

Not away from the world, but a little withdrawn, a quiet moment of contemplation, looking into the depths of your soul and finding yourself, excluding yourself from what is alien and has been imposed on you—that is what I mean by Back to the Bible!

Back to the surest spot, and from there—on towards man and humanity, along the Jewish road!

## *Roads that Lead Away from Jewishness*

"Jewishness is weakening!"

"But what is Jewishness?"

"We are Jews!"

"Yes, but how?"

We say we want our children and grandchildren to be Jews. But what have we to pass on to them? What legacy have we to bequeath to them?

When one of us goes away we call him a deserter. But what has he gone away from? What is this Jewishness he has deserted?

Instead of answering a straight question people begin to stammer—everybody stammers something different—and each so-called answer contradicts the other. Because each period, each place, each class, and very often each individual, has his own Jewishness. We take an institution in which the Jewish spirit has clothed itself at a particular time, in a particular place and treat it as though it were the Jewish spirit. We take the language of the Jewish religion, philosophy, world concept, ethic and the like and set it in the place of the living, creative Jewish spirit. Instead of the man who lives and develops we take his dead garb, which he changes according to time and place. We squeeze the eternal into a passing moment.

People even of the same generation who live in different places and according to different customs have each their own Jewishness, bounded by their own four walls and their own brief span of life. There is something else—often an alien form is accepted as one's own, the imitation as though it were the original. Didn't we sanctify the Polish kaftan? Didn't we take over angelology from the Persians and demonology from Babylonia?

We must reject as far as possible the temporary, the transitory. We seek the eternal. The substance, the essential.

Jewishness is the Jewish world concept. Or if you like, the world idea which seeks material embodiment in the form in which the Jewish soul throbs and pulsates. Jewishness is that which in times of inde-

pendence and freedom creates institutions to embody and reveal it. Then it is joy and happiness—worldly good. Which in times of struggle creates defensive institutions, to guard and protect—itsself and its own. Then it is battle and heroic song! And which in times of weakness and submission must shrink into itself, contract—wait and endure, silently, till better times come. Then it is hope, suffering and pain—Messianic dreams and the world to come. Then it demands sacrifice. And the Jewishness for which we demand sacrifice must be clearly explained and defined.

We once thought that a man is born a *tabula rasa*, a clean slate, and life comes with its pencil and writes. Now we know that the man is an active factor, that life is a process of struggle between man and environment, man and nature, that man comes into the world with a ready-made heritage, with the germs of his own will, and his own individual force, whether he conquers or is conquered. It is the same with the nation.

What did we come into the world with? What do we want? What culture threads are we weaving into the world fabric? What will be missing if we are not there? What is Jewish and what non-Jewish—how are we distinguished from others? What have we got that we must protect? What is there to sacrifice ourselves for?

## 2

It is easier to ask the question "What is Jewishness?" than to find the answer. Our "modern" folk thrust the question aside. "Jewish spirit," "true Jewishness," "Jewish ethic"—to the modern man it is all old-fashioned, archaic. "The One Jewish God" and all the rest of it is dismissed as a relic of the dark Middle Ages.

The modern man wants light and color—even if the light is only from a paper lantern and the color is in a soap bubble. He finds daylight and true color too ordinary, banal. "We must destroy the old," he says, "undermine the moss-covered stone, uncover the slime and the mold. This is no fortress, but a ruin," he tells us. "It cannot serve us in our defense."

What does he mean by "defense"? The modern man doesn't want to fight—he won't fit in to an army, not even in the ranks of his people. That calls for work and sacrifice. And the modern man isn't capable of either. Above all, no sacrifices. That is for the herd.

What is our "modern" man? First of all, he is not modern. What he stands for is already out of date. There were once great ideals, for which men sacrificed themselves. "Fatherland" proved a prison, where the poor did hard labor. "Patriots" were army contractors. "Family" legalized labor suppliers. The modern man fled from all this.

But there was nowhere to flee to. So he sat idle, or played with toys. And that soon got boring. He doesn't destroy, and he doesn't build. He has smashed his Life-God; every moment he prostrates himself before a different speck of dust from his former God, and imagines he has liberated himself from God. He thinks he is not serving anyone. He thinks that because those he serves are so small that he himself doesn't see them, and they change so often that there isn't time to retain any of them in his memory. He can't coordinate himself. You can't expect someone who can't coordinate himself, his own life, can't find a purpose in his life, to coordinate world manifestations, and find institutions which give a purpose to class or nation. Great men go their own way, not following the herd. But the "modern" man wanders aimlessly; he has no road. That doesn't mean freedom to go his own way. No, that is the way of the deserter, of the fugitive. That is no way—not even to baptism.

## 3

Take "modernism" in art. It is a revolt against the past. The Old Masters smell of sweat, of study, of hard work. The modern man doesn't like hard work. He wants to be free. Free like the birds. Free from any standpoint, from ideas and ideals, from having to weigh and measure, to be judged—he wants to be his own judge. Free to do what he likes, to be subject to nobody and nothing. Not even to his subject. It is a philistine superstition that a portrait should look like the model, that the sky is not green. And everything must be done quickly. Who has time to spend a year on a composition? On a symphony? On a drama? Those heavy tragedies—they are anti-art. "Modern" art must be swift, without a lot of painful detail and careful substructure. That would need living, seeing, suffering. If you tell the modern artist that without suffering there is no real art, only entertainment, passing the time, he pulls a face and says you're out of date and you don't know what you're talking about.

Once upon a time Sparta was besieged. Things were getting desperate. The Spartans sent to Athens for help. And Athens sent one man to Sparta, and he a lame hunchback. Sparta couldn't understand it. But the lame hunchback was Pindar, the great poet. And Pindar stood in the market place and sang a song of war. The song rang in every heart, and everybody became a hero. They fell upon the besiegers and drove them off. That's what one Pindar did!

What would have happened if Athens had sent one of our "modernists"? He would have said, "Pull down those old walls! Undermine the foundations! These are no defense! They are old ruins! Leave not a stone on a stone!"

No, my friends! Back to school! You must learn! You must bring back yesterday!

## 4

Living religious feeling has nothing to fear from the little disbeliever who tears the feeling out of his heart, throws it into a pit and puts a stone over it to keep it there, and proclaims to the world: "Religion is dead! I have rid myself of it! Eat, drink and embrace, do what you like!" He is no danger. The philosophy of do what you like is too frivolous to bring the world following it. Nor does it need to fear the little disbeliever who credulously believes every secondhand retailer of the latest scientific discovery, and runs through the streets crying: "Down with the supernatural! All the doors are wide open! Light in all the dark corners! No angels, no devils, no God! Don't believe the rabbi!"

Let him go on reading and learning. He will come upon the same walls and closed doors around his science, and he will yearn for his religion.

Religious feeling has nothing to fear from the workman engaged in the bitter struggle for bread and light, who becomes indignant seeing that the official mediator between God and man, the interpreter of God's word stands on the side of the oppressor, and proclaims that the existing crimes are according to God's will, and in his indignation becomes an enemy of religion. If he wins his struggle, the rabbi will interpret as he wishes.

