

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
PRIMARY SOURCES OF INSPIRATION
IN THE WORKS OF ISAAC BABEL AND MARC CHAGALL

by
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A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF SLAVIC STUDIES

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

FEBRUARY, 1974



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ABSTRACT

The fundamental concern of this thesis was an attempt to account for the similarity of vision and style observed as existing between the works of the writer Isaac Babel and the painter Marc Chagall. In the first chapter the psychic relationship of the artists to their milieu was examined with an eye to discovering basic influences it may have had on the formation and evolution of their aesthetic Weltanschauungen. It was found that certain streams of thought, particularly certain Hasidic interpretations concerning the nature of reality, as well as the socio-cultural tensions each artist faced as a Jew, largely accounted for the similarity of their spiritual outlooks. These primary sources of inspiration, common to both Babel and Chagall, accounted not only for the similarities of content, but also of style.

In the second chapter the works were examined from the perspectives of style and effect. Again it was found that the shape and tone of their cultural universe, i.e. the milieu of the "fiddler-on-the-roof", was structurally reflected in Babel's stories and Chagall's paintings. In order to facilitate comparison, it was necessary to find critical parameters with which the verbal and the visual media could be effectively discussed. Out of this need the composite concept of the epiphanic correlative developed. This concept was used to analyze the manner in which the artist verbally or pictorially formulated his epiphany with the goal of enabling his reader or viewer to experience it with the same force and intensity of the artist's own epiphanic experience. The epiphanic correlative is concerned primarily with style and its anticipated effect.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis was prepared under the guidance of Professor Jaroslav Rozumnyj of the Department of Slavic Studies, University of Manitoba, Canada.

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INTRODUCTION

Although neither can be said to have influenced the other, the creative output of Isaac Emmanuilovich Babel the writer, and Marc Zakharovich Chagall the painter, shares a striking relatedness in both content and form. By and large one can almost say that what the latter wrote with his brush the former painted with his pen. Speaking of this correspondence one critic wrote:

...The resemblance is truly striking. The same poetic wisp recurring throughout the stories of Babel is breathed also in Chagall's paintings...Dazzling colors underline this poetry so penetrated with love and tenderness for mankind and for the entire universe.¹

The similitude appears too overwhelming to be wholly coincidental. An explanation must be sought in the light of their respective developments as artists, in an examination of what it was that became psychologically internalized to become later externalized in their art. The cultural milieus of the artists must also be examined in order to determine whether common influences were operative, and to evaluate the extent their artistic evolutions were thus affected. The central purpose of this study is to discover whether the apparent similitude in their art, in its content and form, derives from common sources of inspiration.

1) Stora-Sandor, Judith, Isaac Babel'--L'Homme et L'Oeuvre, Paris, Editions Klincksieck, 1968, p. 142-143. (Translation mine).

Certain assumptions regarding the nature of art and its relationship to life have been utilized in this study. The notion that no art is created in a void, that it derives from and forms an integral part of the human condition has been subsumed. In the light of this, art can be fully understood only against the background of its cultural matrix.¹ This is not to say that art cannot be appreciated strictly on its own merits, but rather, that a deeper appreciation necessarily involves that the relationship between the artist, his art, and the psychic contents of the milieu which produced the artist, and hence his art, be taken into account.² Hence a work of art is to be understood as a "product of complicated psychic activities, intentional and consciously shaped", while the artist himself is seen as the "psychic apparatus of living, creative personality".³

The artist's experiencing of life, personally as an individual and collectively as a member of his culture, constitutes the raw material of his Weltanschauung, both as a

1) Hall, Robert F. Jr., Cultural Symbolism in Literature, Ithaca, "Linguistica", 1963, p. 9 f.

2) Cassou, Jean, Chagall, New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1965, p. 15. Cassou maintains that "...an artist's entire oeuvre and at the same time his person, his existence, in short all that is implicit in the mention of his name, is a complete entity, an organic whole, a universe."

3) Jung, Carl Gustav, "Psychology and Literature", The Creative Process, ed. Brewster Ghiselin, The New American Library, New York, 1952, p. 208.

person and as an artist. This influence is evidenced in his works both structurally and contextually. The enigmatic patterns of his culture affect not only his life but also his art. In other words, various cultural concerns of the individual artist in relation to his culture or sub-culture (particularly if the artist is a member of a sub-culture which is in conflict with the host culture) are symbolically disclosed in varying degrees in his works. Furthermore, this symbolization may be conscious, more frequently more or less conscious and most frequently unconscious.¹ The artist is then by definition a "...synthesis of contradictory aptitudes. On the one hand he is a human being with a personal life, while on the other side...an impersonal, creative process."² For the most part then, the artist unconsciously symbolizes certain aspects of his culture, certain enigmatic concerns, which due to their deep-rootedness he may at the level of overt expression be unaware of.³

The artist stands in a predetermined relationship with his epoch, his milieu; it has made its psychological

1) Hall, op.cit., p. 14-15.

2) Jung, op.cit., p. 220.

3) Hall, ibid.

imprints upon his formation and development as both an individual and as an artist, and these imprints are in turn consciously or unconsciously^{are} reflected by him in his art. It is in Babel's and Chagall's milieu, in its Zeitgeist, that one must search for their primary sources of inspiration.

In the first chapter then, the relationship of Babel and Chagall with their milieu shall be examined in order to determine whether their spiritual and stylistic kinship might be explained in terms of common sources of inspiration. In so doing, their works, biographies, as well as the observations of other critics shall all be examined. In the second chapter, the similarity of their aesthetic approaches shall be examined against the background information gained in the first chapter.

CHAPTER I

THE BREATH OF AN INVISIBLE ORDER OF THINGS

The cultural milieu of Isaac Babel and Marc Chagall provided them in terms of both content and form with the primary sources of their inspiration. Fundamentally, this milieu was the same temporo-spatial universe so poignantly described almost a quarter of a century preceeding the artistic debuts of Babel and Chagall by Sholem Aleichem, a fellow-countryman and Jew.¹ The basic tone and flavor of this milieu was Jewish; more specifically, Jewish as defined by a Slavic context. Geographically, this universe fell within the territories which today constitute the Ukraine, with extensive overlaps into eastern Poland and southern Bjelorussia. Historically, these territories contained the bulk of East European Jewry, and are traditionally referred to as the "Pale of Settlement".² Babel's native city of Odessa and Chagall's Vitebsk lay on its southernmost and northernmost boundaries.

The works of Babel and Chagall are peopled with the

1) Aleichem was the pen name of Solomon Rabinovich (1859-1916), a Ukrainian-Jewish writer born in Pereyaslav. Aleichem is considered to be one of the three founding fathers of modern Yiddish literature.

2) Greenberg, Louis, The Jews in Russia. The Struggle for Emancipation, (2 vols in 1), New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1965, v.II, p.9-11. This term was used to designate those territories of the Empire in which Jews were allowed residence. It originated under Catherine II in an ukaz of 1772, following the first partition of Poland.

inhabitants of their milieu, mostly Bjelorussian or Ukrainian Jews. The reader is confronted with their problems, with their socio-cultural predicament. Yet, despite the fact that the modern reader is wrenched out of his particular cultural context, he cannot but derive from the various stories and paintings insights which are applicable to the human condition in general. The cultural background of Babel and Chagall, with its idiomatic pastels and textures, provided them with a social and spiritual context, a window to the world at large.

As members of the Russian Empire's Jewish minority, Babel and Chagall found themselves by mere virtue of birth, thrust into a conflict whose origins could be traced back to the societal role prescribed to their ancestors on their first migrations to Eastern Europe. This role, which was an obligatory condition of their rights of survival as a cultural entity, was that of the middleman.¹ None of these measures made them popular with the non-Jewish peasantry which itself was ^{oppressed}, was in no position to appreciate the Jewish predicament. Moreover,

1) Jews were not allowed to work or own land, but were allowed to lease land. Because in addition to taxes which all payed, they had to pay the exorbitant "Jewish" taxes, many were forced to resort to other means of raising capital, e.g. innkeeping, tax-collecting, etc.

the tsars and the Church (both Catholic and Orthodox) utilized ^{the} existing religious and linguistic differences between the Jews and the Christian populace in order to veer their own ^{responsibility} in the matter onto the Jews.

The origins and the evolution of this intercultural conflict, however, are beyond the scope of this study; its existence is acknowledged as a cultural fact within the temporo-spatial framework of the milieu under examination. The concern of this study is rather with the impact of this conflict on the lives and art of Babel and Chagall.

Certain cultural aspects of this milieu, i.e. from the late 1880's until the beginning of the third decade of this century, in the area of the Pale of Settlement are worth mentioning. This time period corresponds to the formative years of Babel and Chagall; the former was born in 1894, the latter in 1887. The places Odessa, Nikolaev (where the Babels lived from 1894 until 1905) and Vitebsk¹ fell within the area of the Pale. The year of Chagall's

1) Although Jews were allowed to reside in these cities, various discriminatory restrictions, e.g. occupational limitations, compulsory conscription, excessive taxation, etc. were imposed upon them. These civil disabilities were in the main, fashioned and refined in accordance with Pobedonostsev's triadic policies of autocracy, orthodoxy and nationality.

birth was marked by the introduction of the notorious numerus clausus (which was to affect in no small way the struggling students Babel and Chagall), while the year preceeding Babel's birth witnessed one of the most terrible pre- itlerite pogroms in the tsarist-administered Bessarabian city of Kishinev.

In "The Story of My Dovecote" (Istoriia mojej golubjatni), dedicated to Maxim Gorky and written in the form of an autobiographical recollection, Babel, through the figure of his nine-year-old self describes a few of the obstacles he encountered in the process of entering the gymnasium

At our secondary school the numerus clausus was stiff: a mere five percent. So that out of forty boys only two that were Jews could get into the preparatory class. The teachers used to put cunning questions to Jewish boys; no one else was asked such devilish questions.¹

In this story (written in 1925) Babel also relates the incident of a pogrom, albeit with several imaginative modifications, e.g. his claim that his granduncle Shoyl was murdered.² For the purposes of this study, however,

1) Babel, Isaac, The Collected Stories, (ed. and transl. by Walter Morison), Cleveland and New York, The World Publishing Company, 1964 (1960), p. 251.

2) Babel, I., The Lonely Years 1925-1939, New York, Noonday Press, 1964, p.xiv f. In her introduction, Babel's daughter Nathalie claims that this illustrates Babel's characteristic tendency to blend fact and fiction.

the view that Babel's "...portrait of the artist as a young Jew, may be considered true artistically if not autobiographically" has been assumed.¹

These pre-Revolutionary years were characterized by numerous mass expulsions of Jews from the various towns and cities within the Empire. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, thousands of anti-Jewish atrocities, i.e. pogroms and other excesses, were systematically carried out. The propagation of various medieval legacies, e.g. ritual murder, well-poisoning, anti-Christian conspiracy, etc., fanned the flames of a rising popular anti-semitism.² During this period it has been estimated that as a direct result of rising and widespread persecution, over a million and a half Jews left the Russian Empire for other countries, mainly those of the New World.

Traditionally the Jews were dedicated to literacy and the quest for knowledge, and had several millenia of outstanding achievements in virtually all fields behind them.³ In contrast, the peoples among whom they lived, with a few exceptions (and these mainly among the ruling classes) had neither this tradition nor inclination. In the Pale

1) Leviant, Curt, "Poignant Polarity", The Saturday Review, No.52, July 12, 1969, p.25.

2) This anti-semitic program was carried out under the auspices of government-approved and supported organizations such as the Cernaja Sotnja (Black Hundreds) and the Sojuz Russkogo Naroda (Union of Russian People).

area, where the majority of the population was still the victim of feudal exploitation and had little hope of improving its dismal social conditions, this contrast was even greater. Furthermore, there were Jews living in almost every country of the world and international liason and influence tended to make them cosmopolitan in political outlook. This fact, at a time of growing nationalism among the Slavs, did not better their relations with their non-Jewish compatriots, who viewed Jewish disinterestedness in their nationalistic aspirations with acrimonious suspicion. Under the influence of then popular Social-Darwinistic theories, almost every country of Europe still referred to its Jewish minorities with the pejorative and noxious phrase, "the Jewish Problem". Several countries, and Russia in particular, still denied their Jews full citizenship rights.

Aleichem's expression, "fiddlers-on-the-roof" is one which poignantly describes the unique cultural quandary of the East European Jews in the context of their milieu. For one who against his choice walks on a roof is, in fact, in a precocious position, being constantly faced with the prospect of falling off. But one who of his own volition, chooses to fiddle in the face of this danger, is concerned with much more than survival alone. One is reminded of Babel's tongue-in-cheek remark on this matter:

...But wasn't it a mistake on the part

of God to settle Jews in Russia, for them to be tormented worse than in Hell? How would it hurt if the Jews lived in Switzerland where they would be surrounded by first-class lakes, mountain air, and nothing but Frenchies? All make mistakes, God not excepted...¹

The case of the East European Jews was not only of contra spem spero, but also of hope tempered with large doses of humour and irony.

In the Pale of Settlement, Jews fared much worse than in other countries at this time. As a direct consequence of persecution, many left for America. Others bound their hopes up in the new and rapidly-spreading doctrines of Marx and Lenin, which promised an international and classless society in which distinctions generating mistrust and hatred would in time, supposedly evaporate. Others sought to become assimilated into the cultures of their host countries, but this alternative proved least popular as usually these apostates were required not only to reject but also to denounce their Jewishness. Still others began to work for a Jewish homeland, where Jews would never be faced with any of the above-mentioned alternatives.

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, op.cit., p.219.

Although it is neither possible nor desirable to treat in depth all of the above-mentioned problems faced by the Jews as Jews in the Pale of Settlement, a few have been mentioned to make the reader aware of some of the perils of being Jewish in Babel's and Chagall's milieu. Both directly and indirectly their origins and Jewish destiny in general loomed large in the lives of both artists and was recurringly depicted in their works. In the years between the turn of the century and the Revolution, anti-semitism gained even greater momentum. It was intensified during World War One and the ensuing Civil War. Chaos and anarchy reigned supreme and its most susceptible victims were the "tolerated aliens", the Jews.¹ Babel's cycle of stories entitled Konarmija (Red Cavalry) begins with a story about the brutal murder of an old Jew before the eyes of his pregnant daughter and terminates with a description of the final moments of a young Jew --the "last prince" of a famous Hasidic dynasty and commander of a routed Red regiment. Similarly, many of Chagall's paintings illustrate the conflicting position of the Jew in the context of the turbulent atmosphere of this period. Inevitably, the problems of Jewishness became a thematic concern for many

1) Meyer, Franz, Marc Chagall--Life and Work, New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., (n.d.), p. 24.

writers and artists, non-Jewish as well as Jewish.¹

Shortly after Babel was born, his family moved from Odessa to Nikolaev (Ukr.: Mykolaiv), a port-city at the mouth of the Buh River. When the young Babel had barely turned five, a pogrom almost as severe as that which had earlier occurred in Kishinev, erupted here. Although the Babel family was not physically harmed during this tragedy, the traumatic event became firmly embedded in the mind of the sensitive young Isaac.² When in 1905, the Babels returned to live in Odessa, another major pogrom erupted in this city in which over 500 people were murdered and another 300 maimed or wounded.³ The prospect of becoming a victim of a pogrom loomed in the mind of every Jew living at this time. A mass but not unfounded paranoia prevailed among the East European Jews, who saw their extermination promulgated in the currently racist press, and who could find little reassurance from the predominantly anti-semitic officialdoms. It is then hardly surprising that the pogrom itself became a theme for many artists and writers.

1) Choseed, Bernard J., "Jews in Soviet Literature", in Through the Glass of Soviet Literature, ed. Ernest J. Simmons, New York, Columbia University Press, 1961 (1953), p. 110-158.

2) Nikolaev provides the setting for two of Babel's stories: Istorija mojej golubjatni (Story of My Dovecote) and Pervaja Ljubov (First Love).

3) Greenberg, op.cit., v.II, p.76-9.

In later years both Babel and Chagall had gone to the capital, St. Petersburg, the former to attempt to get his stories published, the latter to continue his studies at the various art schools there.¹ Both were there illegally as they did not possess residence permits.² The relationship of Babel and Chagall to their milieu in toto, must be viewed as one of psycho-social conflict. This conflict is reflected in their works in terms of a series of dichotomous tensions and contrasts. The various conflicting alternatives available to Jews inevitably worked their way into the subject matter of their art. Although each treated this material in his own individual way, both were deeply concerned with the encounter of the Jewish with the non-Jewish world, and this intercultural confrontation provides the conscious and subconscious source of inspiration for many of their works.

