

III. The Image of Barnow

A. Discursive

1. Resplendent natural landscape; @ foothills of Carpathians
2. Tragic historical landscape: 400 martyrs
persecutions of Polish nobility
3. Victims of cholera
4. Shtetl beautiful only from afar
5. reads like an ethnographic study, complete w/interviews

B. Metonymic

1. Cemetery in Elul: epitome of devotion to God
2. Measuring the boundaries: cemetery as seat of arcane customs
3. Nameless Graves: emblems of intolerance
4. Ghetto as place of darkness (313)

C. Metaphoric

1. Cemetery as mock Eden; only refuge; link to imagined future
2. Shtetl as Christ-killer

No biblical analogue: Rebecca sending Eliezer to find a groom for her son.

Shtetl = Ghetto
Yid / Heb. German / Anglo-Jew.

B. Abraham Cahan

1. You can't go home again

Summer '93: painful reunion w/parents in Zurich

earlier, in Paris, reconnected only w/his rev. past in Vilna

i.e., only usable past = self-sacrificing Russian radical intelligentsia

2. Critique of American Jewry

"The Imported Bridegroom" (1898)

IV. Generational Perspectives

A. The SHTETL thru Asriel Stroon's eyes

1. Asriel responds most profoundly to natural. physical landscape for which he has no adequate vocabulary
2. his crisis of identity; tug of war
3. cemetery = dead past

B. Flora & Shaya: Marriage of Old World / New?

comic love story

supposed to vouchsafe continuity

1. FLORA/Bluma: American-born, just turned 20
the only girl of her circle who read Dickens
wants to marry a doctor
as stubborn as her father
FLORA: despite her self-proclaimed interest in writers like Dickens,
her own English is rather crude
Yiddish rendered throughout in flawless English syntax
only Flora always speaks (bad) English
making her appear marred in reader's eye
"a new version of the American vulgarian" (Ronald Sanders)

Tamara the Housekeeper = rabbinic pedigree

Everything that Asriel lacks

Flora amazed at her father's new-found piety

Recitation of Grace

decides to return to Pravly

2. Asriel Stroon, baal-tshuve

upon retirement, suddenly became fearful of death

yortsayt = practice of Judaism in America

cult of the dead
did not understand the meaning of Psalms!
tshuva (in both senses) =
pabulum for the weak-of-heart & soft-of-mind

3. The Return

1st thing are the smells of the *tshatshkes*, nameless flowers
leads to ecstasy
doubts his own identity
the River Repka
shtetl = like things seen in a cyclorama (103)
brief sense of triumph
Shmulke, Angel of Death
the latter not thrilled at being called by his nickname;
Aunt Sarah-Rachel too senile to understand a thing

4. First Shabbes

Reb Lippe & His Bridegroom
Old Money vs. New: Reb Lippe vs. Asriel
Graduates to the Eastern Wall
Auctioning shlishi = sporting event
Women nearly come to blows
In a rage when he is tricked out of the aliya
his rage subsides & he donates 200 rubles
now sees Pravly as "a heap of beggarly squalor"
maggidic sermon on procuring a scholar as a son-in-law

5. Outbids Reb Lippe for Shaye the Talmud-Scholar

af keyver-oves: lyrical high point
"soul full of tears and poetry" (116)
grief at father's grave, 35 yrs later = catharsis

6. The Prodigy Arrives

Asriel's rapture of return
Q: **Will he succeed in marrying Old World to the New?**
[story's focus now shifts to the young lovers]

Shaye dolled up top to bottom
enter as Flora is playing piano, unawares
Flora torn between amusement / rage
Tamara tries to mediate

the imported library: sees how Shaye loses himself in study-chant

7. The Great Debate, or Talmudic Boxing Match
Flora impressed by his "knock-out blow",
how you can beat your opponent without any violence
8. The Young Lovers
Shaye being tutored
mutual attraction begins
novelty of studying math & grammar
maskilic theme: a little geometry and he can no longer concentrate on Talmud
discovers Astor Library
shares his excitement w/Flora, the first kiss as she listens to him read aloud
decide to keep his studying a secret
they announce their love, Asriel rejoices
9. Asriel discovers the truth
144-46 superb desc. of traditional lernen:
"20 centuries thrown pellmell in a chaos of sound and motion"
Reb Tsalel spills the beans
10. Catches Shaye red-handed
11. Flora confronts her father
Tamara's comical response (154-55)
decides to marry Tamara and die in Erets Yisroel
12. Shaye's Real Love...for Philosophical Pilpul
intimations of impotence in Shaya's triumph;
after all, it's their wedding day!

FAKE vs. REAL CONTINUITY

FAKE: Back to the shtetl

transplanted piety, talmudic scholarship
exclusive province of the old
young hero "vanquishes" the old scholars on own turf
then goes on to conquer world of forbidden knowledge
Asriel marries Tamara and they leave for...Erets Israel!
But also: fake allure of a doctor for a husband

REAL: culture of learning

only in America can this craving for knowledge be nurtured
but exacts its own price