The real danger to religion is the man who halts it, stops it on its way, no matter where, at the Torah, the Mishna, the Gemara, the Chai Odom, at the moment of its flourishing or the moment of its decline. Life does not stop. It goes on. And whatever has stopped is left behind by life, ceases to live! If I don't die with my religion I carry it with me as a dead weight—it becomes false—I believe one thing and live another. I have false weights and measures.

From the religious point of view God is eternal and changeless. But man develops. And his conception of God develops. If he lets God stand still and he goes on, he will find God getting smaller as he moves away, till his idea of God becomes an amulet that he puts into his pocket or wears on his breast. Till he loses his faith in the amulet and discards it as unnecessary. But if my conception of God grows in me and with me I change my whole language with which I speak with God, and the symbols and forms in which my belief pours itself out.

The Pentateuch doesn't speak of belief; it speaks of searching, seeking, knowing, learning. But you shrink from searching and knowing. You want belief. You are right. Because the Pentateuch seen



with your eyes, not retrospectively, not seeking the living germ, can only be taken on credit. But life means movement, development, growth. You want us to stand still. But when you stand still you turn God into an idol, and you call that "Jewishness."

It often happens that we lose our way and must retrace our steps—to find what was left behind and had been forgotten. If not we can't go any further. We must never stand still! It's no good leaving stumps of what were once living trees, broken stones of what had been strongholds and fortresses. Are you surprised that your children who seek life clear them away against your will?

The worst of it is that thinking to serve the Synagogue you are in reality serving the Church. For that is what the Church has tried to do—to make Judaism, Jewishness, stand still—driven it from the field of life, locked it into the ghetto. If you perpetuate this even when the walls of the ghetto have fallen, you are continuing the work of the Church, the estrangement of Judaism, of Jewishness from life. Then your children think that Jewishness is really something that is alien to life—and not knowing the exhortation in the Pentateuch to "Choose Life!" they leave you and your Judaism, desert your Jewishness.

And where did you stop your Jewishness? At the moment of its deepest decline! We are like the dust of the earth. And like the stars in heaven. You have gathered the dust into your sacks, and you have extinguished the stars. What has your Jewishness in it of Maimonides, of Saadia Gaon? Have you torn out of your inherited curtains for the Ark of the Law all the gold thread they had woven into it, and left for your children only the bare cloth? Have you expelled the living spirit and sanctified the dead letter? Driven out the living people because it is not learned enough for you?

## 5

Once, not so long ago, your Jewishness was a great thing—a fortress for the Jewish soul. A fortress that besieged by the entire Church world did not capitulate. Starved, deprived of water, all its fruit trees uprooted, Jewishness did not give in. We proclaimed—Messiah has not yet come. The world is not redeemed. The world is full of sin, and tears and blood. Till God's word rules, till justice is established, we shall wait!

But you turned the temporary fortress into an eternity, our means of defense into an end and a purpose. And when the siege was raised, when the tyrants stopped bombarding our walls, and it became possible to open the gates and go out into the world and preach God's word to the world, you kept repeating: The fortress is holy!

You have lost your sense of what matters, what is essential. The spirit has gone! You can't come to the world with dry words—so you hide your Jewishness from the world. Should the world, which you should go out to win, come to you and plead with you to take over, you will refuse to budge from your fortress, you will not bend your head for the proffered crown.

When your young people, in search of life, broke out of your fortress and came to the world, they had no Jewish word to say to it. The grandchildren of the proud warriors for the Jewish truth came to the world as beggars, seeking the alien word. They struggled to find a place for themselves at other people's stoves, to warm themselves at strange fires. They opened their mouths wide to swallow foreign truths. Some of the best of our young people went away from us. But what was worse was when some of them returned—with strange words in their mouths!

They opened a broad road that leads away from Jewishness, a broad and dangerous road—the false national!

## 6

"Renaissance" is a single word, with no conditions of time and place. But it is a seed, a germ from which a whole world should grow, a Jewish world. It is a proud and powerful word, and it is not new—it is the old Prophetic word, the Messianic word. But it has not yet been uttered anew in all its true purity.

When the walls of the ghetto fell Jewishness was too exhausted, too weak to come out. Some said it was finished, done with. It had been such a great thing once, they said. Had given the world God. But, they consoled themselves, it would leave a legacy behind. Nobody lives for ever, they went on. The days of religion (and to them Jewishness is nothing more) are over. Even the Church is falling into decay. So let's get together and bury Jewishness. No, someone else objects—not bury it. Embalm it! Keep it as a relic!

But there are others who won't have that. "A nation doesn't die so easily," they say.

Then someone puts a question: "Where are the Jews to go? If we retreat where do we retreat to? The doors are not open everywhere. The world's stomach isn't able to digest us all. It will take the big bankers, the great scientists and politicians and artists—but not everybody!"

What are the rest to do? We can't remain with this Jewishness, they say. The stream of life is sweeping past it. We won't give it up entirely. But it's too big as it is, too heavy and clumsy—not nice! We'll cut it down to size. We'll make it presentable. We'll cut out the dead bits. We'll shed no blood! We'll give no pain! Unless perhaps the

quiet moan of the Shechina in some ruin. Nobody takes any notice of that!

How easy it is to tear pages out of the prayerbook! How fine the Jewish religious books look in the Archives! How spacious the Jewish home is without them! What remains of Jewishness will be confined to the Synagogue—and the rabbi will look after it.

But the rabbi too must look like a civilized European. The Christian clergyman's clerical dress is so becoming! The Synagogue must become a Temple! The prayers—without the mention of sacrifices, and without Zion, and everything translated into German—are not so bad. We call it "Divine Service."

True, it doesn't attract the people. Something has been lost. But the peal of the organ will bring people, and the girls' choir will fetch the young men. And we'll have hymns! Just like in church. If people won't come on the Sabbath, we'll have the services on Sunday! Something will remain!

So we cut and change and perfume—but what is dead stays dead! The youth is not attracted. Reform is bankrupt!

Then someone comes along and says: Yes, the soul has fled. But the form has remained. Don't touch it! The wine is drunk or it evaporates. But the barrel remains! The barrel is eternal! Keep to the barrel! Pour new wine into the barrel! There's plenty of new wine to be got. But hold fast to the barrel! Only you must get a good cellar, a safe place where to store it!

Then those who have come back, or who have been chased back, bring us the message that "We are a people!" We knew that all along! There are so many words in Hebrew that designate us a people, a nation. Only they added the words: "No more!" "We were a people, and we are no more!" That is another danger!

## 7

When you come back from outside and you look at our Jewish tradition with foreign eyes, or shall we say through foreign glasses, you see something monstrous. And you can't understand this monstrous thing. You cry out: "It's not normal!"

But things that are not "normal" may be supernormal as well as subnormal. You must estimate what it is itself, compared with your normal. You're not going to put everything onto a Sodom bed, to stretch the short and shrink the long all to the same size—to squeeze out all differences, to make everything uniform!