1) In the winter of 1906-7, Chagall left for the capital. For support he retouched photographs. He was also aided by Baron Ginsburg, a philanthropist and patron of the arts. He was arrested and imprisoned for not possessing a residence permit. Another influential Jew rescued him by ostensibly hiring him as a footman-servant. Chagall studied first at Saidenberg's private school, and later at the "Imperial Society for the Protection of the Arts" school. In 1908, he began studies under Leon Bakst at the famous Svaneva School. In 1910, under the patronage of Duma member and Vosxod editor M.M. Vinaver, Chagall left for Paris where he remained until the outbreak of the war. Both Chagall and Babel lived in St. Petersburg between 1915 and 1917, but it is not known whether they knew each other personally.

2) Only doctors, lawyers and certain categories of merchants were allowed residence; for all other Jews it was a crime to be in the capital.

Both as men and as artists, Babel and Chagall were caught between opposing cultural forces. According to Yarmolinsky, Babel had left the ghetto "painlessly" but was keenly aware that in Russian society his Jewish origin would not be forgotten. He was "...emotionally involved with the particularity of the Jewish experience", and although he may not have desired to preserve Jewish "distinctiveness", Babel did not "...repudiate the Jewish ethos."¹ The Polish-Jewish novelist Bashevis-Singer was closer to the truth when he wrote that Babel "...was deeply rooted in the Jewish soil, but it was a Jewishness which sought to escape from itself."² As Jews, both Babel and Chagall were faced with rendering their Jewishness meaningful, since they refused to abandon it in a society which demanded nothing less. In their works, and particularly in Babel's case this tension is everywhere apparent and serves as an aesthetic dynamic.

Babel's and Chagall's aesthetic outlooks are very similar. Their works "...open the door of the same universe, constructed on the same source of inspiration. Old Russia and her folklore, the life of her Jews, impregnated with talmudic and biblical traditions, are the principal themes of both."³

1) Yarmolinsky, Avrahm, "Isaac Babel (1894-1941): An Odessa Maupassant", The Russian Literary Imagination, New York, Funk & Wagnalls, 19 , p.137.

2) Bashevis-Singer, Isaac, "A Good Storyteller Never Surrenders", Book World, July 13, 1969, p.6.

3) Stora-Sandor, op.cit., p.143.

Consciously and unconsciously Babel and Chagall have drawn from these well-springs of their milieu. An examination of their works then, must entail a familiarization with the psycho-sociological and historical factors which formed and nourished their artistic development and works.

The traditional Jewish Weltanschauung, particularly its Hasidic variant, as well as the problems facing the East European Jew in a predominantly non-Jewish environment, provided both artists with their outlooks and themes. Although neither Babel nor Chagall adhered in their mature lives to any orthodox doctrines, both retained a trenchantly Jewish attitude which "...explored that medley of private sensibility, ingroup experience, and onslaught of history that has gone into the moulding of the consciousness of the modern Jew."¹ The primary sources of their artistic inspiration fall within the cultural sphere: each was concerned with the nature and vicissitudes of Jewish life and destiny.

Several attempts to explore the cultural identities of Babel and Chagall through their artistic figures and personae have been made, and various unlikely conclusions have been reached. In some instances this was due to the critic's lack of familiarity with the milieu, while in other cases it was because their works were assumed to be strictly

1) Fein, Richard J., "Babel and the End", Judaism, XVIII, 4, Fall 1969, p. 109.

autobiographical. In this study the position suggested by Leviant, that the fictional characters may or may not be the artists themselves, that the "...crucible of art has subsumed autobiography", has been adopted.¹

There are of course, certain differences between Babel's and Chagall's treatment of Jewish subject matter and themes. These differences may be explained for the most part, in terms of their individual backgrounds and personalities. Whereas Chagall came from a strictly orthodox, Hasidic background, Babel's parents were partially-assimilated "Russified" Jews. Whereas Chagall's Jewishness was, so to speak, "organic", Babel's was that of one in search of roots, in search of meaning in his somewhat obscured identity. Chagall is concerned with the relationship of the Jew to the Gentile, Babel with that of Jew and Slav. For Chagall it is a matter of cultural co-existence between Jew and non-Jew, while for Babel the additional question of cultural synthesis between Jew and Slav, of ideological synthesis between Jew and Marxist is foremost.

Babel's story Karl-Yankel provides a curious insight into his attitude toward cultural and ideological synthesis and Slavic-Jewish identity.² This story examines

1) Leviant, op.cit., p. 24.

2) Babel, The Collected Stories, op.cit., p. 283-293.

but does not attempt to resolve the problem of inter-cultural and ideological conflict (typical of Babel's characteristic non-didactiveness). Karl-Yankel is the offspring of one Ovsej Belotserkovsky -- an up-and-coming young Soviet citizen and candidate for Party membership, and Polina Brutman -- the atheistic daughter of a Jewish blacksmith and his deeply devout, Hasidic wife Brana.

The story centres around a trial, in which Ovsej, upon consultation with his Party Secretary, sues his mother-in-law Brana and one mohel Naftula Gerchik.¹ The charge is that of "moral defilement". While the son-in-law had been out of town on official business, Brana had the infant circumcized by Naftula, and named him Yankel. Ovsej, in keeping with his political aspirations, wanted the child to be called Karl. Brana had been motivated in her action by the desire to have a Jewish grandson to whom she could tell her Hasidic tales.

The trial verges on the ludicrous. It is attended by Galician tsadikim, who came because the Warsaw papers had described the case as being one of Judaism on trial.² The prosecutor Orlov, who accuses Gerchik of endangering the child's health, turns out to be one Zusman, who some

1) Ritual circumcisor.

2) Plural of "tsadik" - literally 'saintly one', the head of a Hasidic dynasty.

thirty years earlier had been circumcized by the very same mohel. Babel's own views on circumcision are indicated in his humane description of Naftula, and in Naftula's sarcastic retort to Orlov, in which he describes the prosecutor's own lost foreskin as "...that little bit of nothing at all, anything that could have been of service to you."¹

The author is openly sympathetic with Braña's dilemma. He appreciates her suffering with the knowledge that "...her children were not believers, and could not bear the thought that her grandchildren would not grow up to be Jews."² In Polina's testimony, Babel's reluctance to condemn the grandmother's act is apparent: "You must take into account the sort of family my mother was brought up in. You all know the little town of Medzhibozh. The women there still wear wigs..."³ Polina's pleading words could just as easily been those of Babel's or Chagall's mother, or of Jewish mothers and grandmothers in general.

Thus although the trial is presented as one which involves but a few otherwise insignificant individuals, the implication that it is one which could have serious and widespread ramifications for Soviet Jews, is made. Karl-Yankel is more than a name; it is a symbol of cultural and ideo-

1) Op.cit., p. 287.

2) Ibid., p. 289.

3) Ibid.

logical conflict. The outcome of the trial will set a precedent which will affect Soviet-Jewish destiny.

In the concluding passages of the story, Babel reveals his own sense of personal involvement with Karl-Yankel's fate:

From the window flew the straight
streets trodden by my childhood and youth...
I had grown up on these streets, and
now it was Karl-Yankel's turn. But they
hadn't fought for me as now they were
fighting for him: few were those to whom I
had been of any concern.
"Its not possible," I whispered to my-
self, "its not possible that you won't be
happy, Karl-Yankel. Its not possible that
you won't be happier than I." ¹

The infant's cultural survival under the new regime's ideology must be considered as a projection of Babel's own. The concluding lines are subtly ambiguous: the reader is left wondering whether the narrator's statement beginning with the phrase "Its not possible...", which gains significance through being emphatically repeated three times, is one which indicates a conflicting double-view of the infant's destiny. Although it seems at first glance to imply a belief that Karl-Yankel-- in whom Babel's own cultural quandary is projected-- will not suffer as Babel did before him, the thrice-repeated negative form in which the belief is expressed, reveals through implication the author's own doubts and fears.

1) Op.cit., p. 293.

Cultural and ideological conflict is integral to Babel's portrait of the artist as a young Jew. His story Awakening presents the conflict a Jewish ghetto child with literary aspirations experiences when confronted with the outside, non-Jewish world:

...To learn to swim was my dream. I was ashamed to confess...that born in Odessa, I had not seen the sea until I was ten, and at fourteen didn't know how to swim.

How slow was my acquisition of the things one needs to know! In my childhood, chained to the Gemara, I had led the life of a sage. When I grew up I started climbing trees.

But swimming proved beyond me. The hydrophobia of my ancestors--Spanish rabbis and Frankfurt money-changers--dragged me to the bottom.¹

This struggle of "rabbis versus Neptune" is the basis of Babel's cultural dilemma. It is the conflict between the traditionally scholarly and contemplative nature of Jewish life on the one hand, and a life of direct action on the other; a conflict which has plagued Judaeo-Christian philosophers since Plato's time. It is the conflict of culture versus nature, or "...art and the life of action, or freedom and necessity..."² In this story Babel has the

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 309. This passage reminds one of Chagall's comment "Just imagine! Every Saturday, instead of going bathing in the river, my mother sent me to him (the little rabbi from Mohilev) to study the Bible." In Chagall, Marc, My Life, New York, The Orion Press, 1960, p. 44.

2) Hyman, Stanley Edgar, "Identities of Isaac Babel", The Promised End, Cleveland and New York, World Publishing Company, 1963, p. 323.

local "water-god", a Gentile proofreader for an Odessan newspaper, ^{helping} the young artist gain an invaluable insight. He admires the lad's literary attempts but admonishes him for his apparent estrangement from the world of nature:

"And you dare to write! A man who doesn't live in nature as a stone does or an animal, will never in his life write two worthwhile lines. Your landscapes are like descriptions of stage props..."¹

The child's reaction to this observation reminds one of the shock the men facing the wall in Plato's cave felt, when they discovered that the shadows before them did not represent reality. This epiphany, in the Joycean sense, explains Babel's choice of title.²

In the story In the Basement, Babel informs the reader of the form his typical diversions from filial burdens of lessons and musical training took:

I was an untruthful little boy. It was because of my reading: my imagination was always working overtime. I read during lessons, during recess, on my way home, at night under the table, hidden by the hanging tablecloth. My nose buried in a book, I let slide everything that really mattered, such as playing truant in the harbor, learning the art of

1) Babel, The Collected Works, op.cit., p. 311-312.

2) The concept of the Joycean "epiphany" as literary device in Babel's works, shall be dealt with in greater depth in the second chapter of this study.

billiards in the coffeehouses on Greek Street, going swimming at Langeron. I had no pals. Who would have wanted to waste his time with a boy like me? ¹

And one is reminded of the passage in You Must Know Everything, where the young lad spends a Sabbath eve doing his lessons at his grandmother's:

...All grandmother had left was my father and me. Everything else was gone. For her, day was turning into night and death was coming slowly. She fell silent again, then lowered her head and began to cry. "Study!", she suddenly said with great vehemence. "Study and you will have everything -- wealth and fame! You must know every thing. The whole world will fall at your feet and grovel before you. Everybody must envy you. Do not trust people. Do not have friends. Do not lend them money. Do not give them your heart!"

She said no more. There was silence in the room. She was thinking about years gone by and all her troubles. She was thinking about my future, and her stern commandments pressed down heavily-- and forever -- on my weak, untried shoulders...I was hot and stifled, and I wanted to escape, but I hadn't even the strength to raise my head...²

Thus even the play in which the child engaged in is still determined by the traditional and obsessive emphasis on intellectuality and education. This culturally-determined desire to know and understand, as opposed to the desire

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, op.cit., p. 293-4.

2) Babel, Isaac, You Must Know Everything. Stories 1915-1937, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969 (1966), p. 11-12.

to climb trees and swim, is dominant in the budding artist's youth. The eminent writer Ilya Ehrenburg, a close friend of Babel's, astutely commented that Babel "...only wanted to see what he could see deeply."¹ Without long, academic statements on the nature of the conflict between Judaic tradition and Orthodox Christianity, with its incorporation of pagan Rus' pantheistic elements, Babel unobtrusively comments on both, presenting the former as being time-oriented or life in a "...moral order alienated from nature and natural law", and the latter as being space-oriented or life in a "...natural order antecedent to morality."²

It is now possible to understand Babel's later attempt to become a Jewish-Cossack in the person of Ljutov in the Konarmija cycle of stories, and also his positive response to his mentor-protector Gorky's advice to "go among the people" in the tradition of the Populists (Narodniki).³ His non-fictional "water-god" was in reality, Gorky.

In the Red Cavalry cycle, Babel treats the theme of cultural and ideological synthesis. The cycle begins with the story Perexod čerez Zbruč (translated by Morison as "Crossing Into Poland") and ends with The Rabbi's Son.

1) Babel, You Must Know Everything, op.cit., p. 229.

2) Hyman, op.cit., p. 323.

3) In the early part of 1920, Babel was press correspondent for JUGROSTA (the predecessor of TASS). He was assigned to Budennyj's First Cavalry under the pseudonym of Kiril Vas-siljevich Ljutov, presumably to conceal his Jewish identity.

Throughout this cycle of stories a unity is provided in the figure of Ljutov, Babel's narrator and possibly alter ego, who may be described as an assimilated, Russified Jew in search of a way of life that would encompass the Jewish ethos, the Slavic (specifically Cossack) ethos, as well as the new Marxist-Leninist ideology.

As Babel himself did, Ljutov rides with Marshall Budennyj in the Russo-Polish campaign of 1920. In the story Crossing Into Poland, Ljutov is billeted in an impoverished Jewish home in Novograd, where several Jews, one of them a pregnant woman, are living. Coming from cosmopolitan Odessa, these Galycian Jews are not familiar to Ljutov, and his initial attitude toward them appears hostile and unsympathetic. He views them in virtually sub-human terms:

...the two Jews rose from their places and, hopping on their felt shoes, cleared the mess from the floor. They skipped about noiselessly, monkey-fashion, like Japs in a circus act, their necks swelling and twisting...¹

And in the story Two Ivans, a similar description:

...Jews in waistcoats stood about on the doorsteps, hunching their shoulders and looking like plucked fowls. Cossacks were going from yard to yard, collecting towels and eating unripe plums...²

More disarming still is the sacrilegious distance Ljutov

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, op.cit., p. 42.

2) Ibid., p. 158.

assumes in referring to their broken Passover crockery as "occult" (sokrovennoj).

Significantly Ljutov falls asleep on a cot which he shares with an old Jew, and dreams a dream of betrayal (on the part of his brigade commander). He is roused from his dream by the pregnant Jewess who informs him that in his sleep he had been knocking his bed-partner, her old father about. The old man, it turns out, is dead, having been brutally slaughtered by the retreating Poles:

...His throat had been torn out and his face cleft in two; in his beard blue blood was clotted like a lump of lead.¹

Ljutov, although himself Jewish, has until this point been unaware of the horrifying and humiliating experiences to which these Jews, living in Galycia and Volhynja, had been exposed. Presumably Ljutov (like Babel himself) had come to these parts from the South, where Jews fared considerably better, and most likely belonged to the class of assimilated, Russified Jews. In the story Discourse on the Tachanka, Babel contrasts clearly the distinctions between these two categories of Jews:

...Narrow-chested Jews hung mournfully about the crossways. The image of the stout and jovial Jews of the South, bubbling like cheap wine, took shape in my memory, in sharp contrast to the bitter scorn inherent in these long bony backs,

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, op.cit., p. 43.

these tragic yellow beards. In these passionate, anguish-chiselled features there was not fat, no warm pulsing of blood. The Jews of Volhynia and Galicia moved jerkily, in an uncontrolled and uncouth way, but their capacity for suffering was full of a somber greatness, and their unvoiced contempt for the Polish gentry unbounded. Watching them, I understood the poignant history of the region: the stories of Talmudists renting taverns, of Rabbis carrying on usury, of young girls raped by Polish troopers and over whom Polish magnates fought pistol duels.¹

These are the Jews who stand in contrast to the Jews among whom Ljutov has grown up, the "bankers without a history and catapulted out of nowhere, converted Jews who had grown rich selling materials to the army...".² One need only compare the pregnant young Jewess in the story Crossing Into Poland with Raisa Bendersky in Guy de Maupassant:

...It was easy to recognize in Raisa Bendersky one of those charming Jewesses who have come to us from Kiev and Poltava, from the opulent steppe-towns full of chestnut trees and acacias. The money made by their clever husbands is transformed by these women into a pink layer of fat on the belly, the back of the neck, and the well-rounded shoulders. Their subtle, sleepy smiles drive officers from the local garrisons crazy.³

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, op.cit., p. 85-6.

2) Ibid., p. 330.

3) Ibid., p. 330-331.

