for the firm (it resembles the situation of Roth's father, who worked for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company; *The Facts* 82.) What Alex is doing,

he says, is taking his revenge against the WASP world he both admires and deplors. Elsewhere he puts it very crudely; it is the "Phenomenon known as Hating Your Goy and Eating One Too" (233). He even recognizes that, given her background, family, and milieu, "She could have been a Lindabury ... A daughter of my father's boss" (237).

Earlier while in college Alex enjoyed for a time a romance with Kay Campbell a.k.a. "The Pumpkin" (mainly because of her build). Young, idealistic, intellectual, the two made a nice couple at least for a time. During the 1956 election year, when together they campaigned for Adlai Stevenson, Alex recalls the contrast between Kay's approach to the yokels they met as they went around Greene County, Ohio, near their school. While she steadfastly remained cool and ladylike, never losing her temper no matter how repugnant the yokels appeared, Alex acted like a "barbarian ... sneering, insulting, condemning, toe-to-toe with these terrible pinched people" (218). He thoroughly admired Kay and says: "Christ, yes, this was one of the great *shiks*es. I might have learned something spending the rest of my life with such a person. Yes, I might—if I could learn something! If I could be somehow sprung from this obsession with fellatio and fornication, from romance and fantasy and revenge—from the settling of scores! the pursuit of dreams! from this hopeless, senseless loyalty to the long ago!" (219). But there is more, some of it totally unrelated to Alex's seeking revenge by seducing *shiks*es. Early in the novel, while Alex is still an adolescent, his father lectures him on the paradoxical nature of Christian anti-Semitism. Jack Portnoy's diatribe amounts, in fact, to a reverse anti-Semitism—Jews against Christians. Alex begins the episode by lamenting Jack Portnoy's sad situation: "Oh, this father! this kindly, anxious, uncomprehending, constipated father! Doomed to be obstructed by the Holy Protestant Empire! The self-confidence and the cunning, the imperiousness and the contacts, all that enabled the blond and blue-eyed of his generation to lead, to inspire, to command, if need be to oppress—he could not summon a hundredth part of it. How could he oppress?—he was the oppressed. How could he wield power?—he was the powerless. How could he enjoy triumph, when he so despised the triumphant—and probably the very idea. 'They worship a Jew, do you know that, Alex? Their whole big-deal religion is based on worshiping someone who was an established Jew at the time. Now how do you like that for stupidity? How do you like that for pulling the wool over the eyes of the public?'" (39-40). Jack is astonished that Jesus, "a Jew, like you and me," he tells his son, is worshiped as a God, but he is even more amazed, he says, that "then the dirty bastards turn around afterwards, and who is the first one on their list to persecute? who haven't they left their hands off to murder and to hate for two thousand years? The Jews!" He ends by calling Christianity "a mishegoss of mixed-up crap and disgusting nonsense" (40).

On occasion in *Portnoy's Complaint* Roth can be somewhat even handed; that is, he can satirize Jews as well as Christians. In one chapter he takes off on Jewish dietary laws, but this more or less inevitably leads to a harsher satire on Christians' diets. "Self-control, sobriety, sanctions—this is the key to a human life, saith all those endless dietary laws," Portnoy says (80-81), but then turns to what gentiles eat: "Let the *goyim* sink *their* teeth into whatever lowly creature crawls and grunts across the face of the dirty earth, we will not contaminate our humanity thus. Let *them* (if you know who I mean) gorge themselves upon anything and everything that moves, no matter how odious and abject the animal, no matter how grotesque or *shmutzig* or dumb the creature in question happens to be. Let them eat eels and frogs and pigs and crabs and lobsters; let them eat vulture, let them eat ape-meat and skunk if they like—a diet of abominable creatures well befits a breed of mankind so hopelessly shallow and empty-headed as to drink, to divorce, and to fight with their fists. All they know, these imbecile eaters of the execrable, is to swagger, to insult, to sneer, and sooner or later to hit" (81; italics in the original). The diatribe continues: "They will eat *anything*, anything they can get their big *goy* hands on! And the terrifying corollary, *they will do anything as well* ... Yes, it's all written down in history, what they have done, our illustrious neighbors who own the world and know absolutely nothing of human boundaries and limits" (*Portnoy's Complaint* 81; italics in the original). Roth's irony, as events show, is that Alexander Portnoy himself has trouble finding "boundaries and limits" himself, which is why he eventually finds himself on the psychiatrist's couch.