In this matter of our national future, I ask: Am I of lesser or of greater worth? Better or worse? You don't need to tell me that we're not the same. I know that.

My past tells me: "Thou shalt have no other gods." Only your One God!

And in your land, in the midst of your land, in Jerusalem, you will erect God's Temple. Three times a year you will appear in the Temple before God, to bring Him your sacrifice, to thank Him, to pray to Him and worship. One people, one land, one Temple, one Law, one God. And all formed together, in one breath.

There must be no Temple in any other place, no altar. No sacrifices anywhere else, not even to the One God—no incense. Punishment is death!

Yet the Temple is for all. The stranger may come there and pray. God will listen, God will accept his sacrifice. And whoever calls on the Name of the One God is His child. And out of Zion goes forth the Law for the nations.

Nationalism as a world ideal! Have other nations such? Have the Germans, the French, the English, the Russians and the rest of the European peoples a national world concept, a national religion? A national world ideal? They are all Christians. But Christianity has not united them. They did not create their Christianity. It was imposed on them, or willingly accepted. It did not spring from their own mind, grow out of their blood. Its home is in the Church. It floats, a strange substance on the surface—it has not become integrated, body and soul. So it has nothing to do with real life. It is not a social manifestation. It is a "faith." It has become a key with which to open heaven after death, not to compel life. It is the Kingdom of Heaven, not the earth, not life on earth, not work and development. It is belief, not will. It is denial, renunciation, departure. Redemption from life, not redemption to life. It bears you aloft, above life. It is a cloak. Under the cloak Roman law rules, Greek art, European technology.

That is why the European nations when they wish to develop nationally must first abandon the international Church, separate the State from religion. We, a people without possessions, without a common language, we as "a nation and nothing more" are nothing! And how easy it is to go away from nothing!

It is not an academic argument with the others in which we are engaged. The world seen with Jewish eyes is an organically bound, organized, and therefore morally responsible world. The world seen with heathenish eyes is epileptic, spasmodic, unrelated movements, subject to no law, and therefore not answerable to any moral demands. On the road from heathenism to Judaism we come to gods and semi-gods. The world becomes a battlefield between them. Jupiter emerges victorious, and allocates to each his or her place—each with a separate Temple, and a separate day—and an imperative law.



As you go on, coming nearer to Judaism, the idols have fallen outwardly, their carved statues disappear. But there is still no unity. There is no subordination to the One.

So they are all against the Jewish "provincialism" and the cry is "Renaissance"!

Let me speak my word freely, let me work at my cultural values freely according to my world concept. I once gave you so much. Let me give you more now.

And the conflict is waged not only in one particular spot. We left our cradle long ago. Willingly or unwillingly we became a world people—and now the conflict is world-wide. We wage our struggle not with this people nor with that, nor with a coalition of nations. I have my own evaluation of good and evil. They tell me to revise my values. I struggle for my truth. They laugh at me, and at my "mission." But worst of all are hasty promises and exaggerated pessimism. "Your home is waiting for you! You can go there tomorrow!" When the morrow came, and the doors to the home did not open, many fled from us. They had lost their hope. Or—"All you do outside is built on sand; the wind will carry it off!" It made people feel impotent, they went looking for strange cultures—and if the others put a condition: "Admit that the Messiah has come," they began to wonder. The wisest decided to retreat.

## 8

So you still can't get to "Jewishness." The road is not yet free.

It is impossible to revive the Jewish distinctive character and to develop it further, without the Bible. It is impossible for a tree to grow without roots in the ground. But roots without a trunk, branches, leaves, and blossom are not a tree, only what is left of what used to be a tree.

What we have to do is to continue our yesterday. And that is what the Jewish father does. That's what he does with his children. But children mean to him boys. Girls are left "free." They are taught to read and write—two or three languages, but not Yiddish. So they read all literatures except the Yiddish. And they live with their bodies in the Jewish home, but with their souls in the outside world. They go about with a mask in their father's house—and afterwards in their husband's home. Their hearts are torn in two—and let me say it openly—drawn like a magnet by every Church bell.

We come back to our subject. The boys are taught Torah. Not Torah for life, not living Torah. It was that once upon a time, it will be that in time to come—but now it is a Torah for the world hereafter, with no relation to the world in which we live, to life under the sun.

So the boy too lives a double life—today and yesterday—wearing a

mask as long as his parents and parents-in-law live and provide lodging and keep, and dowry, and will leave a legacy. After that—either luftmenshen or emigrants, with no trade, with no language, and if they are lucky they end up across the ocean in the sweatshop, and they have no time left for studying the Bible.

Zeitlin once wrote: "Peretz has a heaven, but no God in heaven!" The first half of the phrase is a compliment, and I acknowledge it gratefully. And I confirm that the second half is true, too. I don't even know where to look for His dear Name! Before the world—He is its Creator? After the world—He slips out of it? In the world He is its spirit, its general will, which expresses itself in different forms—He is its master, the master of death and physical decay, its captive struggling against the prison doors, and liberating itself, to be finally revealed?

Maybe the world is the clay and He the Potter, producing ever finer shapes and stronger forms, then shattering the old and molding the clay into new, more sublime forms, and to the best and the highest He will give the gift of eternity? Whatever He is, He is the source of life!

Life means: having divine imagination and in a certain measure divine will to carry what is imagined into effect, to change the environment to accord with the imagination, creating new forms—a partner in the work of Creation!

I live—therefore I have a divine spark in me; all who live have it—and I feel that all lives!

He who denies God also has the divine spark. So has the blasphemer.

Remember—we were told at Sinai, that you saw no shape or form of God. Not that it isn't there—but you did not see it. You only heard the Voice! Therefore, not having seen, you must make no image of God!

You must feel God as a living, personal God, who goes forward. What stands still is dead. The gods that stood still, images, were only idols. God is a living God. He is always going ahead of man. And man must strive to follow Him, onward, higher. God always goes ahead. When man, in supreme ecstasy, does see God, he sees only His rearward parts. "Thou canst not see My face, for man shall not see Me and live." For then man would have seen everything. There would be no further striving left for him. Life is only in striving further. God is not in the past, that has gone, nor in the present that stands still. "I am that I am!" God is always! God is the eternal future! And our striving to Him must be eternal!

Nomadic blood—a wandering tribe in the wilderness. In its blood honesty and justice—and such is its God, who wanders with it, and therefore is not of wood or stone, but is a moving, living God!

Then when this people settled in the chosen land, they built a Temple for God in their land. But they hadn't the heart to exterminate the inhabitants of the land—justice would not let them dominate and subjugate other nations. A small people, a chosen people, a holy people, a people of priests.

As time went on, this people fell. But this people was its own creator, the builder of the Temple to God, not gathered and united by the Temple, the initiator of the social-cultural-economic form and pattern of the country, not a brick in it. And then this people goes again wandering over the earth. And again, God goes with it; This people becomes a world people—and the world becomes the arena for battle between the One Sole God and the gods. God will conquer!