In Crossing Into Poland, Ljutov awakens to his Jewish identity. His initial attitude of indifference and near-hostility has become radically transformed. He has gained an insight into the plight of his persecuted people, an insight which derives from an understanding of the history of this region. The distance between Ljutov and the Galician Jews has all but vanished and in the story Pan Apollek, he endearingly refers to them as "my plundered Jews". In Road to Brody, Ljutov's sense of identification with these martyrs has intensified, to the extent where he feels guilt for not sharing their fate:

O Brody! The mummies of your crushed passions breathed upon me their irremediable poison. I could already sense the deathly chill of orbits suffused with tears grown cold. And here am I being borne away at a jolting gallop, far from the dented stones of your synagogues.¹

The story Gedali provides further insight into the identity of Ljutov and introduces another of Babel's major Jewish figures, the old Gedali. In the first paragraph Babel presents Ljutov's predicament of identity:

On Sabbath eves I am oppressed by the dense melancholy of memories. In bygone days on these occasions my grandfather would stroke the volumes of Ibn Ezra with his yellow beard. His old woman in her lace cap would trace fortunes with her knotty fingers over the Sabbath candles, and sob softly to herself. On these

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, op.cit., p. 82.

evenings my child's heart was rocked like a little ship upon enchanted waves. O the rotted Talmuds of my childhood! O the dense melancholy of memories!¹

These are the longings and heartaches of a highly sensitive Jewish soul for those childhood moments which can never return. Central to this meta-nostalgic recollection is the traditional atmosphere of the Jewish Sabbath: his grandfather pouring over the sacred ancient tomes, his grandmother in holiday attire, the special Sabbath candles.

This longing on the part of Ljutov, estranged and severed from the Jewish atmosphere of his childhood, by the events of war and revolution and his participation in these events, is that much more intense because of the actuality of Jewish suffering confronting him in every town and village, by the death of the shtetl, the death throes of the "fat soul of plenty".

Ljutov's search ends when he meets Gedali, the Hasidic proprietor of a small curiosity shop. In appearance Gedali is the stereotypical, orthodox shtetl Jew: his beard is neither shaved nor shorn, his dress non-Europeanized -- he wears the traditional full-length kaftan, with a hat like a "little black tower". His shop is like the "box of an important and knowledge-loving

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, op.cit., p. 70.

little boy who will grow up to be a professor of botany."¹ In his shop, amongst other various artifacts of different epochs and places are to be found gilt slippers, ship's cables, an ancient compass, a stuffed eagle, an 1810 Winchester rifle; in short, what Macguire has called the "spoor of his dead humanism".²

The disillusionment of the vast majority of the shtetl Jews with the Revolution and its apparent indifference to the worth of the individual is revealed in the person of Gedali. The old man fails to see any difference between revolution and the so-called "counterrevolution". He views the catch-phrase of internationalism as a fine-sounding camouflage for the same old Russification; when he says "my znajem što takoe Internacional", the personal pronoun invariably refers to the Jews, and his tone is bitter and sarcastic.³

Initially Gedali had not been opposed to the Revolution. It is unlikely that the events culminating in the inauguration of a liberal on March 17, 1917 did not please him; among the very first measures the Provisional Government had taken was the abolition of the noxious, complex system of civil (and particularly Jewish) disabilities.

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 70.

2) Macguire, Robert A., Red Virgin Soil--Soviet Literature in the 1920's, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 337.

3) Literally "we know what this International means!" (Emphasis and translation mine).

This, however, turned out to be more of a theoretical formality than an actual change in practice.

For the centuries-oppressed Jewish population, the bitter disappointment following the short-lived relief was particularly intense; many had viewed it as a last hope, and many had devoted their lives and energies to the Marxist cause. The disillusionment of Gedali and others like him marked a definite shift in East European Jewish political orientation. Zionism was to become the more practical dream of all the Gedalis who survived the turbulent years of the Revolution.

An entirely different reaction is represented by Ljutov. Unlike Gedali, he refuses to become disenchanted. He is not undisturbed by the brutality of the Revolution, but like his author's friend the poet Aleksander Blok, believes it unavoidable.¹ He attempts to convince the elder Gedali of this but fails. The conflict between Ljutov and Gedali may yet be stated another way: Revolution versus Sabbath, or Judaism versus Marxism. Gedali cannot see why the two need be incompatible, why the two ideologies could not coexist. Ljutov, on the other hand, stands torn between the two. Babel concludes the story in two taut but

1) Aleksander A. Blok (1880-1921) was one of the foremost Russian symbolist poets and the reference here is to his poem "The Twelve".

pregnant with meaning, sentences:

The Sabbath is coming. Gedali, the founder of an impossible International, has gone to the synagogue to pray.¹

For old Gedali there cannot be a synthesis of Marxism and Judaism, at least in practice. Perhaps the timing of the great social experiment was not right, perhaps in Gedali's case, there could not be a right time. For the young Ljutov, however, there is hope. A product of the St. Petersburg university, he can rationalize the justification of means, and attempt to distinguish between the revolution and counterrevolution.

Ljutov's God may be "pensioned-off", but he remains nevertheless, Jewish. The nature of Ljutov's request of Gedali reveals the nature of his religiosity. Following no dogma, neither agnostic nor atheistic, he tolerates and even sympathizes with Gedali's mysticism. Through his eyes religion, at least Judaism, doesn't take on the conspiratory and dangerous nature attributed to it by Party propagandists; if it is an "opiate", then it is a harmless one. Ljutov, like his author was a tolerant Marxist.

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 72.

Ljutov's parents are conspicuously not mentioned by Babel in the Konarmija cycle of stories. Presumably they were not unlike Babel's own. They had provided him with a secular (i.e. Russian) education as well as a Jewish one. Members of the moyenne bourgeoisie, with a tendency toward assimilation, they had hoped that their son would become assimilated into Russian society and not face the problems of cultural alienation from the society of the majority.¹ On the other hand, their efforts virtually cut him off from the mainstream of Jewish cultural tradition. Moreover, non-Jewish society only partially accepted him, and then only as a Jew. Hence he turned to the world of his grandparents, to his Jewish heritage from which he had been sheltered and all but alienated.

Gedali represents the traditional orthodox non-Russified shtetl Jew, while Ljutov is the assimilation-oriented, "emancipated" urban Jew, whose involvement with Jewish life is considerably more removed than Gedali's. Ljutov's relationship with Gedali is characteristic of his identity crisis; Ljutov is searching for his roots, and Gedali is one of his most organic but problematic sources. Although he is somewhat uncomfortable with Gedali, he is

1) Stora-Sandor, op.cit., p. 19.

even more disconsolate without him. Gedali is a kind of symbolic grandparent to Ljutov, not unlike his own grandfather who studied the Talmud on Sabbath eves.

In the story Rabbi (which may be considered an extension of the story Gedali in terms of theme and characters), Gedali takes Ljutov to the "court" of Rabbi Motale, the last tsadik of the Černobyl dynasty.¹ The tsadik is dressed in traditional attire: a white dressing gown drawn round him with a cord, and a sable cap. His eyes are closed, his thin fingers "monkish". His court is almost parodic, a pathetic caricature of what once was. The devastating circumstances of war and revolution which reduced Zhitomir's once-lively ghetto into a deserted ghost town, have had a similar drastic effect on the tsadik's entourage, now nothing more than an assembly of pitiful and broken old men, or as Babel puts it: "...broad-shouldered Jews who resembled fishermen and apostles..."²

1) Hasidism was founded by Israel ben Eliezer (born ca. 1700) when he was living in the village of Kutu, on the fringe of the Carpathians. He came to be known as the "Besht"-- an acrostic in Hebrew letters for Baal Shem Tov 'Master of the Good Name'. According to legend he lived for seven years in the manner of St. Francis of Assisi, then left his home to wander through Volynja, Wallachia and Podilja. Beset with the prevailing sense of alienation among the peasants as well as with the sophistry of the scholarly rabbis, he preached familiar narratives from the Torah, Tanach and Zohar in the Yiddish vernacular. After his death in 1760, his "movement" split up into "dynasties" headed by "tsadikim". By the turn of the nineteenth century, virtually all East European Jews were Hasidic in persuasion.

2) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 79.

At the tsadik's court, Rabbi Motale Braclavskij poses four questions to Ljutov: whence he came from, his occupation, his studies, and his reason for coming. Ljutov falsely answers the second question, stating that he is versifying the adventures of Hersch of Ostropolje.¹ In the presence of the tsadik, Ljutov evades mention of his revolutionary affiliation and activities. This conscious omission must be construed as implying more than conflict-avoidance. Ljutov, being generally outspoken, e.g. with Gedali, would have been deeply shamed and hurt by the tsadik's inevitable disapproval. In the presence of his ancestral heritage, Ljutov chooses to deny his connection with the forces which Gedali proclaimed "...smashed open the windows and doors of the edifice of Hasidism".² Ljutov's reference to the presence of liars in Rabbi Motale's court no doubt refers to himself, to his sense of being in "bad faith".³

In another passage Babel contrasts the peaceful little Hasidic gathering with the hostile outside environment:

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 78. The correspondence here between Ljutov's professed occupation and his author's actual one is particularly revealing. Babel wrote a story Shabos Nahamu (1918), subtitled "From the cycle Hershele", Ostropoljer was a character in Pale folklore, an archetypal trickster not unlike Tyll Eulenspiegel.

2) Ibid., p. 77.

3) Ibid., p. 78.

The Rabbi blessed the food and we sat down at the table. Beyond the window horses were neighing, Cossacks were shouting. Beyond the window yawned the wilderness of war...¹

And when Ljutov leaves the candle-lit sanctuary, another contrast is made:

...At the station, in the propaganda train of the First Cavalry Army, there awaited for me the flare of innumerable lights, the magical brilliance of the wireless station, the stubborn coursing of the printing presses, and my unfinished article for the Red Trooper.²

Ljutov's brief excursion into the world of his Hasidic ancestry has terminated. In the candle-lit, time-hallowed little courts, Jewish life and lore continues in spite of the electrical violence of war and revolution that rages outside. Ljutov has left the sanctum of timelessness and returned to the blinding, space-oriented, time-disregarding present.

This story introduces one other character who figures prominently among Babel's fictional Jews and who appears again in another story The Rabbi's Son:

...And suddenly I caught sight of a ... youth with the face of Spinoza, with Spinoza's powerful brow and the wan face of a nun. He was smoking, shuddering like a recaptured prisoner brought back to his cell.³

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 80.

2) Ibid., p.

3) Ibid., p. 79.

Ljutov is informed by one of the Hasidim that this youth was Elijah, Rabbi Motale Braclavskij's son: "...the cursed son, the last son, the unruly son."¹

Besides Ljutov and Gedali, Elijah must be considered as Babel's third major character in the Konarmija cycle of stories. Essentially, Elijah represents a cultural synthesis of Ljutov and Gedali. Unlike Ljutov, Elijah is steeped in the traditions of Hasidic Judaism, being the son and potential heir of the Černobyl dynasty. Unlike Gedali, he is young, a Marxist and much involved in the contemporary socio-political upheavals.

The story The Rabbi's Son begins with a tender and nostalgic evocation of the evening at the tsadik's court, of Ljutov's vivid impressions on that Sabbath eve. The opening passages are addressed to Vasilij (Elijah's Russian name), whom Ljutov's propaganda train finds in the Kovel region, wounded and dying:

Do you remember Zhitomir, Vasily? Do you remember the River Teterev, Vasily, and that night when the Sabbath, the young Sabbath crept along the sunset, crushing the stars beneath her little red heel?

The slender horn of the moon bathed its darts in the dark waters of the river. Queer old Gedali, the founder of the Fourth International, led us to Rabbi Motale Bratslavsky's for evening prayers. Queer old Gedali shook the cock's feathers on his top hat in

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 79.

the ruddy haze of evening. The predatory eyes of lighted candles blinked in the Rabbi's room. Broad-shouldered Jews groaned dully, bent over prayerbooks, and the old buffoon of the Chernobyl saddiks jingled coppers in his frayed pocket.

Do you remember that night, Vasily? Beyond the window, horses were neighing and Cossacks shouting. The wilderness of war yawned beyond the window, and Rabbi Motale Bratslavsky prayed by the eastern wall, digging his emaciated fingers into his talith. Then the curtain of the Ark was drawn aside, and we saw in the funereal candle-light the Torah rolls sheathed in covers of purple velvet and blue silk, and, bowed above the Torah, inanimate and resigned, the beautiful face of Elijah the Rabbi's son, last prince of the dynasty.¹

They had spotted the pantless young man doubled up beneath his soldier's pack in the crowds around the Political Section train at Kovel:

...And a monstrous and inconceivable Russia tramped in bast shoes on either side of the coaches, like a multitude of bugs swarming in clothes. The typhus-ridden peasantry rolled before them the customary humpback of a soldier's death.²

Breaking the rule, Ljutov lifted him onto the coach and

...laid him in a corner of the editorial office, on the floor, and Cossacks in loose red trousers set straight the clothes that were dropping off him. The girls (typists, L.Y.) planted their bandy legs--

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 191.

2) Ibid., p. 192.

legs of unforward females--on the floor, and stared dully at his sexual organs, the stunted, curly-covered virility of a wasted Semite. And I, who had seen him on one of my nights of roaming, began to pack in a case the scattered belongings of the Red Army man Bratslavsky.¹

These scattered belongings themselves symbolize the conflicts of the youth; side by side are the following^{items}: the mandates of the propagandist and the notebooks of a Jewish poet, a portrait of Lenin (revealing the "knotted iron" of his skull) and one of Maimonides (in dull silk), a copy of the Resolutions of the Sixth Party Congress inside which are found a lock of a woman's hair, revolver cartridges, pages from the Canticle of Canticles, and communist leaflets with ancient Hebrew verses scribbled in the margins.² The impact of the dying Vasilij's possessions on Ljutov in terms of their symbolism are traumatic: "They fell upon me in a mean and depressing rain--pages of the Song of Songs and revolver cartridges."³

When Ljutov asks Elijah why he hadn't belonged to the Party at the time of their last encounter, the youth

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 192.

2) As in the description of Gedali's shop, Babel here employs the "objective correlative" (to be treated more deeply in the second chapter of this study) in order to transmit to the reader a total emotional apprehension of the situation.

3) Ibid., p. 193.

replies that he had, but that he was then unable to leave his mother. But later he had left for the front, concluding that "when there's a revolution on, a mother's an episode..."¹ With pride the rebellious young but dying idealist beams about his regiment's having reached Kovel, in spite of their defeat due to lack of artillery. Babel concludes the story with the following intense and emotionally-charged passage:

He died before we reached Rovno. He-- that last of the Princes--died among his poetry, phylacteries, and coarse foot-wrappings. We buried him at some forgotten station. And I, who can scarce contain the tempests of my imagination within this age-old body of mine, I was there beside my brother (emphasis mine) when he breathed his last.²

The oft-levelled charge that Babel sought to "escape" or deny his Jewishness cannot stand up to an in-depth examination of his principal characters. The unmistakable pattern of his characterizations should by now be clear; almost without exception his "heroes" are Jews who suffer either because of cultural, i.e. Jewish-Slavic, or ideological, i.e. Judaic-Marxist, conflict. In all cases, whether it is

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 193.

2) Ibid.

the infant Karl-Yankel, the teenage-narrator personally, Gedali, Elijah or Ljutov himself, Babel presents their suffering as a consequence of conflicts directly resulting from their Jewishness. The author's sympathies, although infrequently veiled (mostly on account of contemporary political considerations or pressures), are clear: the conflicts which his characters face are capsule fragmentations of his own conflict, just as Dostoevsky's Karamazov brothers can most adequately be interpreted as aspects of a single personality.

Like Babel, Chagall drew his inspiration from virtually the same sources: Jewish life as defined by its East European, specifically Bjelorussian setting. As one of his commentator's points out Chagall's entire long career was "...deeply imbued throughout...with all manifestations of the East European Jewish life he experienced in his youth in the ghetto of Vitebsk."¹ Unlike Babel however, Chagall had not experienced an imposed alienation from his Jewish cultural heritage due to parental assimilationism. Unlike Babel's parents, Chagall's were orthodox Hasidim, perhaps more akin in their socio-cultural outlook to the

1) Werner, Alfred, "Chagall and the Bible", Reconstructionist, Dec. 29, 1967, p. 7.

grandparents Babel frequently refers to. In any case, nothing could have been further from the Chagalls' minds than the Russification or assimilation of their son Marc, a prospect neither encouraged nor desired. Hence, Chagall never felt a need, as Babel did, of cultural reconciliation or synthesis; he simply accepted the existing social categories.¹

The distinction noted by Meyer between Chagall and the writer Franz Kafka, applies to a certain extent to the distinction existing between Chagall and Babel:

...Kafka came from an assimilated family in which Judaism had degenerated into a mere empty husk, without a homeland of his own and an alien in the Christian world, he felt most deeply the precariousness of all orders and relationships. For Chagall, instead, though living apart from all specific religious and social forms, the intact conception of the world received from the tradition of a simple Eastern Jewish community provided a solid ground on which he could rely...from out of his work radiates the spirit of a new, more humane order rooted in age-old tradition.²

Like the Jewishness of Kafka's parents, that of the Babels was mainly token. Despite this rather fine distinction, namely that Babel had to search^{for,} whereas Chagall (like Babel's character Elijah) started life out in the living presence

1) The fact that Chagall at an early age, and again later in his life was to live abroad in the relatively free atmosphere of Paris, throws considerable light on this assertion.