One might even find another somewhat positive spin on reverse anti-Semitism in several passages in the novel. Take, for example, how Alex describes the attitude of his Newark Jewish neighbors toward high school athletics: "it was for the *goyim*, Let them knock their heads together for 'glory', for victory in a ball game!" (55). At football, Alex recalls, his school (Weequahic High) was "notoriously

hopeless," but however losing a football game was to the young, they realized it was not exactly "the ultimate catastrophe." Indeed, the cheers they shouted out during games boasted that the team was Jewish. For example, consider this cheer: "Ikey, Mikey, Jake and Sam, / We're the boys who eat no ham, / We play football, we play soccer—/ And we keep matzohs in our locker! / Aye, aye, aye, Weequahic High!" (56). As Alex says: "We were Jews—and we weren't ashamed to say it! We were Jews—and not only were we not inferior to the goyim who beat us at football, but the chances were that because we could not commit our hearts to such victory in such a thuggish game, we were superior! We were Jews—and we were superior!" (*Portnoy's Complaint* 56; italics in the original). A curious form of reverse anti-Semitism occurs in a much later novel, *Operation Shylock*, which Roth initially maintained was a true story (it is not; it is fiction, although Roth did actually attend part of the Demjanjuk trial in Jerusalem, the scene of part of the action). In this novel, Roth discovers that someone else is impersonating him, quite successfully, too. Besides looking like him, the imposter dresses exactly like Roth and talks like him. As if this were not disturbing enough, the false Philip Roth goes around seriously advocating Diasporism and proselytizing for it. Diasporism is a political program advocating that the Jews of Israel must return to their European countries of origin to avert a second Holocaust, one at the hands of their enemies, the Arabs.

When the real Philip Roth confronts the imposter he asks whether "stupid people" will say that this resettlement idea makes you "an enemy of Israel." The imposter replies, "I am an enemy of Israel if you wish to put it that sensationally, only because I am for the Jews and Israel is no longer in the Jewish interest. Israel has become the gravest threat to Jewish survival since the end of World War Two" (*Operation Shylock* 41). Of course Israel was "the Jewish hospital" after the Holocaust, providing someplace where Jews could recover from that horror, the imposter concedes, but that is no longer the case. The "miracle" of recovery has now passed, he says, and "the time has come to return to our real life and our real home, to our actual Jewish Europe" (42). "Some real home," Roth replies, and the conversation continues as the imposter explains that he is talking only about "the great mass of Jews [who] have been in Europe since the Middle Ages," during which time their culture and religion flourished. As for Jews who have come to Israel from Arab lands, the situation is different. Given the geographical context and given the recent spate of Moslem anti-Semitism throughout much of the world (to say nothing of the current Iranian threats which post-date the novel), diasporism has a kind of logic, preposterous as it might otherwise seem. In point of fact, some Jews—survivors or descendants of those who suffered in the Holocaust, have returned to the European countries where the Holocaust occurred. To argue, however, that Israel should abandon its newly formed state to avert another disaster is ridiculous. It is reverse anti-Semitism taken to the extremity of absurdity. Or, as Roth puts it, "The resettlement in Europe of more than a million Jews. The demobilization of the Israeli army. A return to the borders of 1948. It sounds to me," he tells his imposter "that you are proposing the final solution of the Jewish problem for Yasir Arafat" (43).

I return to *Portnoy's Complaint* and Roth's other novels: In chasing after *shiksas*, Roth's protagonists do not always seek some sort of revenge. The truth is that they seldom do. The Other retains its fascination nevertheless, and many of Roth's Jewish men hook up with or marry *shiksas*. Roth himself first married a gentile woman, Margaret Martinson Williams, but as he admits, it was to experience "real life," not for any sort of vengeance on WASPs (*The Facts* 89-90). In some of his later novels, for instance, *Indignation* (2008), the protagonist, Marcus Messner, couples with a young woman who seduces him as much as he does her. But in *Portnoy's Complaint* Alex's motivation as often as not is for revenge, one type of reverse anti-Semitism. Historically, of course, the greatest example of reverse anti-Semitism was the foundation of the State of Israel, a thoroughgoing reaction against European anti-Semitism that culminated in the horrors of the Holocaust. Ironically, it is when he lands in Israel for the first time that Alexander Portnoy discovers he is impotent. He tries to seduce first one then another female Israeli soldier, with astounding (to him) consequences. His reverse anti-Semitism seems there to be itself reversed, especially as Naomi tells him off for the kind of poor Jew he is in her estimation. It seems to me—to use an English expression Shakespeare's contemporaries enjoyed—clearly a case of the biter bit.

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