The world is not free from struggle and war, from toil and oppression and pain. Because God is still above the world, not yet in it. But the time will come—it must come—God will judge the nations and purify the world. Messiah will come! We will bring him! We the weakest, the martyrs of God's Name!

Raise the banner of the Messiah, of world judgment, and world liberation, of the future free humanity! That is the mission of the eternal people. It must come from Jewish life, from the Jewish home, the Jewish school, the Jewish theater, the Jewish book, from everything that is Jewish.

## *Concerning History*

A Jew I know sat down next to me on a bench in Krasinski Park and wanted to know why I was looking sad.

"Graetz has died," I told him.

"God rest his soul!" he responded. "Someone from these parts?"

This question—which 90 per cent of Jews would have asked in his place—is the measure of the gulf into which we have fallen. Whom don't we know in Warsaw Jewry? Who doesn't dwell in the mind of the Nalevkis, who isn't on the tongue of the Wolov, whom doesn't Grzybov discuss? To have Warsaw ring with your name you don't need to lose wife and child at dice, or climb up the pole in the Ujazdowski Avenue. It's enough to be a cab horse and to fall on the tramway lines. Yet you may be Graetz, who wrote the history of the Jews, and they don't know.

When I told my companion what Graetz had done, he said: "Oh,

history!" and his voice sounded as if he was marveling at someone who had swallowed a dozen hard-boiled eggs at one go.

When he saw that I nearly jumped out of my skin, he asked: "And what do you get out of history?"

"You're a Jew, aren't you?" I said.

"I think so," he answered, smiling, as much as to say, "More than you are!"

"And you like Jews?"

"What do you think? Would I hate them?"

"You know that Alexander the Great, returning from a series of victories, came upon a Kingdom of only women?"

"Sure!—it's in the Ayin Jacob, isn't it? Or did my Rebbe tell me the story in chedar?"

"Do you know when the Kingdom of Judah and the Kingdom of Israel were split? When one Jewish people became two?"

"When? Do I need to know when? It's in the Bible!"

"And what happened to the Kingdom of Israel?"

"Why, it's on the other side of the River Sambatyon."

"What happened to the Jews who were expelled from Spain?"

"They fled and scattered."

"And those who were twice expelled from France?"

"Where should they be? Some went away. The rest sneaked back. What a question to ask!"

"You know what Jews have suffered and still suffer in Persia, in Rumania?"

"Persia I don't know. But I've heard a lot about Rumania in Synagogue—people read about it in 'Hazefirah.' Makes your hair stand on end!"

"Have you ever heard of the Kreuzzuge?" (the Crusades).

"Come again!"

"You don't know German?"

"Oh, it's German, is it? I never came across that word!"

"And Nosai Hatzelev?"

"What language is that?"

"Hebrew! Don't you know that in the Nosai Hatzelev, in the Crusades, thousands of Jews were slain, whole Jewish communities were destroyed?"

"You mean the Chmielnicki massacres in 1648?"

"Do you know anything about the Jews in Morocco?"

"Morocco? No, I don't!"

"Would you like to know?"

"Hm—what is there to know? Anything different there? Different faces? People live differently? Believe me, it's the same world every-



where. Thank God I can forget about it. (A pause, and a sigh.) Tell me, you read the newspapers—any news?"

"No, you don't like Jews," I told my neighbor.

"What do you mean? I don't give money? I haven't any to give! The German Jews have it, so they give!"

"I don't mean that. You see, it's in the nature of a man that he should want to know everything that concerns his friends, his family. If you meet a relative you haven't seen for a long time, you don't get tired of asking him questions—how he is, how things are going, how his wife and children are, and if one of them has been ill you want to know all about it, what doctor they had, what the doctor advised, whether it did any good. If your friend is wearing a new suit you ask how much he paid for it, who was the tailor, what the lining is like."

"True," said my neighbor, smiling. "Who's denying it?"

"Yes," I cried triumphantly, "and when you have brothers all over the world you don't want to know how things are with them. You're not interested to know about your brothers who are suffering, what is happening to them. What it amounts to is that when you say 'All Israel are brothers' in the New Moon Blessing, you mean it no more than when you say 'Next Year in Jerusalem!'"

"But I do like Jews!"

"You're mistaken."

"What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you. But will you first answer honestly a few questions I am going to put to you?"

"Go ahead!"

"Do you like your family?"

"Not all of them."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. If someone in my family opens a business just like mine, as though there weren't enough already, and drags the customer out of my shop, takes the bread out of my mouth, am I supposed to love him for that? Or there's a relative of my wife's who keeps getting drunk, and another who openly flouts the Sabbath, must I like them?"

"Apart from these?"

"Apart from these—yes! I like them! All the family I know."

"And those you don't know?"

"I couldn't say! I have a cousin in America, for instance. I've never set eyes on him!"

"So you—" I prompt.

"No, I don't dislike him. But how can I like someone I don't know? Like a hole with nothing around it!"

"And Jews as such—do you like them?"

He felt trapped. He didn't know what to say.

"That settles it," I concluded. "You don't like Jews as such, because you don't know what they are like. A hole with nothing around it! What do you sell in your shop?" I went on.

"Groceries."

"You've lived in this world about fifty years?"

"Forty-five!" he corrected me.

"All right, forty-five! In the course of your life you have got to know about two-hundred Jews. Half of them you throw into the sea—those who are not religious, those who say their prayers according to a different rite, let alone those who don't say any prayers at all, the heretics! Into the fire with them! Of the rest there are plenty you won't have anything to do with—you've got a lawsuit with one, another is a business competitor and gets on your nerves, somebody else said nasty things about you, the next man you owe money to, and that one's wife quarreled with your wife. Those who are left, as many as there are, perhaps you do like them."

He pondered this.

I continued: "To like people you must know them. To like Jews you must have ties with all Jews, not just with twenty or thirty Jews, but with the whole line of all the generations, and with the whole present generation, which is scattered and dispersed. A people is like a cone."

"And what may that be?"

"Let's call it a sugarloaf. On top, the Patriarch Abraham. The farther down you go, the more it broadens out. Our sugarloaf is not properly a true cone. The mice have nibbled bits out of it in the middle. The water has got at it. The lower down you get the more hacked about and disfigured it is. Rivers divide the different parts, steppes cut us off one from another, countries and continents stretch between. To like Jews means to like the whole shape and form of it—it means to know it all, every part of it, to have it all in your mind, in your heart, in your blood."

"I must confess," said my neighbor presently, "that it's all very interesting."

"It's more than interesting—it's vitally important. It's one of the foundations on which the whole sugarloaf, our entire Jewishness stands. We are an ancient people, yet in this respect other peoples are wiser than we are. Not only the European peoples, who write and read and study history, not only the Romans, the Greeks, the ancient civilized peoples who gave a lot of attention to recording their history, not only the Egyptians, the Persians, and Medes who chiseled their history on stone, on walls, on the Pyramids, but even the primitive peoples, even the savages, knew the value of history. Even the savage

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tribes of Africa, who go about naked, like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, with rings in their noses or lips and their bodies tattooed with beasts and reptiles, even they have a sense of history. And because the men are occupied with war, or hunting or fishing, the women keep the record of the experiences of the tribe, and recount them on special occasions."