2) Meyer, op.cit., p. 91.

of Jewish tradition, both Chagall and Babel were deeply concerned with the tribulations and exaltations of the Jew in modern society.

As Venturi had observed of Chagall:

We must also consider what it meant to be a Jew in Czarist Russia--the humiliations, the threats, the pogroms. Then we begin to understand Chagall's obsessions. His hypersensitive mind feeds on memories of his parents, of the houses and streets of his native town, the long, haunted nights, the sounds that conjured up ghosts in the darkness. To elude them, he pictures himself on the roof or imagines he is flying through the air; he rebels against them with irony and a certain impudence, with an upsurge of courage and that forlorn violence which is the last resort of timorous spirits.¹

Certainly Chagall like Babel had frequently encountered anti-semitism. His mother had to bribe the elementary school teacher to get her son accepted (incidentally, he was accepted directly into the third form as that was the class of the teacher who had accepted the bribe).² His paintings had not been displayed in certain exhibitions for the same reasons.³ And like Babel, he had been arrested for not possessing a residence permit in St. Petersburg.

1) Venturi, Lionello, Chagall: Biographical and Critical Study, Lausanne, Editions d'Art Albert Skira, 1956, p. 13.

2) Chagall, My Life, p. 47.

3) Ibid., p. 106.

Chagall, who generally dismissed attempts at describing him as a Jewish artist, significantly remarked: "And yet it seems to me, had I not been a Jew, I would never have been a painter, or entirely a different one."¹

The source of inspiration which most influenced both Babel and Chagall in their attitudes toward life and art is to be found within Judaism, and specifically within Hasidism, -- which as mentioned earlier, began in the early part of the eighteenth century in the Ukraine. There were several factors which gave rise to this movement: insecurity and a sense of pending doom amongst the survivors of the popular peasant uprisings, i.e. those led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky in 1648, and those of the Haidamaky in 1734, 1750 and 1768; sectarianism and false messiahs, e.g. Shabbatei Zvi, Jakob Frank, and others; the disparity which had developed between rabbinical Judaism, with its emphasis on Talmudic study and on intellectuality, and the impoverished and semi-literate Jewish peasantry threatened with physical devastation, are but a few. It was within this psychosociological context that the Hasidic movement made its timely appearance through the teachings of its founder, one Israel ben Eliezer of Podilja.

1) Kloomok, Isaac, Marc Chagall: His Life and Work, New York, Philosophical Library, 1951, p. 7.

The basic precepts of Hasidism were a modification of those held by the biblical psalmists and the later kabalists, particularly Isaac Luria, in the Middle Ages.¹ God was conceived of as being an ever-present reality, i.e. the concept of Shekinah or God as divine hypostasis in the universe, who reveals himself through the animate as well as the inanimate, the physical as well as the intellectual qualities of man. The concept of creation was continuous, progressive and eternal; it was a "process" from which the Creator had not retired, but was deeply involved in. The main obligation of the pious Jew in this scheme of things was the "liberation" of Shekinah, of the Divine Presence. Shekinah was the redeeming feature in all things, and all things good or evil, possessed some degree of it.

The philosophy of Hasidism was one of joy and optimism, of compassion and ecstasy. In addition to (and frequently in preference to) study, the Hasidim feasted, sang, danced and listened to the tales of their tsadikim, hoping in this manner to achieve self-realization through ecstatic religious experience. Thus, Hasidism sought to restore within the precocious confines of East European Judaism a balance between the role of the body and that

1) Isaac Luria (1534-1572) lived and taught in the Palestinian town of Safed. He believed that through intense concentration man could gain union with the Divine.

of the mind in the divine scheme of things. It sought to restore harmony between culture and nature.¹

The Hasidic approach to life has been described as one in which scholarliness ceased to be the exclusive prerequisite for holiness. Prayer was re-interpreted as communication with or apprehension of the divine in the world, and did not require the physical presence of a synagogue for its validation. Love of nature was equated with love of God. Music and dance, in particular, were regarded as the highest forms of worship. One had to avoid being overly somber, and joy replaced silent and mournful adoration. The objects of the inanimate as well as the animate world were regarded as mysterious "receptacles" of various forms of hidden life and meaning. Moreover,

...Everything...took on a personal, human, intimate aspect. The sense of an object almost completely disappeared. The spirit of Buber's "I--Thou" philosophy was born in the villages of Kasrilevka and Vitebsk... It is a way of thinking...personally rather than objectively...²

In this approach to life and its mysteries, every object

1) Heschel, Abraham Joshua, The Earth Is the Lord's & The Sabbath, New York, Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966, p. 39-40, considers Hasidism as a phase in the "democratization of Talmud" process, which began with Rashi's comprehensive commentaries and Maimonides' codification of Jewish law.

2) Schmidt, Maurice, "Marc Chagall--The Jewish Painter", Judaism, XIII, Summer 1964, p. 240. This mode of thinking, so different from that operative in Western art and criticism, Schmidt feels is what explains the Western World's basic misunderstanding of Chagall's art and motivations.

derives its significance, its "essence" from a higher, metaphysical source. The origins of this approach are biblical, perhaps pre-biblical. Often described as animistic or pantheistic, the Hasidic approach is more accurately a dynamistic one. It is an outlook in which intensive reality-- where objects are seen as deriving their significance within the dimension of time, conceived of as being dynamic and a continuing process, as opposed to space, conceived as being static-- is preferred to extensive reality, considered "less real" than the former. The reality of time is internal, spiritual, subjective, whereas the reality of space is external, material and objective. Chagall once stated: "I believe that Time is an important factor in art, perhaps the most important. Works of art are sanctioned by Time and not by people."¹

There exists a large distinction between the space-oriented and the time-oriented approaches: the former is one which equates spatial reality with "thinghood" and blinds one to "...all reality that fails to identify itself as a thing, as a matter of fact."² Time, on the other hand, is "...the process of creation, and things of space are results

1) Erben, Walter, Marc Chagall, New York, Frederick A. Praeger, 1957, p. 11.

2) Heschel, op.cit., p. 5.

of creation...Time is perpetual innovation, a synonym for continuous creation."¹ The relationship between time and space is stated in the following manner: "...it is not a thing that lends significance to a moment; it is the moment that lends significance to things."² Like that of the mystic, the approach of the artist is one which is time-oriented.

The Hasidim viewed the reality of space as being the vessel of a "greater" reality, namely, the reality of the spirit, of eternal, measureless time. In the infinite variety of external qualities--shapes, sizes, colors, tones and patterns-- the Hasidim perceived hints of that immeasurable reality, of the physiognomy of time in dim outline. Moreover, each of these qualities possessed the potential to evoke mood or feeling; to celebrate this evocation in song or dance or poem was to liberate the spirit, the Divine Presence from its spatial receptacle. Hence passion and ecstasy. Hence freedom of form and absence of logical orderliness, for joy and ecstasy cannot be constructed and celebration in accordance with scientific rules is absurd.

The mechanics of the Hasidic approach are those of

1) Heschel, op.cit., p. 100.

2) Ibid., p. 6.

de-objectivization and personalization. No person, place or thing remains an "It" but becomes transformed into a "Thou".¹ Buber restated the time-space problem in terms of the "realm of Thou" and the "realm of It". The Hasid's paramount challenge is the sanctification of time, of transforming the "realm of It" into the "realm of Thou". Through this attitude he takes his stand "in relation".² Matter here, matters only insofar as it suggests something beyond the immediate perception, and even beyond the intellectualization of itself.

The influence of the Hasidic notion of the inter-relatedness of the world and man, of time and space, on the aesthetic approaches of Babel and Chagall is a major source-link of spiritual kinship between the two men as artists. As Meyer noted, the "...spirit of Jewish mysticism is one of the fundamental sources of Chagall's art."³ Furthermore Chagall was not

...the interpreter of a religious universe: he did not turn back toward Hasidism in order to become its painter. On the contrary, he lapsed from the movement in order to paint and only to paint, independent of any movement or doctrine. But the Hasidic spirit remains nevertheless the sustenance and the foundation of his art.⁴

1) Buber, Martin, I And Thou, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958, p. 3-4.

2) Ibid.

3) Meyer, op.cit., p. 15.

4) Ibid.

Chagall

...held himself aloof from distinctions of doctrine and belief, from those that characterize the religion of his ancestors as well as from the principle distinction between the revealed Law of Judaism and the Christian New Testament. But in every religion, as in every idea, every dream, every thing there is an inner fire that needs to be released, and in this way all religions are participants in total love. It is in this spirit that Chagall must unhesitatingly be described as a Jew and as a fundamentally religious being, as a religious man and a religious painter.¹

Furthermore he

...is certainly not concerned with religious learning or minutiae of doctrine. However... as an essentially religious being he contributes in his own personal way to the sanctification of the world.²

Elsewhere the view that Hasidism was what accounted for Babel's affinity with Tolstoy, in whose writings Babel supposedly felt that the pinnacle of Russian spirituality had been reached, is also encountered.³ Thus, although neither Babel nor Chagall adhered in their mature lives to orthodox

1) Hodin, J.P., "Marc Chagall. In Search of the Primary Sources of Inspiration", The Dilemma of Being Modern, London, Routledge & Kegan, Paul, 1956, p. 240-241.

2) Cassou, op.cit., p. 239.

3) Stora-Sandor, op.cit., p. 20-21. Ultimately however, Babel became disillusioned with Tolstoy and in his story Guy de Maupassant writes: "He turned yellow, your Count; he was afraid. His religion was all fear. He was frightened by the cold, by old age, by death; and he made himself a warm coat out of his faith."

Judaic doctrine, both retained the essentially spiritual orientation to life inherent in Hasidic Judaism.

In the story The Rabbi, Babel has his central character Gedali say:

"All is mortal. Only the mother is destined to immortality. And when the mother is no longer among the living, she leaves a memory which none has yet dared to sully. The memory of the mother nourishes in us a compassion that is like the ocean, and the measureless ocean feeds the rivers that dissect the universe."¹

And again:

"...The passionate edifice of Hasidism has had its doors and windows burst open, but it is as immortal as the soul of the mother. With oozing orbits Hasidism still stands at the crossroads of the turbulent winds of history."²

The full significance of Gedali's words becomes clear when one takes into account what appears to be Babel's conduit dictum in the Odessa cycle of stories, namely that "...passion rules the universe."³ Thus an identification between the "immortal memory and soul" of the mother--symbolic source of universal compassion--and Hasidism has been made. The centrality of passion in Babel's Weltanschauung recalls Chagall's claim that "...everything may change in our

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 77.

2) Ibid., p.

3) Ibid., p. 207.

demoralized world except the heart, man's love and his striving to know the divine."¹

The correspondence with the philosophic approach of the Baal Shem Tov--who sought to shift religious emphasis from the mind to the rest of the body, from the realm of the mind to the realm of the heart--should now be clear. Although various commentators have on occasion made note of the Hasidic influence in Babel's aesthetic approach, none have actually developed this to any extent. Thus it has been observed that

For Babel' every person, place or thing in the world carries a rich aura of suggestion and association. It is the power to see beneath the surface that gives his writing its characteristic qualities of compactness, despair, laughter and nostalgia.²

Babel himself, in his story You Must Know Everything wrote:

...I knew all the signs, the stonework of the houses, the store-fronts. I knew them in some special way all my own, and I was quite convinced that I saw in them what really mattered, the mysterious something that we adults call the "essence of things"... And it was from such stores, people, auras, and theatre posters that I pieced together my native city of Odessa. I remember, feel, and love it to this very day. I know it as one knows the fragrance of one's mother's skin--the flavor of love, words, smiles. I

1) Jaffe, Aniela, "Symbolism in the Visual Arts", Carl G. Jung. Man and His Symbols, New York, Dell Publishing Co., Ltd., 1971 (1964), p. 296.

2) Murphey, A.B., "The Style of Isaak Babel'", Slavonic and East European Review, XLIV, 103, July 1966, p. 371.

love it because I grew up in it, was happy,
sad, and dreamed my dreams--fervent dreams
that will never return. (Emphasis mine.)¹

This passage provides the most crucial insight on Babel as man and as artist. It reveals the discerning and highly personal attitude which pervades his entire works. "What really mattered" and "the mysterious something that we adults call the 'essence of things'" is perceived by Babel through emotion, memory and love, and is "known" as is the "fragrance of one's mother's skin". It is a mystical apprehension of the relationship between space and time. In the story The Church at Novograd, Babel provides a variant clue when he speaks of "the breath of an invisible order of things...".² Babel's attitude toward the material environment of his native Odessa has flavored his artistic comprehension of all nature, in fact, of all things animate and inanimate. His attitude has the same direct apprehension of a "reality" beyond the things of space, as that of the Hasid, what Buber calls the transformation of the "realm of It" into the "realm of Thou".

Babel's formula of perceptualization is virtually identical with that which Hasidism inspires, albeit it is

1) Babel, You Must Know Everything, p. 5. The title of this story in Russian is "Detstvo.II. U Babuški".

2) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 44. The cited phrase in Russian reads "dyxaniye nevidannogo uklada...".

modified to suit the agnosticism or atheism of Babel.¹ Just as the Hasidic attitude toward the spatial world is undermined by the notion that "sparks of a suprareality" (Shekinah) are dispersed throughout the cosmos in varying degrees, and that this greater reality can be "liberated" through compassion and ecstasy, Babel's attitude reveals a desire to release this mysterious (tainstvennoje) "essence of things" (suš-čnostb veščeje) through the medium of his art. His attitude, like Chagall's illustrates the secularization of a traditional religious concept.

T.S.Eliot reached a very similar aesthetic viewpoint in his concept of the "objective correlative". According to this notion, that art which is eternal results not from the artist's indiscriminate outpour of personal emotion, but rather from his presentation of

...a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.²

This is particularly applicable to Babel and Chagall, whose methods of artistic presentation are especially evocative. It is not merely the visual or verbal chronicling of their

1) Yarmolinsky, op.cit., p. 153. Yarmolinsky views Babel as being a "marginal" Jew.

2) Eliot, T.S., "Hamlet and His Problems", The Sacred Wood. Essays on Poetry and Criticism, New York, Methuen, University Paperbacks, 1966 (1920), p. 100.

particular emotional experiences which renders their art powerful, but rather their masterful and precise utilization of verbal and pictorial patterns by which the particular emotions are educed in same from their audience.

This brings to mind Babel's almost fanatical commitment to le mot juste,¹ Like Maupassant, Crane, Hemingway and Joyce of Dubliners, Babel attempted to "...create a form which shall in itself be shapely and autonomous and at the same time unusually responsible to the truth of external reality, the truth of things and events."² To this end Babel was concerned with the "given moment...seeming almost hostile to the continuity of time..." and presenting the past "...only as it can be figured in the present."³

The above observations apply equally to Chagall, whose scenes are always parturient with the past, not with a static, but with a dynamic past, where Moses and other biblical figures "live" side by side with painter, and where their dialogue with humanity is still effectively in process. Excluding the prehistorical cave-artists in terms of compo-

1) MacAndrew, Andrew R., "Afterword", Isaac Babel. Lubka the Cossack and Other Stories, New York, New American Library, 1963, p. 271 f. Also see:
Herling-Grudziński, Gustaw, "Izaak Babel", Kultura, (Paris), 1/171-2/172, Jan.-Feb. 1962, p. 68.

2) Trilling, Lionel, "Introduction", The Collected Stories, op.cit., p. 16.

3) Ibid.

sition, Chagall has been considered the first modern, non-architectonic painter. Schmidt noticed in Chagall's mode of presentation that which complies with the objective correlative, noting that the "...emotional range and the manner of de-objectivizing an object into a feeling, as opposed to a structure...these are quite different."¹ In literature, Hyman has called this the process (traditional or ritual) "...from Purpose through Passion to Perception."²

The distinction between the space-oriented and the time-oriented approach, between the reality which is seen and that which is suggested, is one which characterizes a distinctly Jewish, or Hasidic attitude toward life, and one which profoundly influenced the aesthetic sensibilities of Babel and Chagall. In their works spatial entities are recurringly de-objectivized and personalized; separate (in terms of time and space) events and objects fuse into single images, the dividing line between the animate and inanimate, the organic and inorganic disappears. Although Babel and Chagall sought this effect consciously, the subconscious influence of underlying cultural factors which concerned

1) Schmidt, op.cit., p. 333.

2) Hyman, op.cit., p. 326.

their Jewish sub-culture as a group, and from the unconscious expression of which, neither could escape.

