



Telling Difficult Stories:

Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock*

Dr. David Kraemer

David Kraemer is the Joseph J. and Dora Abbell Librarian at The Jewish Theological Seminary, where he has also served as Professor of Talmud and Rabbinics for many years. As Librarian, Prof. Kraemer is at the helm of the most extensive collection of Judaica—rare and contemporary—in the Western hemisphere. On account of the size and importance of the collection, Prof. Kraemer is instrumental in setting policy and establishing vision for projects of international importance.

Prof. Kraemer is a prolific author and commentator. His books include *The Mind of the Talmud* (1990), *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature* (1995), *The Meanings of Death in Rabbinic Judaism* (2000), and *Jewish Eating and Identity Through the Ages* (2007, 2009), and *A History of the Talmud: From its Origins to the Present Day* (2019) among others. He is also the author and co-creator of The Haggadah app, for iPads.

of the highly attuned, and his English is spoken precisely, each word lightly glazed with an accent as Old Worldish as it is Israeli. It is an appealing voice to listen to, alive with the dramatic cadences of the master storyteller and vibrant in its own distinctly quiet way—and I was listening very hard. “I’ll translate from your statement here,” he was telling me. “The reason for my visit to Walesa was to discuss with him the resettlement of Jews in Poland once Solidarity comes to power there, as it will.”

“You’d better translate the whole thing. Start from scratch. What page is it on? How long is it?”

“Not long, not short. It’s on the back page, with the features. There’s a photograph.”

“Of?”

“You.”

“And is it me?” I asked.

“I would say so.”

“What’s the heading over the story?”

“‘Philip Roth Meets Solidarity Leader.’ In smaller letters, ‘‘Poland Needs Jews,’’ Walesa Tells Author in Gdansk.’”

“‘Poland Needs Jews,’” I repeated. “My grandparents should only be alive to hear that one.”

“‘Everyone speaks about Jews,’’ Walesa told Roth. “Spain was ruined by the expulsion of the Jews,’’ the Solidarity leader said during their two-hour meeting at the Gdansk shipyards, where Solidarity was born in 1980. “When people say to me, ‘What Jew would be crazy enough to come here?’ I explain to them that the long experience, over many hundreds of years, of Jews and Poles together cannot be summed up with the word ‘anti-Semitism.’ Let’s talk about a thousand years of glory rather than four years of war. The greatest explosion of Yiddish culture in history, every great intellectual movement of modern Jewish life,’’ said the Solidarity leader to Roth, “took place on Polish soil. Yiddish culture is no less Polish than Jewish. Poland without Jews is unthinkable. Poland needs Jews,’’ Walesa told the American-born Jewish author, “and Jews need Poland.” Philip, I feel that I’m reading to you out of a story you wrote.”

"I wish you were."

"Roth, the author of *Portnoy's Complaint* and other controversial Jewish novels, calls himself an "ardent Diasporist." He says that the ideology of Diasporism has replaced his writing. "The reason for my visit to Walesa was to discuss with him the resettlement of Jews in Poland once Solidarity comes to power there, as it will." Right now, the author finds that his ideas on resettlement are received with more hostility in Israel than in Poland. He maintains that however virulent Polish anti-Semitism may once have been, "the Jew hatred that pervades Islam is far more entrenched and dangerous." Roth continues, "The so-called normalization of the Jew was a tragic illusion from the start. But when this normalization is expected to flourish in the very heart of Islam, it is even worse than tragic—it is suicidal. Horrendous as Hitler was for us, he lasted a mere twelve years, and what is twelve years to the Jew? The time has come to return to the Europe that was for centuries, and remains to this day, the most authentic Jewish homeland there has ever been, the birthplace of rabbinic Judaism, Hasidic Judaism, Jewish secularism, socialism—on and on. The birthplace, of course, of Zionism too. But Zionism has outlived its historical function. The time has come to renew in the European Diaspora our preeminent spiritual and cultural role." Roth, who is fearful of a second Jewish Holocaust in the Middle East, sees "Jewish resettlement" as the only means by which to assure Jewish survival and to achieve "a historical as well as a spiritual victory over Hitler and Auschwitz." "I am not blind," Roth says, "to the horrors. But I sit at the Demjanjuk trial, I look at this tormentor of Jews, this human embodiment of the criminal sadism unleashed by the Nazis on our people, and I ask myself, 'Who and what is to prevail in Europe: the will of this subhuman murderer-brute or the civilization that gave to mankind Shalom Aleichem, Heinrich Heine, and Albert Einstein? Are we to be driven for all time from the continent that nourished the flourishing Jewish worlds of Warsaw, of Vilna, of Riga, of Prague, of Berlin, of Lvov, of Budapest, of Bucharest, of Salonica and Rome because of him?" It is time," concludes Roth, "to return to where we belong and to where we have every historical right to resume the great Jewish