"But what use is history?"

"Have you any children?"

"As God commanded."

"Who would you say knows more, you or your infant child?"

"The eggs always say they know more than the hens."

"But what do the hens say? Would you trust your business and your money to a boy of six or seven?"

"I should think not! Am I mad?"

"Why wouldn't you?"

"I'd go bankrupt."

"Why should you? Can't a six-year-old boy run a business?"

"No, he can't! He's got no experience!"

"I see! I suppose that is why a young married couple doesn't get the dowry paid out all at once, in a lump, because it needs experience to do business, and the young husband must pick up his experience as he goes along."

"That's right!"

"And you fix him up first with an older, more experienced partner."

"Naturally—it's the way of the world."

"Now tell me—the young people learn from their experience?"

"Obviously—they see what is good and what is bad—they learn."

"A philosopher has said that yesterday is the teacher of today."

"You don't need a philosopher to tell you that. Every schoolboy knows it. You learn from experience."

"To learn from experience you must have memory, mustn't you?"

"Sure!"

"If a man falls ill, if he has typhus, for example, and forgets everything?"

"Then he's in a bad state. You've got to start all over again with him from the beginning."

"And if a man has no memory at all, was born without a memory?"

"Does it happen?"

"Suppose!"

"It would be terrible! Such a man could never learn anything. No memory, no experience!"

"So that a boy of six with a memory would know more than he does?"

"Sure!"

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"Now you see! That applies not only to an individual, but to a whole people, to a nation. The memory of a nation is its history. Without history a nation is like a man without his memory—it can't learn from experience. Where would a people learn how to act in difficult times, to overcome a crisis, to prepare for and to have faith in the future if each generation, with its joys and griefs, its virtues and faults were laid in the grave and forgotten?"

"Take my advice! Buy Graetz!"



## PROLOGUE

*There are two curtains: a front one, which is already raised, and a scrim of black gauze behind it that gradually grows more diaphanous until, by the end of the prologue, the entire stage is seen through it. The DIRECTOR and STAGE MANAGER enter from opposite wings. The STAGE MANAGER is followed by the NARRATOR.*

DIRECTOR (to STAGE MANAGER):  
Ready?

STAGE MANAGER:  
Almost.  
There's just the fence to put around the well.

NARRATOR:  
In which once, long ago,  
The drunk musicians drowned . . .  
But what about the gargoyle  
Whose magic power lured them into it?

STAGE MANAGER:  
It's all in place—  
A huge thing,  
Half-man and half-woman,  
With a horn in the half that's a man.

NARRATOR:  
A long-forgotten god  
From days before the synagogue and church . . .

DIRECTOR:  
. . . which will awake and start to spout . . .

STAGE MANAGER:  
. . . a river of red water from its mouth,  
As though it were a cow that dreamily  
Lifts up its head from drinking  
To cast a magic circle with its eyes  
In a zealous, red-beamed light,  
Exactly as the stage directions call for.

DIRECTOR (*to* NARRATOR):

You'll introduce each act—  
Just make it short and snappy!

STAGE MANAGER:

Or else it's curtains for you!

DIRECTOR:

Before Act One you'll walk around the stage  
And explain the set.

(*To* STAGE MANAGER)

Make sure you spotlight everything he points to.

NARRATOR:

Who'll summarize the plot?

DIRECTOR:

That's the playwright's job.  
And here he is . . .  
(*The* POET *enters.*)

NARRATOR:

He has no color in his cheeks,  
But his dark eyes burn bright.  
Look how he keeps his right hand on his heart.

DIRECTOR:

He doesn't even see us!  
(*He exits peevishly.*)

NARRATOR:

He's lost in thought . . .  
(*To the audience*)  
This is his play.  
He wants to tell us something.

POET:

(*Bowing to the audience from the right wing*)  
A fevered dream by night  
On a sickbed in a swamp that will not drain!  
Half-scared to death,  
The frightened heart keeps vigil.  
From far away,  
From the black wastes,  
From fields and forests spattered by the night,  
Wild peals are borne on air  
Of howling, bloodthirsty beasts,  
Of cackling devils



And tittering ghosts.  
 Far-off, a will-o'-the-wisp,  
 Toadstool or dogskull,  
 Dances and prances  
 With a horrible gleam,  
 While above,  
 Hushed as a dove,  
 A pale sky spreads itself out . . .  
 Not a shimmer,  
 Not a glimmer,  
 Not a dark eyeball's sheen  
 Or the white of an unseeing eye . . .  
 The world is asleep, in a fever of  
 Silence hushed as a dove,  
 While a madcap fool  
 Weaves a net of shadowy beams  
 At the foot of the old gargoyle.  
*(He paces back and forth.)*  
 Ah, shades of the past,  
 Whose fountainheads scarce are behind us!  
 Ah, beams intertwined  
 With the net's bare hope of a haul . . .  
 And the anguished heart asks:  
 Is it over once and for all,  
 Or is there more still ahead?  
 And if so, how soon will the thread  
 In the weave be made tight?  
 Who can know on a fever-night?  
 The jackal, or else the hyena . . .  
*(Having reached a wing, he suddenly exits.)*

STAGE MANAGER:

Powerful!  
*(Nudging the NARRATOR)*  
 Set the scene!  
*(Exits)*

NARRATOR:

An old marketplace.  
 Over there is the town hall.  
*(The town hall is lighted up.)*  
 In the niches of its walls  
 Are statues made of stone:  
 All kinds of old nobility;  
 A pair of pious, pensive priests;

And up above, as you can see,  
 High on the clock tower  
 (The clock itself no longer tells the hour),  
 A bishop with a cross and sword,  
 Both held above his head  
 To fight for the true faith:  
 One is for blessing, one for striking dead . . .  
 In that street on your left, you see the church.

*(The church is lighted up.)*

Commanding the whole square,  
 It stands there with a supercilious stare,  
 Its Jesus gold, its marble white,  
 Throwing its long shadow all the way  
 To the synagogue over on your right . . .

*(The synagogue is lighted up.)*

It's just a shul like any shul,  
 Peering out through cracked old spectacles,  
 An old building damp with tears  
 And full of grief,  
 Stooped beneath a heavy roof,  
 From which it glances at the church in fear:  
 Look here,  
 I hardly take up any room,  
 I'm colorless, I make no sound,  
 My steps go down into the ground—  
 And you're so dazzlingly tall and bright!  
 Why don't you let my windows have the light  
 Your shadow takes from them  
 And stop your poking in my soul . . . ?

*(The study house is lighted up.)*

Poor but cheery—that's the study house.  
 Despite its old, ramshackle frame  
 Its large windows are aflame  
 With youngsters learning Torah:  
 Their cheeks are pale,  
 Their curls are dark,  
 Their glowing eyes could win your heart—  
 Like birds they sing!  
 Like bells they ring!

STAGE MANAGER (*muttering from the wing*):

We're running late!