The past in their works is presented as being both dynamic and impelling; it is a past which lives in, interacts with, and thus affects the present and the future. Conversely, the past is "...altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past."¹ Both Babel and Chagall viewed the past nostalgically, as possessing much that is worthwhile, but in the acute and all-pervasive time-conscious atmosphere in Russia of the first three decades of this century, both were commanded to fall in step with the future, which their country prescribed as being the path of socialist realism. In their personal lives both artists chose different solutions to this conflict; Chagall resolved this conflict of allegiances by emigrating to France, but Babel, who felt that to leave one's country was tantamount to immolating one's talent, remained. As

1) Terras, Victor, "Majakovskij and Time", Slavic and East European Journal, XIII, 2, 1969, p. 151. Terras, in describing the psychic atmosphere of this time period writes: "...It was an age in which the old questions regarding a man's relationship to the generation preceeding his own and to that following it, were asked of each man individually, in an urgent, personal way. It was an age when a man was asked to declare himself for or against the belief that time was an objective, inevitable tendency in history, or more concretely, for or against falling in step with time, for or against the future."

is well-known, Babel's choice proved to be a tragedy; after a long period of silence, he payed for his choice with his life.¹

The time-consciousness of the first three decades of the twentieth century could be extended to include the last two of the nineteenth as well. This period witnessed what could perhaps be called the last era of original and spontaneous, genuine literary and artistic creativity in what is today the U.S.S.R. It was a time which paradoxically embodied both the creative and destructive tendencies in art. It was creative in that it was characterized by multifarious cultural and artistic movements which sought to revitalize tradition, to create living links between the past and the future; destructive in that these movements were devastatingly self-negating, seeking to destroy all but some vague utopian vision of the future.² This era has been accurately described as being a period of "moral nudity".³

1) Several conflicting accounts regarding Babel's suppression and death exist. His daughter Nathalie aptly discusses the validity of these accounts in her introduction to The Lonely Years, op.cit., p. xf.

2) Perhaps the best illustration of this is the so-called Futurist Manifesto entitled "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste" (Poščečina Obščestvennomu Vkusu). Written in 1912 and signed by Burljuk, Khlebnikov, Kruchonykh and Mayakovski, it called for scrapping the entire cultural tradition of the past which it claimed was "stifling"; Pushkin, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy were to be "thrown overboard from the steamer of modernity".

3) Brown, Edward J., "Isaac Babel: Horror in a Minor Key", Russian Literature Since the Revolution, New York, Collier Books, 1963, p. 115.

The creative-destructive dualism of this period may also be regarded as truly revolutionary, in that it was characterized by a polarization of cultural processes and values. It was a period which mirrored analogously the creative act itself, with its pendulation between creation and destruction, cosmos and chaos. The spirit of those times was charged with an intense, gargantuan expectation for the future and an almost equally poignant nostalgia for the past.

In this context then, it is necessary to understand that the concern with time and space and particularly with the collision of time and place on the aesthetic outlooks of the young Babel and Chagall, is with the prevailing psychological atmosphere, the Zeitgeist and its configuration of various and oft-conflicting moods that inhabited the places of their childhoods, and not merely with the external features of chronological event-sequences which transpired therein during the artists' formative years. Between the cultural climate and the individual creative process there exists a direct and discernable relationship: the "times" of an author "...include not only their superficial events but also their underlying attitudes, the themes which concern his society as a group, and their expression both direct and indirect."¹

1) Hall, op.cit., p. 13-14.

An examination of the "times" of Babel or Chagall must of necessity be also place-centred, as time and space become psychically fused into a unity in which the externalities of place and thing serve as the vessels or scenes of internal experience, of inner, psychic space.¹ Vitebsk and Odessa were such focal spatial centres in Chagall's and Babel's creative cosmologies. Commenting on the significance to Chagall of the city of his birth and childhood years, Erben notes:

Biographies always begin with place-names and dates. The reader rarely pays much heed to them...In Chagall's case... the name Vitebsk, and all the lived and dreamed reality contained in it, were of overwhelming significance...Vitebsk was not only the place of his origin, but also his present and his goal.²

Seeing an analogy between Vitebsk's significance to Chagall and Dublin's spiritual and aesthetic significance for James Joyce, a biographer notes: "...For him the town represents not only the past but also the present. It is and always will be the scene of all inner experience."³ And again:

1) Eliade, Mircea, Cosmos and History. The Myth of the Eternal Return, New York, Harper & Row, 1959 (1954), p. 20-21. The reference is to Eliade's concept of "consecrated space and sacred time", i.e. the assurance of a construct's (in this case artistic) reality and enduringness, through a ritual transformation of profane space into transcendent space, the transformation of concrete time into mythical time.

2) Erben, op.cit., p. 23.

3) Meyer, op.cit., p. 41.

"For him it was not a world, but the world, the cosmos."¹
Chagall himself confesses: "...Why do I always paint Vitebsk? With these pictures I create reality for myself, I recreate my home."² Responding to another query regarding the Vitebskian folkloristic element in his painting, Chagall stated: "It is the setting of my childhood, which I have never really outgrown."³

Thus long after Chagall was no longer physically resident in his native city, he still persisted in referring to it as his "home", and emphatically equated it with his personal "reality". The significance of this relationship so ardent and lasting the eight decades of Chagall's lifetime, cannot be overestimated. The question as to what exactly it was about Vitebsk, that so captivated the artist that for the remainder of his long life as an emigre, it was to occupy so central a place in his art, his thinking and feeling and creating, must be posited.

In search for the answer one is inevitably led beyond the external and superficial and must, as noted

1) Cassou, op.cit., p. 11.

2) Hodin, op.cit., p. 45.

3) Crespelle, Jean-Paul, The Love, the Dreams, the Life of Chagall, New York, Coward-McCann, Inc., 1970 (1969), p. 31-32.

above, examine Vitebsk's inner psychic life, its "lived and dreamed reality", and attempt to see in what way Chagall was to become a life-long prisoner, creating the vast majority of his works under its spell.

Chagall's talent, the sources of his inspiration were deeply rooted in the memory of his boyhood. A severing of this psychological relationship with the time and place, the atmosphere of his formative years, would probably have had a disastrous effect upon his art, a possibility whose likelihood Chagall seems to have recognized:

...One ought to travel in foreign countries for a short time and then return home...Man is like a tree, his roots lie in the earth of his country. Then the branches spread over the whole world. Of course, there are trees that hang in mid-air and others that stand in water. But those that are rooted in solid ground bear the best fruit.¹

Meyer writes that in Chagall's opinion there could be not real art without a "closeness to one's origin in the motherly sense."; he cites Chagall's statement that art "...needs a withinness...An artist is tied to his mother's apron strings, humanly and formally obsessed by her closeness. Form derives not from academic teaching, but from this withinness."²

1) Hodin, op.cit., p. 45.

2) Meyer, op.cit., p. 24.

In 1934 Chagall wrote to his close friend, the painter Isaak Brodsky: "The title 'a Russian painter' means more to me than any international fame...In my pictures there is not one centimeter free from nostalgia for my native land."¹ In Vitebsk's lived and dreamed reality is encompassed virtually all of the primary sources of his inspiration; this city provided him with both the content and modes for the expression of his art, which as one critic noted, was complete from the moment of its inception.²

Like Chagall, Babel also had a profound sense of lasting identification with the places of his childhood, particularly with Odessa. In one of his first stories, which Gorky published in his journal Letopis in 1916-1917, Babel reveals the centrality of Odessa in his aesthetic outlook:

...I think there's a lot to be said for this great city, which has more charm than any other in the Russian Empire...

The Odessan is the opposite of the man from Petrograd...

...I think there must also come--and soon--the fructifying, life-giving influence of the Russian South, of Odessa, perhaps (qui sait?) the only city in Russia which might give birth to something we need so much: our own national Maupassant.

1) Meyer, op.cit., p. 608, note 5.

2) Cassou, op.cit., p. 22.

...The literary Messiah who has been awaited so long and so hopelessly will come from there--from the sunny steppes washed by the sea.¹

Babel's Odessa was a city of living contrasts; it was opulent, straightforward and easygoing, cosmopolitan, peopled with "fat, pot-bellied, and good-natured negocianty" and "pimplly, scrawny dreamers, inventors, and brokers"; it had an impoverished, crowded and "much suffering Jewish ghetto, a very self-satisfied bourgeoisie, and a very 'Black Hundred' city council", and "smoking factories where Karl Marx is up to his usual business".² Odessa emerges as the only place which can offer the crumbling and gloom-ridden Russian Empire the antidotal sunshine and vitality, ^{which is conspicuously} lacking in the literature of the Dostoevskys and Turgenevs.³

At the age of twenty-one Babel elaborated on the nature of his relationship with Odessa, on the significance of its "lived and dreamed reality", its "motherly withinness".⁴ In the years which immediately followed the ^{writing of the} above story (it was never published during his lifetime), Babel wrote his

1) Babel, You Must Know Everything, p. 26-30.

2) Ibid. In the story "The Rabbi", Reb Mordecai declares that Odessa was a city of "rich fools" and "penniless wise men", op.cit., p. 79.

3) Babel felt that only Gogol, in his early Ukrainian stories, had given Russian literature a taste of the conspicuously absent sun. The gloom of the later Gogol, Babel feels is the victory of Father Matvei over Gritsko, of Petersburg over Poltava.

4) Chapter I, p. 48-49.

cycle of Odessa stories. These stories resurrect the psychological world of the young writer and reveal his psychic relationship to certain aspects of his milieu. Babel's motivation for writing these tales seems to parallel Chagall's desire to "document" his milieu upon returning from abroad.¹ For Babel and Chagall, Odessa and Vitebsk were more than merely places, they were spiritual time zones, and as such were undergoing a merciless re-shaping from without and within.²

It seems that to counter the blinding and hence reckless speed of change with its forces of industrialization, urbanization, collectivization, etc., which sought to oblivate the past, Babel and Chagall felt it necessary to attempt to cope in their own individual, yet similar ways with the implications posed by Gogol at the conclusion of his Dead Souls.³ The worlds of their youth were being banished from existence not only because of the technological

1) Meyer, op.cit., p. 217 f.

2) Hodin, op.cit., p. 46, quotes Chagall as saying: "...I am concerned with spiritual space. The others create objects, the others stand in front of nature. I have it inside myself."

3) Gogol, Nikolai, Dead Souls, New York, New American Library, 1961, p. 278. "And you, Russia--aren't you racing along like the fastest troika imaginable? The road smokes under you, bridges rattle, and everything falls behind. A passerby stops and gapes at this miraculous vision. He wonders

advent, but mainly because the Leninist experiment was demanding a "new man", a "new world", and the death of the "old order". Iron-willed disciples of Marxism were determined to change not only the faces of the new republics but also the souls. Whatever was considered incompatible with the new historical doctrines received the death sentence. Thus a vast and unique world, virtually unmarred by the flow of centuries was fast crumbling. In response Babel and Chagall attempted to recreate in their art at least the spiritual realities of that past, of the now politically condemned milieus which had in effect, created them. In this sense a kind of personal compensation was accomplished; while the forces of change—permanently, harshly and irrevocably—transformed the places and corresponding spiritual atmospheres of their childhoods, the two artists, ^{both} tenderly revoked and rendered eternal this unique and vanishing world by means of their art.

Once having left Odessa, Babel was to become obsessed with a desire to return. In his correspondence one

whether it wasn't a stroke of lightning; he ponders the meaning of this awe-inspiring speed and wonders what unknown force drives these mysterious steeds...And where do you fly to, Russia? Answer me!...She doesn't answer. The carriage bells break into an enchanted tinkling, the air is torn to shreds and turns into wind; everything on earth flashes past, and, casting worried, sidelong glances, other nations and countries step out of her way."

finds a persistent and intensifying desire (especially in those letters written shortly before his arrest and subsequent death) to return to Odessa "...in pursuit of the sun and inspiration, for that is where my inspiration seems to live."¹ He never did return. The forces of change, which by now had become tangled up due to a war with Nazi Germany, could no longer tolerate the so-called poputchiki, and therefore decided to crush them.²

Chagall on the other hand, physically escaped what would perhaps have proven to be a similar fate. After leaving Vitebsk with Lunacharski's help in 1923 for Paris, Chagall returned to the U.S.S.R. only once, in 1935.³ But neither Chagall the man nor Chagall the artist was ever to become spiritually divorced from the milieu of his primary inspirations. The Zeitgeist of his Vitebskian youth

1) Babel, The Lonely Years, p. 342. Ehrenburg, in his "Foreword" to I. Babel's, Izbrannoe, Kemerovo, Kemerovskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 1966, p. 13-14., quotes Babel's comments on the death of Eduard Bagritski in 1934: "I remember our last conversation. It was time to leave foreign cities, we agreed, to return home to Odessa, take a home in the Bližnije Mel'nicy (an Odessan suburb), write stories, to grow old... We saw ourselves as old men, sly obese old men, basking in the Odessan sun, on the sea--on the boulevards, casting long glances at the women..." (translation mine).

2) Poputchiki--the so-called "Fellow Travellers", writers and artists sympathetic towards, but not committed to, communism.

3) In this year Chagall visited Vilna.

continued to be for him the setting and atmosphere of his creative work, the scene of his inner, psychic experience. One can only speculate as to whether Babel would have been able to accomplish a similar psychological transplantation of his childhood world, had he chosen exile on one of his several trips abroad.

Of his first encounter with Vitebsk, Chagall wrote: "When I first opened my eyes, I met a world, of the town, of the house, that took a gradual and lasting hold on me."¹ This world, at the time of Chagall's birth in 1887, was the capital city of the gubernija of the same name. An ancient Bjelorrussian town, it was mentioned in the early Kievan Chronicle, and was saturated with historical memories. It was situated on both banks of the Dvina River and was about one hundred and forty miles north-east of Minsk. Three years before Chagall was born, Vitebsk had a population of about 48,000, of which over one-half was Jewish. Although a river-port and a railway junction made it a relatively important trading centre, the town, unlike Odessa, was relatively isolated. Perhaps because of this it was able to retain a deeply religious outlook; there were over thirty churches (one of these a fifteenth century cathedral) and twice as many synagogues

1) Erben, op.cit., p. 23.

and Jewish prayer-houses.¹ In brief, Vitebsk was a thriving Jewish cultural island in a Bjelorussian, Orthodox-Christian sea. Its general atmosphere was that of a shtetl.

One critic maintains that Chagall's native town of Vitebsk and Sholem Aleichem's fictional village of Kasri-levka were "...twins born out of two kindred souls."² Like Aleichem's fictional village, Vitebsk had virtually all of the physiognomical and spiritual qualities and characteristics of the East European Jewish market-town, a phenomenon which originated in the Middle Ages, and which had changed little from the time of its inception. The shtetl figures so pre-eminently in the works of Babel and Chagall, particularly in terms of setting and historical symbolism, that it is worthwhile re-quoting Schmidt's citation from Aleichem's The Town of the Little People:

Shall I call it a beautiful little town? From a distance it looks--how shall I say it?--like a loaf of bread thickly studded with poppy seed. Some of the houses are built on the slope of a hill, and the rest are huddled together at the base, one on top of the other, like the gravestones in an ancient cemetery. There are no streets to speak of because the houses are not built according to any plan, and besides, where is there room for such

1) Meyer, op.cit., p. 21.

2) Schmidt, op.cit., p. 328.

a thing? Why should there be vacant space when you can build something on it? It is written that the earth is to be inhabited, not merely to be gazed at...big streets, little streets, back streets and alleys. What if they happen to twist and turn uphill and downhill and suddenly end up in a house or just a hole in the ground.¹

Meyer gives a more statistical albeit similar account, not of a fictional place but of Vitebsk:

...Of the...approximately eight thousand houses, only six hundred and fifty were of stone; the rest were timber structures of the type figuring in many of Chagall's pictures and still common in the smaller Russian towns and villages. Some were simple frame cabins; others were well-built and painted log houses with ornamental carving on lintels and gables. Few of the streets were paved, so that when it rained, as it frequently did, most of them were muddy and full of puddles. Many of the houses had backyards in which chickens scratched for worms, or small gardens enclosed by the typical palings. The only part of the town which could claim a truly urban character was the centre, namely the streets surrounding the cathedral on the left bank of the Dvina and the railway station on its right bank. Everywhere were small factories, workshops and stores.²

From these descriptions emerges that something, that internal world reality common to and characteristic of all shtetlech. Its external features mirror certain parallel, but not immediately perceptible spiritual qualities. These qualities

1) Schmidt, op.cit., p. 328.

2) Meyer, op.cit., p. 21.

are significant in that they are reflected in Babel's and Chagall's works as sources of inspiration. The influence of this internal spiritual world on the two artists must be appreciated; it provided them with a variety of forms for self-expression, as well as much of the content they were to express. In these qualities the landscapes of their souls took shape, were nourished and evolved.

Failure to appreciate the depth and scope of the relationship which existed between the artists and the psychic content manifest in the shtetl led many otherwise perceptive critics to label their works as being "fantastic" or "unrealistic", "exotic" or "ornamentalist". This inner world of the shtetl must be enucleated before its impact on the aesthetics of Babel and Chagall can be understood.