NARRATOR (*hearing steps, he breaks off and says nervously*):

Someone's there!



(*The WANDERER appears, walking slowly and looking very tired.*)  
An unfamiliar face . . .

DIRECTOR (*leafing through his notebook*):  
I can't find him anyplace.

NARRATOR (*regarding the WANDERER with astonishment*):  
He walks  
As though to leave his footprints in the air;  
A knapsack on his back and heavy travel wear;  
A walking stick carved with a faded rose  
That drops its petals as he goes . . .  
Look how he bites his lips!

STAGE MANAGER:  
I'd better let them know.  
(*Exits*)

NARRATOR:  
A sickly smile;  
Eyes young but sorrowful  
Beneath a wrinkled brow . . .  
(*He cups his hand to his ear.*)  
Sshhh, he's talking now!

WANDERER (*looking about*):  
The same stars, the same sky,  
The same earth . . .  
How much these ears have heard,  
And yet they would hear more!  
How little do these eyes  
Feel they have seen their fill  
Of color or of form!  
What's near still drives me on;  
What's far still draws me to it:  
On and on and on . . .  
My legs feel like lead.  
My pack  
Sits heavy on my back . . .  
(*He begins to remove it.*)  
And beside the weight of my own clothes,  
I bear with me the dust of many lands and roads . . .  
(*He sits down by the synagogue wall.*)  
Come closer to me, night, drift close around me!  
Your breath is pure,  
Your shadows soft . . .  
Where am I coming from? Don't ask.

Before these shadows flee, I must be off.  
 Where am I going to? Don't ask again.  
 Maybe Someone Up There knows,  
 But I myself  
 Have grown old but hardly wise  
 From seeing set and seeing rise  
 The sun that I've been following so long.  
 Nowhere a stranger and nowhere at home;  
 Driven by the same unknown hunter  
 Who drives us all but me a little faster . . .  
 No matter where I sleep, I dream in a strange bed,  
 And with the crack of dawn I'm up.  
 Night, let me lay my head down in your lap!  
 I won't bother looking at the town—they're all the same . . .  
 Be good and spin for me a dream  
 That gently rocks my weary heart to sleep:  
 Spin red, spin black,  
 Spin gray—  
 Mix the colors any way—  
 But spin!  
 Spin life,  
 Spin death,  
 Spin out what's in between . . .

*(He falls asleep. The scrim now seems so thin that the entire marketplace can be seen clearly, along with all the characters on stage. The synagogue is dark, the study house brightly lit; oil lamps burn smokily in the backs of the shops in the old courtyard. The shopkeepers are getting ready to put out the lights and close for the day. On the wooden balcony overlooking the courtyard women sit looking down, some at the study house, others at a group of girls standing in a circle in the marketplace, still others at the shops below. Behind them the windows of their homes are like red, burning eyes. In the street in the background leading away from the marketplace stand two young ladies. One holds a letter up to the light of a streetlamp. The LAMP SNUFFER, his instrument in his hand, is about to start work. The town hall is shuttered from within. A rainbow-colored light plays over the edges of the shutters. On a corner near the church street a boy and a girl are holding hands. They are about to stroll into the marketplace. The NIGHT WATCHMAN leans against a wall by the tavern door, from which he has apparently just emerged, ready to begin his rounds; around his neck is a whistle on a chain. The gargoyle in the middle of the marketplace is a somber green. The cobblestones gleam in the paved streets. The flames of the streetlamps quiver in the damp air.*



*The characters are all in place, motionlessly waiting for a sign to begin.*

*The STAGE MANAGER returns with the DIRECTOR and the POET. They walk on tiptoe.)*

STAGE MANAGER (*pointing to the WANDERER*):  
He's fast asleep.

NARRATOR:  
As if in some deep fog.  
The things that happen in the theater!

DIRECTOR:  
Come on, let's get him out of here.

*(The DIRECTOR, the STAGE MANAGER, and the NARRATOR drag the sleeping WANDERER offstage, leaving his things behind.)*

POET (*suddenly inspired*):  
Hold on!  
I've just glimpsed one of his dreams:  
That's the play we'll put on!  
*(He gathers the WANDERER's things.)*

*(Curtain)*

## ACT THREE

(Curtain)

NARRATOR:

“Once upon a time”—  
That’s all some need to hear and they believe it . . .  
And so,  
Among that portion of mankind  
That is too weak or not quite bold enough  
To shield itself from life or live it,  
We find tormented souls  
Who look for comfort to the world of myth,  
In whose protective lap (how great the risk!)  
They hide their heads.  
  
Without bright stars, without the sun,  
The eye thirsts for the images of dreams,  
And the ear yearns  
For olden days and cloudy climes—  
For “Once upon a time”. . .  
Once upon a time—  
Life was exchanged for fantasy,  
Which sows not, reaps not,  
Bears no golden fruit,  
But only raises, sick and shadowy,  
Its pale blue sprouts  
Full of sweet poison for the head and heart;  
While deeper yet, out of a black abyss,  
Stare enigmatic eyes, man’s, beast’s, or winking god’s . . .  
Ah, irresistible hasheesh!  
Once—  
But listen well  
To what befell  
Upon a time.  
  
Picture a world where all is shattered,  
Souls tortured to the point of madness,  
Bodies flayed and flogged with poison snakes!  
Overhead, at the highest zenith,



So faint that few can still have seen it,  
Is a creature with hair gold-streaming  
And eyes as bright as the brightest star.  
A single word is written on its forehead:  
"Truth!"

It pales, it fades,  
It vanishes in mist . . .  
And now, out of the abyss,  
Rises its opposite—  
A ponderously cloud-gray shape  
On whose plutonic brow's inscribed  
The words: "Have faith!"  
Through the dark night  
This legendary beast keeps watch,  
And Death awakes!  
Graves yawn wide  
And from them crawl,  
In snow-white robes and prayer shawls—  
The dead! . . .  
Without a sound, without a word,  
They slip into the synagogue  
To pray and chant,  
And to lament  
The queenly Shekhinah's banishment:  
The dead! . . .  
If you want to live, stranger,  
Don't pray with them: it's mortal danger!  
If they call you to the Torah,  
Your wife's life with you is over;  
Should your house have a male heir,  
Teach him quick the mourner's prayer;  
If you're a bachelor, or have no son—

*(The scrim rises. The NARRATOR walks off, shouting angrily.)*

But I'm not done! I'm still not done!

*(Night. The dead walk up the back street, heading into town from the cemetery. Unsteadily gripping the cemetery fence, since they have no gravestones of their own to support themselves with, are a police INFORMER, his tongue in his hand, and a BUTCHER who sold his unwitting customers non-kosher meat and now has the tripe of a cow around his neck. Others are still crawling from their graves, rubbing their eyes and stretching themselves. The BRODY SINGERS climb out of a common grave in tarred sacks, embarrassed to be without shrouds. On a knoll in the middle of the cemetery stands an*

OLD MAN, *shading his eyes and looking about as if searching for a sign in heaven or on earth.*)

JESTER (*to gargoyle*):

Quick,  
Your magic ring!  
Here come the dead—  
Show them your blood-red rays!  
(*To the apparitions*)  
And you, who believe you're alive—  
Disappear!  
Beat it, scram, get out of here!  
Back to your barracks!  
When the dead  
Come swarming from all corners,  
Be prepared  
For anything!