Babel and Chagall were realists in the profoundest sense of the term. They are not, however, realists in the same manner that Maxim Gorky in literature or Vasilij Surikov in art were. Chagall declared:

...There are no fairy tales, no fables, no popular legends in my paintings...I am against the terms "fantasy" and "symbolism". All are interior world realities, maybe more real than the external world. To call everything that appears to be illogical fantasy or fairy tale is to admit that one does not understand nature.¹

1) Schmidt, op.cit., p. 332.

This reality was of a kind "...that the secure peoples of Western and of many Oriental societies are only beginning to experience."¹ Moreover, Babel and Chagall are mystics only if "...mysticism be accepted as another kind of reality created in another cultural milieu."² The frequently misunderstood external features of their art correspond to the seemingly illogical and haphazard physiognomy of the shtetl. As one critic pointed out, Chagall

...created an immeasurable, untraversable environment in which one cannot write of solids and voids, or the consistent diminution of size related to a fixed viewpoint. Scale, color and solidity, or transparency, of figures and houses are not the function of a detached or objective observer from whose physical vantage point the scene is constructed.³

Thus there is a definite set of correspondences which exist between the source and the creation, the milieu and the artist. Their's is an internal subjective reality, or rather reality internalized and highly personalized, through the "...crucibles of their time and their souls."⁴

It is this inner spiritual reality, of which the

1) Schmidt, op.cit., p. 332.

2) Ibid.

3) Elson, Albert E., Purposes of Art, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., (n.d.), p. 406-407.

4) Schmidt, op.cit., p. 328.

external structure and layout of the shtetl represent one manifestation, that may be viewed as being reflected in the art of Babel and Chagall (on a moral, aesthetic and logical plane). Moreover, its externalities are themselves reflected in the structure and composition of their works.

Morally this quality may be identified as compassion, aesthetically as "joyous ecstasy", and logically as psychological relativity.¹ In science this tendency is operative in Einstein's theory of relativity; in philosophy in the Buberian "Ich-Du" concept; in psychology in Freud's theory of free association; while in music it has found expression in Jewish cantorial singing and more recently in jazz.

The origins of this tendency seem to be pre-biblical and are evidenced in the Psalms. The Weltanschauung of these early poet-philosophers is one in which the physical is secondary to the spiritual; it is a world of the mind in which nature and all of its external manifestations matter only insofar as they "contain", and hence reveal the internal spiritual qualities of objects. The universe was conceived of as being a house inhabited by a lord and master, and it was the master's hidden presence which animated the entire universe. Thus beside the master, the creation paled considerably and various.

1) As in free association, whereby the selection and conjunction of objects or motifs are irrationally suggested to the artist during his conception or execution of the work.

seemed trivial in comparison.¹

This outlook with its stress on the internal meaning of things, on the internal spiritual order rather than on the surface appearance of reality, is the rationale underlying Judaism's anti-iconic tradition; it has been postulated as the explanation of why (at least until Chagall) the Jews had not created a plastic art.

This intensive emotion and joy in God could not find expression except in psalm, in song. Plastic art is not for such experiences, not for such ecstasy--therefore, from the very beginning the Jewish genius picked the word as a means of expression, the word that he could make aglow with his breath...The poet of the psalms accepts his own thoughts and emotions as truths of greater significance than the facts of the external world presented to him by his eyes. All nature must obey him and disregard its external laws if it so pleases the poet for the honour of his God.²

Another manifestation of this tendency is to be found in Jewish cantorial singing:

Cantorial chant is primarily a form of solo art: one voice does all the work. Choruses and instruments may be and are added, but they are only embellishments and never integral parts of the musical form...Its second most important characteristic is... "unmetered" music. There are certain melodies and chants, but all are subject to spontaneous changes. The element that traditionally dictates innovation is the religious ecstasy of the singer. An important

1) Kloomok, op.cit., p. 1.

2) Ibid., p. 2.

sentence, word, even syllable may be elaborated upon by the singer to great extension. It is the music of ecstasy and improvisation...¹

This tendency Schmidt has called the "ecstatic personalization of objective reality".² The relationship between the world-view of the psalmist, the external appearance of the shtetl and the cantorial method all draw upon the same source, the same apprehension of reality, and may be viewed as different manifestations of a distinct cultural tendency.

In summary then, the relationship between Babel and Chagall and their milieu has been critically examined. The direction that the examination has taken was suggested by both the content and form of the artists' works. Certain correspondences between the artists, i.e. their aesthetic notions, on the one hand, and certain concepts operative in their culture on the other hand, have been discerned.

The various correspondences fall within one philosophical category, namely the question regarding the nature and composition of reality. There are two phrases used by

1) Schmidt, op.cit., p. 329.

2) Ibid., p. 331.

Babel which form the foundation of his philosophical outlook: (1) the "mysterious 'essence of things'" (tainstvennaja suščnost' veščej), and (2) the "breath of an invisible order of things" (dyxanije nevidannogo uklada). These crucial notions parallel Chagall's terms (1) "authenticity" (a "certain chemistry in nature, in things, and even in human awareness"), and (2) "interior world realities".¹ These concepts, which were discussed in depth throughout the foregoing chapter, are peculiar to, but were not originated by Babel or Chagall.

The origins of these concepts are deeply rooted in Jewish culture, particularly in Jewish mysticism, i.e. the Kabalah and Hasidism, but other manifestations of these concepts are evidenced in speech, music and even architecture. In its embryonic phase, this notion of reality consisted of the psalmist's cosmology--the Creator animates his creation with his breath (cf. "In the beginning was the Word..."). In this scheme of things, however, man could only contemplate the creation and the creator. Beginning with Kabalah a democratization of this notion took force and reached completion a few centuries later in Hasidism. By this time the original notion had undergone considerable change; man

1) The full text of Chagall's definition of "authenticity" and "chemistry" is included in the Appendix.

now can participate in the divine scheme of things and in fact, is obliged to celebrate the divine nature of reality through his joyous and ecstatic apprehension of the divine presence in all things, animate and inanimate (Shekinah). From this phase it is but a short leap to the aesthetic outlooks of Babel and Chagall, who accepted the approach but stripped it of its traditional religious import. In other words, they secularized the notion, which in its various manifestations, comprises the primary source of their inspiration. The second chapter of this study shall examine in greater depth the way in which they accomplished this.

CHAPTER II

THE EPIPHANIC CORRELATIVE

In the first chapter of this study it has been shown that certain correspondences between Babel's and Chagall's aesthetic notions and certain concepts relating to the substance and nature of reality operative in their cultural backgrounds and milieu, exist. These psychic contents have been defined as constituting the primary source of their inspiration. The examination cannot however, stop at this point as one particularly crucial aspect remains to be analyzed. There exists a distance between the "donor" source, namely the artists' milieu, its psychic contents, and the "recipient" source, namely the reading or viewing audience. This "distance" is gapped by both Babel and Chagall in an especially unique and similar fashion, in spite of the fact that both used different media. This is the focal point of their spiritual kinship: the similarity not only of their poetic vision, but also of their expression of this vision. The purpose of this chapter shall be to examine certain characteristic examples from the works of both artists which attest to the kinship as existing in their modes of expression in terms of both content and structure on the one hand, and effect on the other.

In this analysis the Joycean notion of the "epiphany"

has been particularly useful in terms of content, whereas in the case of form and structural effect, the traditional notion of skaz and T.S.Eliot's concept of the "objective correlative" were utilized as critical parameters. Both latter notions have a coincidental relatedness to certain Hasidic concepts discussed in the first chapter. However, neither of the terms mentioned above, i.e. epiphany, objective correlative or skaz can really be separately applied in this examination, and it was therefore necessary to postulate a new term, the epiphanic correlative.

As this concept was conceived during the examination of the works and represents a gradual composite of several notions, its definition in this study shall also be given phasically. At the onset it suffices to say that both artists were concerned primarily with passing on to their audience, either verbally or visually, certain insights. Their high degree of success in finding appropriate formulae for communicating to others their personal insights constitutes the epiphanic correlative.

Chagall's paintings and Babel's stories are most similar in both their structure, content and effect. Both utilize with a certain degree of modification, the traditional skaz form.¹ Skaz most frequently provides the basic

1) Harkins, William E., Dictionary of Russian Literature,

framework for the expression of their poetic visions. In its root meaning a skaz is a "telling", and the distance in meaning between skaz and "rasskaz" is indeed minimal, the latter being more formalized in structure. Moreover, words in skaz are significant mostly for their notional or emotive value. Ergo, the painting (colloquially "worth a thousand words") may also be skaz, finding however, its verbalization in the mind of its beholder, i.e. the skaz in written form conjures up visual imagery, the painted skaz elicits the appropriate verbalization of its images. In each case a "telling" does occur, the "...form frequently rounds off the content...we are often shown something important by means of it."¹

The majority of Babel's stories are very brief, rarely exceeding ten pages.² This verbal laconicism is not unlike Chagall's paintings, which never burden the observer

New York, Philosophical Library, 1956, p. 360. Harkin's definition is rather simple and does not fully define skaz potentialities. He writes: "...a narrative told by a fictitious narrator, rather than by the author directly. The use of skaz narration creates the possibility of using speech forms which are more original and vivid than the style of ordinary narrative told from the author's point of view. Its use also creates the possibility of characterizing the fictitious narrator through speech peculiarities, such as dialect pronunciation or use of sub-standard expressions.

1) Buber, Martin, Moses. The Revelation and the Covenant, New York, Harper & Row, Publishers, 1958 (1946), p. 8.

2) Babel, You Must Know Everything, p. 235-236. Here

with photographic exactness, with a complete reproduction of that surface which the eye sees. Babel's and Chagall's representations of the visual in nature are basically sketches, which is also an integral characteristic of skaz. These sketches are characterized in form by a primitive directness, like the drawings ("tellings") of the cave-artists, albeit considerably more sophisticated. Furthermore this characteristic terseness strengthens the effectiveness of their works, the "...sketch...is often more prized than the finished painting because of the greater sense of process in it."¹

Spatially skaz tends to disregard chronology and order, while temporally it is free and unmetered. It transforms the specifics of time and place into the general; time and space are treated internally, subjectively and anti-conceptually. The key phrases of skaz setting and mood are "Once upon a time..." and "In a faraway place..." even where specific temporal or spatial (geographic) data or events are alluded to or given. Time here is to be understood as

Ehrenburg quotes Hemingway on Babel: "I have never believed that arithmetic is important for the appreciation of literature. I have been criticized for writing too concisely, but I find that Babel's style is even more concise than mine which is more wordy. It shows what can be done. Even when you've got all the water out of them, you can still clot the curds a little more."

1) Frye, Northrop, "The Road of Excess", Myth and Symbol. Critical Approaches and Applications, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1967 (1963), p. 12.

internal and subjective (as opposed to physical, measured time) or put another way, it is the distinction between "...man's notion of time as a concept and his experience of time as a feeling."¹ Persons, places, events and things are presented in terms of their spiritual interrelatedness, v.g. if a man in a particular "telling" is considered to be spiritually more significant than his house, he may in terms of size be represented as such for the purposes of emphasis.

An appropriate illustration of Babel's and Chagall's adaptations of skaz are respectively The Cemetery at Kozin and Cemetery Gate.² Babel's story is particularly interesting in that he allows his description of the cemetery itself, or rather one of its major vault inscriptions to assume the role of narration.³ It is a Jewish cemetery in the "weed-grown plains of Volhynia" and suggests "Assyria and all the mysterious stagnation of the East."

1) Berkhofer, Robert F. Jr., A Behavioral Approach to Historical Analysis, London, Collier-MacMillan Ltd., 1969, p. 214 f.

2) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 107; Meyer, op.cit., p. 247.

3) Not unlike Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem Ozymandias.

The surface description is suffused with the intensely symbolic elements of several centuries of Ukrainian-Jewish socio-history. In two short sentences Babel presents the central figures: "Lambs and fishes depicted above a skull, and Rabbis in fur caps--Rabbis girt round their narrow loins with leather belts. Below their eyeless faces the rippling stone line of their curly beards."¹ The focus shifts to one particular vault in the cemetery, the vault of Rabbi Azrael and three generations of his descendents. Significantly, the vault lies beneath a lightning-shattered oak. Azrael was one of the many innocent victims of Khmelnytskyj's anti-monarchic forces. The vault's memorial stone "sings" of the lifeless inhabitants with "the eloquence of a Bedouin's prayer.":

"Azrael, son of Ananias, Jehova's mouthpiece.

"Elijah son of Azrael, brain that struggled single-handed with oblivion.

"Wolff son of Elijah, prince robbed from the Torah in his nineteenth spring.

"Judah son of Wolff, Rabbi of Cracow and Prague.

"O Death, O covetous one, O greedy thief, why couldst thou not have spared us, just for once?"²

There is, in terms of content, the equivalent of a novel in this terse sketch. It is the tale of Jewish life and death, of East European Jewish destiny. In the narrow

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 107.

2) Ibid.

sense, the tale is concerned with Rabbi Azrael and his descendants, while in a wider sense it deals with the fate of four generations of Ukrainian Jewry. The terse epitaphs are pregnant with history in the sense of personal and collective conflict: "Jehovah's mouthpiece", "brain that struggled single-handedly with oblivion", "prince robbed from the Torah in his nineteenth spring", -- the essence of an historical belief and its nemesis. Sacrificial victims of eternal process, not unlike the lambs and fishes adorning the stone which allows their voices to be heard, not unlike the lightning-shattered oak which portends of their disaster.

Similarly in the foreground of Chagall's painting is a stone-gray cemetery gate from which some of the plaster has fallen, revealing a blood-red brickwork. The red does not end with the posts but spills over onto the rest of the structure, suggestive of violent bloodshed. The inscription in Hebrew letters on the gate is from Ezekiel--the biblical prophecy that the dead shall arise. In the foreground also is a large tree, bluish-gray in its branches, with green geometrically-shaped boughs which extend to the sky. One is immediately reminded of Babel's shattered oak. Occupying the largest area of the composition is a blue overcast sky, the apices of its oblique, fragmented tent-like texture pointing upwards. The structure of the gate

itself, with its tri-pyramidal pediments suggests a printed shin (W).¹

Through the aperture of the gate is seen the central component of this composition,--the tombstones, their greenish-gray color and time-weathered inscriptions suggesting antiquity and the passage of time. The glow of a strange yellowish light seems to emit from the stones, giving the cemetery a semblance of hidden life. One critic has appropriately described this painting as a "monument to a sacred present."² What is portrayed in both story and painting is in effect symbolic of a spiritual state. The nature of the "telling" in each case becomes clearly apparent when considered from the vantage point of Joyce's notion of "epiphany", i.e. a "showing forth", a sudden spiritual manifestation which an object or action achieves as the result of an observer's apprehension of its meaning. An epiphany "...suggests that the human fact does not dominate the scene of our existence--for something to 'show forth' it must first be hidden..." and the "...human fact is submerged in and subordinated to a world of circumstance, the world of things; it is known only in glimpses..."³

1) Trachtenberg, Joshua, Jewish Magic and Superstition. A Study in Folk Religion, New York, Atheneum, 1970 (1939), p. 158. Trachtenberg comments on the exorcistic significance of this letter.

2) Joyce, James, Stephen Hero, New York, New Directions Publishing Company, 1963, p. 211, 213.

3) Trilling, op.cit., p. 16.

The Joycean notion of the epiphany is related to the Hasidic concept of the distribution of the Shekinah, that all things including acts of mind, coincidences of matter, moments of time, serve as vessels of a greater spiritual reality; what the pious Hasid, through an obligatory ritual attitude, occasionally perceives as the spiritual significance or Divine Presence, the Joycean observer perceives as being symbolic, through his accidental apprehension of it, of a spiritual state.

Skaz for Babel and Chagall serves as a particularly effective method for the treatment of surface reality without making its representation an end in itself. That is, skaz form accomodates the artist with a format for setting, an arrangement of the component figures, without attaching undue significance to the figures themselves, except in the way that the artist himself wishes. It is necessary now to turn to yet another notion in attempting to guage the overall effectiveness of the component details. This is Eliot's notion of the "objective correlative", which consists of the artist's skillful manipulation of his basic tools in order to evoke or reconstruct through word or brush stroke, the essential elements of a particular emotion.¹

1) Eliot's own definition has already been given in Chapter I, p. 50.

Eliot's notion is concerned primarily with the artistic evocation of emotion in the reader through a discriminate arrangement of words which shall constitute a "formula" for most effectively expressing that particular emotion. The central element of structure and style in Babel's and Chagall's works, however, is not emotion but rather epiphany. Thus it was necessary to put forth a new notion, namely that of the "epiphanic correlative". This term in its simplest definition entails the artist's attempt to "pass on" to his reader or viewer, the most complete experience of his revelation or insight by choosing verbal or visual patterns or figures which shall in turn recreate the elements, mood, or atmosphere which gave rise to the artist's own insight. It involves not merely a description of the epiphany experienced, but rather a recreation of it in such a manner that the reader or viewer might experience it for himself.