A WORKER:

He thinks we're easy to scare!  
Doesn't he know we're Reds?

CULTURED JEWS:

Jews—they'll believe whatever they're told!

FROZEN WOMAN (*clinging to the warmth of the gargoyle's light*):

I'm so cold! I'm so cold!

(*The workers, the cultured Jews, and the FROZEN WOMAN remain; all the other apparitions disappear.*)

SOMEONE (*unnerved*):

Here they come! They're almost here—  
And they'll expect us to decide.  
All that talk was a lot of hot air . . .  
I feel so empty inside . . .  
(*He runs off up the church street.*)

OLD MAN (*calling out*):

What a terrible night!  
Someone's playing magic tricks, all right.

(*The dead stand in a circle. The JESTER clambers quickly up the clock tower and tinkers for a long time with the hands of the clock. With a squeak, they begin to move. He starts to count the hours, the clock chiming them angrily after him. Between each count and each chime, the RECLUSE interrupts.*)

JESTER:

One! . . . Two! . . .

RECLUSE:

God is through!

JESTER (*impatiently*):

Three! . . . Four! . . .

RECLUSE:

He'll send no more—

JESTER (*losing patience completely and rushing ahead*):

Five! . . . Six! . . . Seven!

RECLUSE:

. . . miracles from heaven.

JESTER:

Eight!

RECLUSE:

He's shut His gate.

JESTER (*angrily*):

Nine! . . . Ten! . . . Eleven! . . . Twelve!

(*Shouting down to the RECLUSE*)

Why don't you learn to help yourself?

(*All of the dead except for the OLD MAN head determinedly for the marketplace.*)

BUTCHER (*grabbing hold of the INFORMER*):

Has the Messiah woken yet?

(*Shaking him*)

Answer me!

OLD MAN:

The Messiah will wake by day,  
And now it's the black bottom of the night!  
Someone's playing with black magic!  
There's not a sign of Judgment Day  
Anywhere in heaven or on earth . . .  
Wait!

(*Calling to the dead, who ignore him*)

You can't escape  
The long arm of God!  
You're blind  
As the wind—  
And it's an ill wind that has sinned . . .



CANTOR:

Deep in the earth, my dear.  
Put out the fire  
And forget me. I am dead.  
*(Glancing heavenward)*  
And may He too forget!

*(They depart, the CANTOR rejoining the other dead, the woman retiring behind the gate.)*

OLD MAID *(stepping forward)*:

What?  
How gullible can you get?  
Forget what—  
The years I sat home in the dark  
Playing the game they call "Wait"?  
"Wait, your true love will turn up."  
Well, that's all a big load of crap!  
*(Shouting at the sky)*  
I can't stand it any more!  
*(She walks back to the marketplace.)*  
Right outside my front door  
Life went rollicking by  
In a gale of desire,  
And I—  
I lay in a ditch like a worm!  
I might as well have been tone-deaf and color-blind,  
The way I lived, day after day,  
Night after night, in a cloud of gray!  
Not a laugh, not a smile, not a moment of fun,  
Not a single warm hand on the back of my neck . . .  
I never heard a good word,  
Never met a stranger's eyes or looked back . . .  
I bit my nails,  
And gritted my teeth,  
And ate out my heart that was pining away . . .  
Well, now I say:  
No!  
No! No! No! No!  
You can take your "Be a good girl" and stow it—  
You've already used it to cut my throat!  
Who'll pay me back?  
I want to scream, I want to curse,  
Hand me a stone and I'll—

*(She breaks off, catching sight of the BRODY SINGERS, who enter in their tarred sacks.)*

FRIGHTENED VOICES:

- Who are you? What's that you've got on you?
- Tell us about the troubles you've gone through!

*(The music changes to the High Holiday prayer Odom lehevel domoh, "Man is but vanity.")*

BRODY SINGERS:

We are the singers, the singers of Brod,  
 And we have been punished, punished by God!  
 We traveled through heat and we traveled through frost,  
 Till we came down with plague and we gave up the ghost;  
 The pallbearers came without waiting a minute,  
 Each brought a tarred sack and put each of us in it;  
 With pitchforks of iron, we still were alive,  
 They prodded and poked us right into the grave.  
 And now we are asking, we're asking of God:  
 Why did He punish the singers of Brod?

MORE FRIGHTENED VOICES:

- Better not ask! You don't want to know!
- Better to stick to the straight and narrow!
- Better to dance!
- (Excitedly)*
- Go ahead, dance!
- Let's see a fire in your pants!
- Let's see a gleam in your dead eyes!
- Show us you've got a spark of life!
- Shake a leg there, prance!
- Dance! Dance! Dance!
- Give it all you've got!
- Dance till you bust a gut!
- Kick up your heels!
- Pretend you're on wheels!

JESTER:

Feel what you've never let yourselves feel!  
 Live what you've never lived before!

*(They dance apathetically. The music limps along. Still, two circles form to the right and left, one for men and one for women. They keep stubbornly revolving while philosophers, a KABBALIST, and some Hasidim walk up and down between them.)*

FIRST PHILOSOPHER:

Life, death—

I don't know what they're for . . .

SECOND PHILOSOPHER:

What a nit you are!

There are some things you just have to accept.

FIRST PHILOSOPHER:

You mean the human intellect—

SECOND PHILOSOPHER:

. . . is useless? Let it rot!

FIRST PHILOSOPHER:

But that is not . . .

*(Growing agitated)*

What is Truth

If all's just semiotics?

How completely idiotic

It is to hold

That all we know of anything

Is what it's called!

THIRD PHILOSOPHER *(approaching them)*:

That isn't so at all!

You can't deny that suffering is real.

SECOND PHILOSOPHER:

It's simply a modality

Of an unknowable reality.

FIRST PHILOSOPHER *(regretfully)*:

Well, anyway,

Philosophy has had its ups and downs . . .

KABBALIST *(coming over)*:

There are mystical ciphers and mystical sums!

Once—

FOURTH PHILOSOPHER:

Just look at those bones

All creaking away

To a number that dead musicians play!

Some seem quite cheeky and bold.

FIRST PHILOSOPHER:

At least they won't catch cold!

KABBALIST:

To get back to what—



*(A group of four Hasidim enters.)*

FIRST HASID (*singing soulfully*):

My mama told me  
To pick apples from a tree . . .  
But a Jew is too small,  
And a tree is too tall,  
And I never picked  
Any apples at all.

FIRST PHILOSOPHER:

Semiotics!  
Idiotic!

SECOND PHILOSOPHER:

According to Ecclesiastes,  
Life is foolish, vain, and nasty!

SECOND HASID:

If you ask me,  
Dancing's better than talking.