The epiphany is by definition a highly personal, subjective experience. Like the psychedelic experience, it is difficult to effectively describe and even more difficult to effectively recreate for someone "outside" the original experience. The epiphany is again analogous to the psychedelic "trip" in that it too involves an excursion into the realm of "an invisible order" where a glimpse into the "mysterious essence of things" is gained. As such the epiphany

falls into the category of a religious experience, more specifically it constitutes a mystical link between ordinary and supraordinary reality, i.e. the reality of poetic or spiritual vision, and in Babel's and Chagall's case has its inspirational sources in Jewish mystic tradition and Hasidism.¹

It is worthwhile noting that the epiphanic correlative has a perceptive rather than a preceptive orientation basis. The artist suspends or withholds his own personal emotive or intellectual reaction from his presentation; he endeavors to allow his story or painting to tell itself. As Trilling noted:

...In his commitment to event he affects to be indifferent to "meanings" and "values"; he seems to be saying that although he can tell us with unusual accuracy what is going on, he does not presume to interpret it, scarcely to understand it, certainly not to judge it.²

In other words, although the artist's experiencing of the epiphany and the reader's anticipated re-experiencing of it are subjective in nature, the artist's expressing of the

1) Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1961 Ed., p. 557, defines mysticism as 1) The doctrine or belief that direct knowledge of God, of spiritual truth, etc., is attainable through immediate intuition or insight and in a way differing from ordinary sense perception or the use of logical reasoning;...2) Any type of theory asserting the possibility of attaining knowledge or power through faith or spiritual insight.

2) Trilling, op.cit., p. 16.

revelatory experience must be objective and non-didactive in form.¹ Any attempt on the part of the artist to instruct or teach the reader or viewer, would in essence result in a distortion of the epiphany itself; the artist must be extremely precise in his expression of the original experience and any unnecessary tampering could seriously detract from the effectiveness of his art.² In this sense the artist himself serves as a "vessel" of artistic truth, i.e. the "truth" of his epiphanies, his poetic visions, and as an artist is compelled to communicate this truth to the rest of humanity.³ In so doing he must subordinate his personal life in favor of his art, and must act as an impersonal, creative process.

In turning back to the first two illustrations from the artists' works, it is now possible to discuss them in terms of the epiphanic correlative. In Babel's story each word has been painfully and carefully selected, i.e. the

1) Jung, op.cit., p. 223. Jung gives the following definition: "A great work of art is like a dream; for all its apparent obviousness it does not explain itself and is never unequivocal. A dream never says: 'You ought,' or: 'This is the truth.' It presents an image in much the same way as nature allows a plant to grow, and we must draw our own conclusions."

2) Babel obsessively reworked each of his stories; according to his friend Knstantin Paustovsky, as many as twenty-two versions of a single story.

3) Jung, op.cit., p. 221. Jung writes: "Art is a kind of innate drive that seizes a human being and makes him its instrument. The artist is not a person endowed with free will who seeks his own ends, but one who allows art to realize its purposes through him."

words and phrases used in describing the cemetery delve beyond the descriptive realm of language, they are suggestive words which refer to a suprareality, a reality which extends beyond the purely sensory. "Assyria", the "mysterious stagnation of the East", "weed-grown" recall not only antique, exotic refuse, but are in themselves by means of the mood they evoke, crucial to the message of a once-lived reality, its relationship to the reality of the present. The "lightning-shattered oak" which hovers over the tombs, is a carefully chosen reference to the geneological "tree" of Rabbi Azrael. In Chagall's painting, the spastic brutality of naked nature is symbolized not in a tree, but in the cemetery gate. The "tree of life" metaphor is more than a specific reference to the tragedy of Rabbi Azrael and his progeny; it extends to include the Jews and humanity itself. The carved reliefs of lambs and fishes--symbols of spiritual states,--suggest innocent sacrificial offerings, like Azrael's descendants.

In Chagall's painting, the movement

...surges upward, piling the forms in oblique pyramids and embracing the mighty structure of the gate itself and the pediment which crowns it. Every single form becomes a dynamic form, is endowed with wings, and a mighty current is set in motion above and beyond the material world toward a spiritual reality that is also

the true reality of the here and now.¹

The interrelationships between the various figures in Chagall's painting, v.g. the representation of the gate with its suggestion of spilt blood, the central position in terms of both light and movement assigned to the tombstones, are similar to those found in Babel's story. Both the story and the painting are similar in both presentation and effect. The epiphany is found in each case in the sudden, resurrected awareness of once-lived lives, made possible through our confrontation with the obvious external symbols of the cemetery, in themselves not these lives, but which point to them and are the means through which the dead can speak. The tombstones, the cemetery itself, remain as the only link between the living and the dead; it becomes through the crucible of art a voiced receptacle of their "reality", which in the humdrum of daily living normally escapes the apprehension of the living. For Babel and Chagall, death could not obliterate the truth of the dead.²

In his story Guy de Maupassant, Babel achieves an epiphanic correlative which throws further light on the same

1) Meyer, op.cit., p. 250.

2) Eliot, T.S., The Sacred Wood, op.cit., p. 52., writes: "Someone said: 'The dead writers are remote from us because we know so much more than they did'. Precisely, and they are that which we know."

theme, namely the link between the living and the dead. In the pretentious home of the Russified Benderskys, Babel encounters an unusual "grave":

The glassy rays of the Petersburg sun lay on the pale and uneven carpet. Twenty-nine volumes of Maupassant stood on the shelf above the desk. The sun with its fingers of melting dissolution touched the morocco backs of the books--the magnificent grave of a human heart.¹

Maupassant's books, in the way that Babel sees them are not unlike the tombstone epitaphs of Rabbi Azrael. Later in the same story he refers to them as "twenty-nine bombs stuffed with pity, genius and passion."² In the midst of the living, the dead speak. But their voices are audible only to those who are willing and able to listen. The majority of humankind is too preoccupied with survival and therefore with external reality. Crucial to this epiphany is the historical sense, best defined as a "...sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together...", it is "...what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, his contemporaneity."³

In Chagall's painting To Russia, Asses and Others another excellent example of the epiphanic correlative is

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 332.

2) Ibid., p. 336.

3) Eliot, op.cit., p. 49.

found. On a yellow roof beside a church with blue and yellow-green cupolas stands a horned reddish cow, suckled by what appears to be a green lamb and a green child. In the vast black, but splashed with green, yellow and reddish-orange background, the figure of a decapitated woman with milk-pail in hand, descends from above the cupolas in the direction of the other figures.

Chagall has portrayed the various figures as suspended in both time and space. The tale which the painting tells may be both personal and culturally-defined, yet its presentation is objective and detached in both mood and feeling. Time, for a moment stands still and the observer's experience of this moment, deliberately suspended by the artist is immediately complete. Each figure in Chagall's formula constitutes an aspect of the original reality and is its plastic representation. The figures taken together are

...true symbolic formulations; and to a striking degree, perhaps paralleled only by James Joyce in the field of language, he has heightened the capacity to transport his symbolic imagery, unalloyed by rational contrivances, from his unconscious to his canvas.¹

Thus in To Russia, Asses and Others the decapitated woman can be interpreted as the symbol of civilization, of the

1) Schneider, Daniel E., "A Psychoanalytic Approach to the Painting of Marc Chagall", College Art Journal, VI, 2, Winter 1946, p. 115.

"Weaning Witch". The green child, on the other hand, has a strong identification with the little lamb with whom he shares the cow's teats (the cow, in this case symbolizing nature or the natural state). The lamb, of course is the eternal innocent sacrificial victim, not unlike the martyred Jews. The reason for the witch's headless state is found with the unweaned child, who wishes that the witch along with the Church would leave him be.¹ It is again a conflict of culture and nature with the child representing a Rousseauan "noble savage" confronted with the violence of becoming civilized.

As in Babel's stories there is nothing extraneous in Chagall's paintings; each figure is intrinsic to the unfolding tale. One is reminded of Babel's confession to his friend I.S. Livšic: "...My only vanity...is to write as few unnecessary words as possible."² And in Guy de Maupassant Babel writes:

...A phrase is born into the world both good and bad at the same time. The secret lies in a slight, an almost invisible twist. The lever should rest in your hand, getting warm, and you can only turn it once, not twice.³

1) Schneider, op.cit., p. 123.

2) Babel, I., "From Babel's Letters", Soviet Literature, No.1, 1965, p. 156.

3) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 331/

This aesthetic dictum is equally applicable to Chagall. The separate images in To Russia, Asses and Others each share in the skaz and their relation to one another serves to complete the meaning of the painting as a whole. And although one cannot find the narrator in this painting, his presence is sensed from the perspective given, a perspective so disturbingly different from that of the camera eye, that one cannot but be certain of his involvement in the tale being told. Poggiolli elaborates on the relationship between perspective, narrator and artist when he points out that Babel

...works like a painter, representing on a flat surface and in a small space all the massive and colorful variety of reality. Like an old painter he yields to other figures the centre of the scene, while tracing his own self-portrait in one of the corners of the canvas. The immediacy of his vision seems to suggest that he always writes under the shock of impact of the event; yet second sight we realize that he represents the event itself as if it were detached in both mood and time.¹

Thus the artist-narrator is virtually always present in each of Chagall's and Babel's oeuvres, and even when unseen his presence is sensed. Rarely occupying a central place, he usually leaves this to the other figures or personae, himself lurking in the sidelines. The other figures, however, frequently act as mouthpieces for his own thoughts and feelings.

1) Poggiolli, Renato, "Isaak Babel in Retrospect", The Phoenix and the Spider, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1957, p. 236.

Like the individual Karamazovs of Dostoevsky, they are used by the artist to express the various conflicting or harmonious aspects of his own soul. Through this device, greater scope and intensity is afforded to each figure or expression; the effect of each story and painting is enhanced by this sharing in the telling of the tale. The transfigurative revitalization of memory is not restricted to the narrator alone, all of the component figures are allowed to participate.

In the written skaz a certain originality and vividness of expression are generally accomplished through the usage of irregular or peculiar speech forms, while in the painted skaz this is frequently achieved through various distortions or aberrations of shape, size, line or color. The painting under discussion could not please the naturalists; the child is green, the cow is red, the cow is larger than the house on which it stands, etc. Moreover, the contours of each human and animal figure are depicted in geometrical angularity. The animal figures, e.g. the cow and the lamb in certain of their features, namely eyes and overall facial expressions, appear more human than animal. In other paintings this anthropomorphic tendency is more extreme: animals are depicted with human heads, as in I and the Village, and conversely, humans infrequently are endowed with animal heads, as

in Dedicated to My Fiancée.¹

The anthropomorphism which is found in both Babel's and Chagall's works (almost each story or painting has at least one example) is remarkably similar when considered as constituting symbolic language. It might be argued that it is an aspect of poetic visionary language. If the epiphany is in fact, a primordial experience, it would then require mythological imagery to give it form.² Furthermore, this mythological imagery, though personalized by the artist's peculiar vision, may be considered archetypal. The images are primarily drawn either from nature, e.g. animals, birds, plants, or may be celestial, e.g. stars, sun, moon, etc. In Babel, there is frequently a merging of animal and celestial qualities, as in the following examples: "The orange sun rolled down the sky like a lopped-off head..." (Crossing Into Poland); "The dying sun, round and yellow as a pumpkin, was giving up its roseate ghost to the skies..." (My First Goose); "Like a cat's back the earth lay overgrown with the gleaming fur of crops..." (The Road to Brody); "...the moon, clasping

1) Meyer, op.cit., p. 163, 133.

2) Jung, op.cit., p. 217; Jung considers the primordial experience to be the source of artistic creativity.

in her blue hands her round, bright, carefree face wandered like a vagrant outside the window." (Crossing Into Poland); "Evening wrapped about me the quivering moisture of its twilight sheets; evening laid a mother's hand upon my burning forehead." (My First Goose); "...the young Sabbath crept along the sunset, crushing the stars beneath her little red heel", (The Rabbi's Son), etc.¹ In Chagall's paintings one also finds animals playing musical instruments, men whose bodies are the instruments which they play. For Babel and Chagall, it must be remembered, all surface reality has the same mystic, primal source. Their imagery itself is suffused with that living, dynamic "essence of things", which when apprehended, disintegrates the surface distinctions between all things.

Occasionally Babel uses anthropomorphism or more specifically a kind of metempsychosis as the central image of epiphanic correlative. The story Squadron Commander Trunov has as its setting the Galician town of Sokal, and as its leit-motiv, treachery.² In a public square, where Jews are participating in a Hasidic-Mitnagdic debate, Ljutov suddenly "...perceived before me a Galician as lanky and cadaverous as Don Quixote."³ Babel then gives the following description:

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 41, 74, 82, 42, 76, 191.

2) Ibid., p. 143-152.

3) Ibid., p. 145.

This Galician was clothed in a white linen shirt that reached down to his heels. He was arrayed as though for his funeral or for Communion service, and he led by a rope a little tousled cow. Upon his huge body was set the nimble, tiny, pierced head of a serpent that waggled beneath a wide-brimmed hat of common straw.

The wretched little cow followed the Galician at the end of its lead. He led it with an air of importance, his gibbet-like frame cleaving the burning brilliance of the skies.

Solemnly he crossed the square and went down a winding lane all smoky with thick and nauseating vapors.¹

Ljutov follows this strange-looking man down the lane where his last glimpse of the Galician shows him giving potatoes to a Gypsy blacksmith, presumably in exchange for some service. However, neither Ljutov nor the reader can ever find out, for at that point Ljutov is distracted by a quarrelsome Cossack. This, however is not important as it is rather Ljutov's encounter with the Galician that is. At first reading, the above-quoted passage would seem to have little if any significance in relation to the story. On further contemplation however, it becomes quite clear that the passage is the quintessence of the story, its epiphanic correlative.

It must be mentioned that Budennyj's First Cavalry

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 145.

which was Moscow-affiliated, was in the Galician town of Sokal on the business of burying Trunov, a soviet "hero". The Russian presence in a predominantly Ukrainian town stirred up a centuries-old hostility; Ukrainian partisans continuously sabotaged Budennyj's efforts as well as those of the Poles. Thus treachery from the hostile peasants was the rule rather than the exception. From this vantage point, the sudden appearance and disappearance of the mysterious Galician must be understood as portentous. But it is more than just an omen; the figure has been endowed by Babel with all the attributes of a disguised Satan. The Galician is dressed as if for a religious ceremony, his head is serpent-like, he is proud, and his frame "cleaves" the burning brilliance of the heavens. Before vanishing into smoky, nauseating vapors, the figure has what seems to be a business transaction with a Gypsy blacksmith (Gypsies were rumoured to entering into various satanic pacts). This is perhaps a suggestion of cloven hooves.

Babel withholds Ljutov's reaction to the Galician, he only lets the reader know that Ljutov's perception of him was sudden and direct. The encounter is revelatory, to the reader if not to Ljutov. It intimates the presence of masked evil. The passage relates to an earlier encounter between

Trunov and ten Polish prisoners. The prisoners had disrobed in an effort to conceal the identities of the officers among them. Trunov had made an old Pole try on an officer's hat before stabbing him in the throat with his sabre. This episode however, is secondary to the epiphanic passage in terms of the story's structure. The episode with the Polish prisoners can be considered as "surface" reality, while the epiphanic passage contains the essence which belies it.

In the story Pan Apolek, the following passage which describes a painting of St. John the Baptist, which hangs in the house of a fugitive Novograd priest is given. Ljutov remembers:

...the spiderweb stillness of a summer morning hung between the straight bright walls, and the base of the image was struck by a shaft of sunlight in which swarmed numerous dust-motes. The lanky figure of John was coming straight down to me from out of the blue depths of the niche. A black cloak hung regally about that implacable, that repulsively emaciated body. Drops of blood flashed on the round clasps of the cloak. John's head had not been cut off straight, and the neck was jagged. The head lay upon an earthenware dish gripped tight between the large yellow fingers of a warrior. The dead man's face seemed familiar to me. I scented a mystery...¹

As Ljutov confesses, the painting presents a mystery. Yet the mystery is a result not so much of the paintings content

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 55-56.

but rather of its style, v.g. the manner in which the painter had shown the head had been severed, the "familiarity" of his features. The passage is continued:

...The dead man's head that lay on the earthenware dish had been painted from that of Pan Romuald, the fugitive priest's assistant. Out of the mouth with bared teeth looped the tiny body of a snake, scaly and glittering. The small, lively head of a delicate pink pwerfully set off the dark background of the cloak.¹

This is Ljutov's epiphany, a "gospel that had lain concealed from the world". thrown at his feet.² Its essence -- the "...sweetness of meditated rancor, the bitter scorn I felt for the curs and swine of mankind, the fire of silent and intoxicating revenge...".³ As in Chagall's painting, each detail serves to complete the meaning of the epiphany, yet none in itself tells all. As in Chagall's visual presentations, so in Babel's verbal description the reader becomes emotionally implicated in the tale. Babel's choice of words creates a mood, and his imagery captivates even if at first one cannot rationalize why. In Apolek's painting Babel apprehends the irreconcilable conflict between established religion, its abusive dogma and the purposes of art; of the paintings of the scoundrel painter Apolek, the crippled care-

1) Loc. cit.

2) Ibid.

3) Ibid.

taker Vitold retorts to the Vicar of Dubno and Novokonstantinov:

Your Holiness...who is to tell the ignorant folk about the things in which the all-merciful Pan God sees truth? And isn't there more truth in the pictures of Pan Apolek, who satisfies our pride, than in your words so full of blame and aristocratic wrath?¹

In this particular epiphanic correlative, one finds the same contrasting visual, especially in terms of color, juxtapositions that one finds in Chagall's paintings, particularly those depicting birth and to a lesser extent circumcision. Sanguine red and pink are contrasted with yellow and black. The violence of the apostle's death is indicated in the "jagged" line of the decapitation, and foulness is signified by the snake-like tongue. The moment of apprehension is sudden and intense, the epiphany is "thrown" at him in the "spiderweb stillness of a summer morning". The overall mood is one of suspension and disorientation, and one's senses are dismantled into that dimension best described as "in illo tempore".² The image transcends the limitations of time and space; the moment of encounter between the reader and the beheaded apostle is one of violent

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, op.cit., p. 60.

2) Eliade, op.cit., p. 4.

immediacy. The visual image is objective and detached, but the reader's reaction to it is not. With precise and effective selection of words denoting qualities of color and shape, which in turn evoke emotion, the artist has concretized his most subjective inner experience.

In the story In St. Valentine's Church, Babel again utilizes a description by his narrator of a painting for the purpose of epiphanic correlative. This time it is a particularly poignant picture of Christ:

...at that instant, the velvet curtain by the altar swayed and, quivering slipped to one side. A niche was revealed, and in its blue depth, against a background of cloud-furrowed sky, ran a bearded figure in a Polish greatcoat of orange--barefooted, with torn and bleeding mouth...The man in the orange greatcoat was being pursued by hatred and overtaken by the chase. He had put out a hand to ward off the impending blow, and blood flowed from that hand in a purple stream.¹

And further Babel writes that this extraordinary figure was Christ

...a curly-headed Jew with a tousled beard and a low wrinkled forehead. His sunken cheeks were painted with carmine, and above the eyes, closed in pain, arched delicate reddish eyebrows.

His mouth was torn like a horse's lip. His Polish overcoat was girded with a costly belt, and beneath the caftan twisted little porcelain feet--painted, bare and pierced

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 142.

with silver nails.¹

This epiphany has as its central image the terrifying figure of a fleeing Christ. The psychological impact of the image is multifold. Christ is here portrayed as being a Polish Jew, presumably fleeing from a Polish mob. To grasp the full significance of Babel's ploy, one must remember that the story was written in 1920 in a country where antisemitism was rampant; where in a sense, every Jew shared the daily horror of being a pogrom victim. This period, as mentioned in the first chapter, witnessed the rise of a new popular antisemitism, which of course culminated in the fascist takeover of Europe. Babel's emphasis on Christ's Jewishness is in this context a direct affrontation to anti-Jewish propagandists, who had to cope with this embarrassing fact.

Another interesting facet of this image is the fact that Christ's body, depicted as that of a Polish Jew, is human in all respects except for his feet, which like the church in which the painting is found, have the appearance of porcelain.² The reference here is to Christ's remark to Peter-Simon the apostle "...thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build

1) Babel, The Collected Stories, p. 142.

2) Ibid., p. 139. The church is described as "...white and mighty...It gleamed in the cool sunlight like a tower of porcelain."

my Church...".¹ However, in the context of the story, the reference has a negative connotation; the implication that the organized Christian Church, unlike the teachings of a very human Jesus, is a very lifeless, anti-spiritual institution is made. This interpretation is strengthened by the opening line of the above-quoted passage, which reveals the startling painting through the sudden opening of the altar curtain, and suggests Christ's death prophecy of rending asunder the curtain of the Temple.² This passage illustrates the complexity of Babel's symbolism, and verifies one critic's observation that Babel like Spinoza utilized language as a system of "mnemonic symbols", where words do not merely represent ideas but rather complicated trains of thought, and arguments "...are not fully unfolded but merely hinted at by suggestion."³

As already mentioned, Babel's In St. Valentine's Church was written during the Russo-Polish campaign. Chagall's painting White Crucifixion was finalized in 1938, which also was a particularly turbulent time for the Jews as the nazist

1) Matthew 16:18.

2) The prophecy "I will destroy this temple built by hands, and after three days I will build another, not built by hands" is found in Mark 14:58. Its fulfilment is claimed in Mark 15:38--"And the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."

3) Carden, Patricia, The Art of Isaac Babel, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1972, p. 51-52, note 15.

antisemitic program was already in motion.¹ Hitler's perverse drama, which in its final act was to adversely affect not only the Jews but all of humanity, had already begun. And Chagall, who in his childhood and early youth had had a foretaste of Nazism in its tsarist variant, fully sensed the cataclysmic implications of the pending tragedy. His painting White Crucifixion represents a culmination of themes dealt with in earlier paintings, particularly in The Falling Angel which underwent several phases of composition (it is dated 1923-33-47).² The Falling Angel depicts in its first phase a falling angel and a fleeing Jew who carries with him to safety the sacred scrolls of the Torah; in the second phase the Jew unfolds the Torah for the observer, and a beast which presumably symbolizes the demonic force of Nazism openly rejoices. In White Crucifixion Christ is the central figure, but as Meyer noted, the painting is not a Christian picture but an "exemplary Jewish martyrology".³

Occupying the center of the composition is the crucified Christ; girt round his loins is a tallith-like cloth. At his feet a seven-branched menorah burns, enclosed in a halo like that which surrounds Christ's head. The inscrip-

1) Hilberg, Raul, The Destruction of the European Jews, Chicago, Quadrangle Books, 1967 (1961), p. 5-6, Table 1.

2) Meyer, op.cit., p. 417, 491.

3) Ibid., p. 414.

tion reads in Hebrew script "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews", and also has the Latin abbreviation (INRI). The remaining figures in the painting encircle the central figure and represent soldiers overtaking and destroying a village, refugees fleeing in a boat, a burning synagogue, wailing rabbis, and various other fleeing and pursued Jewish figures. The epiphanic significance of this painting, particularly as opposed to traditional Christian versions of Christ's crucifixion, is the fact that

...though all the suffering of the world is mirrored in the Crucifixion, suffering remains man's lasting fate and is not abolished by Christ's death. So Chagall's Christ figure lacks the Christian concept of salvation. For all his holiness he is by no means divine. This Christ is a man who suffers pain in a thousand forms and yet finally always in the same form, a man who is eternally burned by the fire of the world and yet, being an archetype, remains indestructible. It is not his divine but his human nature that Christ's suffering preserves.¹

The painting is an intimation of the Nazi Holocaust, but also has various other possible interpretations. It is one of the most poignant in a series of thematically-related paintings. In later variations, particularly The Martyr (1940) the central figure is no longer a Jewish Christ, but rather just a Jew, tied to the stake.² Other variants include

1) Meyer, op.cit., p. 415.

2) Ibid., p. 418.

Yellow Crucifixion (1943), Obsession (1943) and The Crucified (1944); the last painting is particularly interesting because it represents an extension of the crucifixion theme: an entire village street is lined with crucified Jews.¹

It must be mentioned that the illustrations discussed above comprise only a few examples of Babel's and Chagall's use of the epiphanic correlative. It would be beyond the scope of this study to examine all of the examples found in their works; limitations of time and space have necessitated a discriminating selection of characteristic and generally-representative examples.² The notion of the epiphanic correlative as defined in this chapter resulted from an attempt to establish a frame of reference within which the paintings and the stories could adequately be examined in terms of their structure and effect. It is hoped that the notion will prove useful to other researchers.

In summarizing then, the epiphanic correlative is a term derived from a fusion of other notions, namely the traditional one of skaz, the Joycean "epiphany", and T.S. Eliot's "objective correlative". Unlike either of the above, it is concerned with not merely the artist's personal revelatory

1) Meyer, op.cit., p. 457, 447, 456.

2) Lee, Alice, "Epiphany in Babel's Red Cavalry", Russian Triquarterly 3, 1972, p. 249-260. Lee discusses other examples of epiphany in Red Cavalry, but strictly from the ken of the narrator's experience of the epiphany.

experience, but with the artist's verbal or pictorial formulation of his epiphany in such a manner that his reader or viewer might also experience it with the intensity and force of the original, i.e. the artist's own, epiphanic experience. Thus the epiphanic correlative is concerned primarily with style and its anticipated effect. Moreover, the epiphanic correlative is perceptual rather than didactic in intent. Hence the formula of expression must adhere to objective standards, i.e. the criteria of "poetic truth".

Finally the epiphanic correlative as evidenced in the works of Isaac Babel and Marc Chagall is the notion which best describes the stylistic similarity common to both. It is related to and derives from the common Weltanschauung discussed in the first chapter of this study. It therefore represents their concretization of their primary sources of inspiration.

CONCLUSIONS

The writer Isaac Babel and the painter Marc Chagall appeared to share a common aesthetic attitude, which in spite of their different artistic media, expressed itself in an uncommonly similar language. On the strength of their own attestations to this effect, their milieus were examined in an attempt to determine whether common influences operative in their milieu could indeed account for the similarity of their poetic vision and its expression.

Upon examination of the existing body of Babel criticisms, it was found that the majority of these were primarily concerned with Babel's political significance or with filling in missing gaps in his intriguing but incomplete biography. Only a few critics, especially Trilling, Hyman, and Stora-Sandor were concerned with Babel from a literary or aesthetic point of view. Paralleling this in Chagall's case were the early reviews by both Western and Soviet critics who declared his paintings as being exotic and incomprehensible. Most helpful was Meyer's definitive study, and the seminal essays of Cassou, Erben, Kloomok and Schmidt. In general, however, the insights gained from secondary sources were few and far between.

Moreover, whereas one or two critics observed that a spiritual and stylistic similarity existed between Babel and Chagall, no attempts were made to account for the correspondence. The absence of this kind of comparative critique

necessitated a virtual reliance on primary sources. Aside from the stories and paintings themselves, recorded personal or public interviews, letters and in Chagall's case, his quasi-autobiographical book My Life, were considered as belonging in the primary category.

Certain psychic factors operative in the artists' cultural milieu appear to have direct bearing in terms of influence on the content and form, vision and style observed as being characteristic of Babel and Chagall. Firstly, the multifaceted conflict each faced as members of a sub-culture and secondly, the influence on each individual of Hasidism, the dominant socio-religious flavour and essence of their sub-culture. Although the Soviet Constitution granted all ethnic minorities equality, the several-centuries old traditions of xenophobia and antisemitism could not be eradicated by simple legislation. Pogroms and other atrocities did not terminate in 1917 and were in fact very real dangers for Babel and Chagall by virtue of their Jewish birth. These socio-cultural tensions recur in Chagall's paintings and his Jewish figures reveal the suffering and anguish of his martyred people. The clowns, the jugglers, fiddlers precociously perched on rooftops, wandering old beggars floating above the towns with sacks on their backs, all reveal a very personal concern with Jewish existence and survival in the face of emnity. Babel's chief characters reveal the same concern, but go further in that through them Babel attempts to resolve the cultural and ideological conflicts (perhaps because he chose to remain while Chagall emigrated). Unlike Chagall, who merely portrays Jewish plight, Babel attempts to find a

synthesis of cultural and ideological values.

The second well-spring of inspiration from which both Babel and Chagall drew, and which in terms of their aesthetic cosmologies has perhaps even greater significance than the first, is the influence of Hasidism. Although neither adhered to any orthodox religious dogma or doctrine, both were profoundly influenced by this "mystical" movement which was then the dominant and most dynamic current in East European Jewish religious life and thought. Chagall was completely immersed in its influences from childhood, while Babel, coming from a more assimilated or Russified family, was attracted to it in his search for identity and meaning.

Fundamental to the creative process of an artist is his attitude regarding the nature of reality, and in this respect, Babel and Chagall stand apart from the majority of artists in the Western or Soviet "realist" traditions. For the latter the world is sharply polarized between the organic and the inorganic, the animate and the inanimate, the rational and the irrational. Very few Western artists or writers accept the existence of a reality beyond that of immediate perception, beyond the world of things. For Babel and Chagall, spatial reality or the world of things is a result of an eternal creative process, of space-transcending time. The things of space are significant only in terms of what they suggest or intimate to the sensitive observer. The artist emerges as an interpreter and transmitter of the psychic contents of his milieu, with which the majority of people have contact only in their dreams

and which few can effectively communicate to others. The Hasidim equated this type of expanded consciousness with holiness, and spoke of it in terms of "liberating the Divine Essence present in all things". They sought to achieve this state in much the same way that yogins do, in trance-like states attained through intense meditation or through song and dance. James Joyce put forth the notion of the epiphany, which quite accurately describes an individual's contact with supra-reality.

Epiphanies however, were not just something that Babel and Chagall experienced and deemed important; they attempted in their works to transmit their experiences of epiphanies to others as intensely and accurately as they themselves experienced them. At this stage of the study another problem arose. No suitable literary or artistic terminology with which to discuss the visual-verbal similarity of language existing between the writer and the painter could be found. What emerged was the composite notion of the epiphanic correlative (a fusion of the notions of traditional skaz, T.S. Eliot's "objective correlative" and James Joyce's "epiphany"). This notion provided a frame of reference and comparison useful to this analysis. It is useful in describing the artists' attempt to share with his reader or viewer the most complete sharing of his revelatory experiencing of reality or epiphany through the selection of verbal or visual patterns or figures which shall in turn recreate the elements of mood or atmosphere which gave rise to the artists' original insight.



APPENDIX

CHAGALL'S DEFINITION OF "AUTHENTICITY" AND "CHEMISTRY"*

The birth of impressionism threw open a window for us and cast the light of a rainbow across the horizon of our world. Although this world had been differently and more intensely coloured, it seems in general to have become narrower than, for instance, Courbet's naturalistic world, in the same way that Courbet's naturalism became narrower than Delacroix's romanticism. Delacroix's world, in its turn, was more declamatory and narrower than the neo-classical world of David and Ingres. I will stop there. After impressionism came the cubist world, which led us into the geometric inwardness of things, just as later abstract art led us into the smaller elements of matter. So the harmonies and dimensions of life seem to be gradually contracting. To continue like this would seem to mean moving forward towards a progressive narrowing of life. What has happened?

Let us consider what is genuine in the trappings of our life. The world is ours from the moment of our birth and we seem to be equipped from our very beginning. For about two thousand years a reserve of energy has fed and supported us, and filled our lives, but during the last century a split has opened in this reserve, and its components have begun to disintegrate: God, perspective, colour, the Bible, shape, line, traditions, the so-called humanities, love, devotion, family, school, education, the prophets and Christ himself. Have I too, perhaps, doubted in my time? I painted pictures upside down, decapitated people and dissected them, scattering the pieces in the air, all in the name of another perspective, another kind of picture composition and another formalism.

Our world, little by little, has come to look like a

* Cited from: Cogniat, op.cit., p. 29.

microcosm on which we microscopic creatures swarm as we cling to a small particles of our nature, until the tinier particles engulf us and finally the atom itself.

Does not this pseudo-scientific ascendancy over nature restrict the fund of poetry by draining the soul, and deprive mankind of even the physical gifts of calm and repose? Does not man thus eliminate from his organism the moral purpose of his life and creation? During the last few years I have often discussed so-called chemistry, genuine colour and texture as though they were yardsticks of authenticity. An exceptionally sharp eye might see that a genuine colour or texture automatically comprises every possible technique as well as a moral and philosophical content. Any moral crisis is a crisis of colour, texture, blood and the elements, of speech, vibration, etc. -- the materials with which art, like life is constructed. Even when mountains of colour are piled on a canvas, if one can discern no single object even through great sound and vibration, this will not necessarily give authenticity.

In my opinion Cinabue's colour-texture alone started a revolution in Byzantine art, just as another colour of Giotto's, equally authentic (I stress this word in its chemical sense) started another moral and artistic revolution. In the same way later on Masaccio and others...I repeat, it is not a view of the world-- that is, a literary or symbolic factor-- which effects such a change, but blood itself, a certain chemistry in nature, in things and even in human awareness. This conception of authenticity can be seen in all spheres.



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