*(The Hasidim form a circle with their hands on each other's shoulders and begin to whirl around, breaking into song. The dancing circles of men and women sing along with them.)*

FIRST HASID:

Dancing is a mighty thing!  
You don't have to think!  
You don't have to know!  
Just step out of your body and leave it below!

CIRCLE OF HASIDIM (*clapping their hands*):

Bom-bom!

CIRCLES OF DEAD MEN AND WOMEN (*stamping their feet*):

Clomp-clomp!

SECOND HASID:

Dancing is a mighty thing,  
It has every advantage!  
I ask no questions when I dance,  
Because right off I'm in a trance . . .

DANCING CIRCLES:

Bom-bom!  
Clomp-clomp!

THIRD HASID:

Dancing is a mighty thing!

## EPILOGUE

*(Curtain)*

NARRATOR *(entering and about to speak when he hears voices behind the scrim. Walking over, he peers through an opening in it.)*

How they weep, how they mourn,  
The wind-borne dead!  
No new life was granted them.  
Listen.

*(Voices can be heard from behind the scrim, receding into the distance.)*

FIRST VOICE:

There once was someone who went off  
And left his image in a pool,  
Shimmering in water—  
Until the bucket caught it . . .

SECOND VOICE:

When the earthen jug was cracked,  
Out the wine cascaded.  
A single drop alone was left—  
And that evaporated . . .

THIRD VOICE:

There was a song  
That echoed long,  
Till one last sound  
Was left behind.  
It hummed once more  
And fell  
Dead on the ground . . .

FOURTH VOICE:

After the sun has set,  
A misty wake that's made  
By its reflection reddens in the west—  
And fades . . .

ALL FOUR VOICES TOGETHER:

There were dreams . . .

There was sin . . .  
 There was a wind  
 That carried them away  
 Like straw  
 Or spray . . .

NARRATOR:

How piteous!  
*(He puts his ear to the scrim.)*  
 How hideous!

VOICES OF THE MARKETPLACE DEAD:

An illusion, that's all it ever was.  
 Now His long arm has overtaken us,  
 And we're to blame . . .

NARRATOR:

They're at the graveyard gate . . . they're entering . . .

MOURNFUL VOICES OF DEAD MEN:

With our heads bare . . .

VOICES OF DEAD WOMEN:

. . . and unbraided hair . . .

MEN AND WOMEN TOGETHER:

. . . we step into the grave.

CHORUS OF SYNAGOGUE DEAD:

The night begins to fade!  
 We, Thy humble slaves,  
 Await Thy sign tonight,  
 As every night.  
 Do as Thou seest fit!

NARRATOR:

They're standing by their graves.

SYNAGOGUE DEAD:

And when the earth has covered us again,  
 Thy will be done!  
 We shall wait and be still  
 Until Thou wakest us.  
 Thy will be done!

NARRATOR:

Now I see children.  
*(He turns away.)*  
 I can't look . . .



CHORUS OF GIRLS:

Goodbye, goodbye,  
You sweet blue eyes,  
You little flower heads,  
Goodbye . . .

CHORUS OF BOYS:

And you, sweet pears and peaches,  
On the sweet little branches  
Of the sweet little trees . . .

BOYS AND GIRLS TOGETHER:

Goodbye, goodbye,  
You birds who fly  
In the sweet blue air  
Of the sweet little sky!

SYNAGOGUE DEAD:

And may our sins  
Be wiped away  
Just like a cloud  
On a summer's day!

*(The scrim rises, revealing the cemetery. The dead stand by their open graves. The OLD MAN is once again on the knoll in the middle of the graveyard.)*

THE DEAD:

We do renounce  
All things!

OLD MAN:

Into the ground!

*(The dead descend. The cemetery is cloaked in mist again.)*

NIGHT WATCHMAN (*waking and fumbling uneasily for his whistle*):

Damn!

What did I do with that whistle of mine?

*(The JESTER emerges from the synagogue, his head in a blood-stained bandage. In one hand he holds the gavel used by the BEADLE for waking Jews for the morning prayer; in the other the whistle, which he tosses to the NIGHT WATCHMAN. The NIGHT WATCHMAN backs away with it and exits.)*

JESTER (*to the RECLUSE, penitently*):

I really overdid it this time—

Fell flat on my face, I did!

*(He sees the musicians and is terrified.)*

Be gone! Back to your home of slime!

I do renounce all things!

*(The musicians disappear. He turns to the gargoyle.)*

Turn yourself off, you wild thing!

*(Pointing up at the sky)*

He's awake, don't you see?

Shut your eyes and mouth and listen to me!

*(The gargoyle does as it is told. The JESTER turns to the stone statues, which are stumbling about in the street.)*

Back into your niches!

Stick to your own business!

Up you go, turn back to stone!

Forget all that you've heard, all that you've seen:

Last night was perfectly routine.

*(They do as he bids them and he turns to the rooster.)*

You were right,

And your verdict was just!

O bird,

You are Symbol

And Word.

My sin is great;

I won't repeat it.

I'll lay down my life for you if you need it!

I'll wake the Jews for prayer from now on . . .

*(He knocks with the gavel on a gate.)*

One . . . two . . .

That'll do.

*(He walks along, knocking on gates.)*

Soon they'll all know we had a death last night.

FIANCÉE *(wandering disheveled into the marketplace):*

And what about me? What am I supposed to do?

*(When no one answers her, she disappears down the church street.)*

NARRATOR *(following her with his eyes):*

I always knew it wouldn't last between those two!

*(The RECLUSE and the WANDERER enter the marketplace from opposite ends and slowly converge without noticing each other.)*

RECLUSE:

Vanity of vanities,

All is in vain!

WANDERER:

On the horizon's  
Eastern rim  
A secret hand is fashioning—

RECLUSE:

The chain runs round,  
Link after link . . .

WANDERER:

—bright beams of light,  
Spinning mist out of the night,  
Weaving a new day . . .

RECLUSE:

And there was night and there was day . . .  
Who but a fool could ever say  
That he has lived to see new things?

WANDERER:

And in the heart's interior,  
A secret hand is fashioning . . .  
New music's born,  
New hopes are spun . . .  
O weave yourself, Desire, weave!

RECLUSE:

All's vanity . . .  
(*Bumping into the WANDERER*)  
Live  
All you can,  
Wander  
All you want:  
You'll see nothing new  
Beneath the sun!  
What was is what will be.

WANDERER (*startled*):

And yet something renews itself in me!  
Something draws me out  
And drives me on,  
Away,  
Away . . .  
But to what end?

NARRATOR (*firmly*):

That isn't in the play!

DIRECTOR (*appearing in the wings*):

Watch out for the curtain!

*(The WANDERER and the RECLUSE step quickly back. The scrim begins to drop.)*

WANDERER (*clutching the RECLUSE*):

You don't know?

RECLUSE:

No!

*(The scrim descends all the way.)*

JESTER (*from behind the scrim*):

Jews,

Go

To shul!

Jews, go—

*(A blast of the factory whistle drowns out everyone and everything.)*

*(Curtain)*