European destiny that the murderers like this Demjanjuk disrupted." " " "

That was the end of the article.

"What swell ideas I have," I said. "Going to make lots of new pals for me in the Zionist homeland."

"Anyone who reads this in the Zionist homeland," said Aharon, "will only think, 'Another crazy Jew.' "

"I'd much prefer then that in the hotel register he'd sign 'Another crazy Jew' and not 'Philip Roth.' "

" 'Another crazy Jew' might not be sufficiently crazy to satisfy his *mishigas.* "

When I saw that Claire was no longer reading her paper but listening to what I was saying, I told her, "It's Aharon. There's a madman in Israel using my name and going around pretending to be me." Then to Aharon I said, "I'm telling Claire that there's a madman in Israel pretending to be me."

"Yes, and the madman undoubtedly believes that in New York and London and Connecticut there is a madman pretending to be him."

"Unless he's not at all mad and knows exactly what he's doing."

"Which is what?" asked Aharon.

"I didn't say I know, I said he knows. So many people in Israel have met me, have seen me—how can this person present himself as Philip Roth to an Israeli journalist and get away with it so easily?"

"I think this is a very young woman who wrote the story—I believe this is a person in her twenties. That's probably what's behind it—her inexperience."

"And the picture?"

"The picture they find in their files."

"Look, I have to contact her paper before this gets picked up by the wire services."

"And what can I do, Philip? Anything?"

"For the time being, no, nothing. I may want to talk to my lawyer before I even call the paper. I may want her to call the paper." But looking at my watch I realized that it was much too early to phone New York. "Aharon, just hold tight until I have a chance to think it

"And you continue at the same time to write your novels?"

"Writing novels while Jews are at a crossroads like this? My life now is focused entirely on the Jewish European resettlement movement. On Diasporism."

Did he sound *anything* like me? I would have thought that my voice could far more easily pass for someone like Sollers speaking English than his could pass for mine. For one thing, he had much more Jersey in his speech than I'd ever had, though whether because it came naturally to him or because he mistakenly thought it would make the impersonation more convincing, I couldn't figure out. But then this was a more resonant voice than mine as well, richer and more stentorian by far. Maybe that was how he thought somebody who had published sixteen books would talk on the phone to an interviewer, while the fact is that if I talked like that I might not have had to write sixteen books. But the impulse to tell him this, strong as it was, I restrained; I was having too good a time to think of stifling either one of us.

"You are a Jew," I said, "who in the past has been criticized by Jewish groups for your 'self-hatred' and your 'anti-Semitism.' Would it be correct to assume—"

"Look," he said, abruptly breaking in, "I am a Jew, period. I would not have gone to Poland to meet with Walesa if I were anything else. I would not be here visiting Israel and attending the Demjanjuk trial if I were anything else. Please, I will be glad to tell you all you wish to know about resettlement. Otherwise I haven't time to waste on what has been said about me by stupid people."

"But," I persisted, "won't stupid people say that because of this resettlement idea you are an enemy of Israel and its mission? Won't this confirm—"

"I am Israel's enemy," he interrupted again, "if you wish to put it that sensationally, only because I am for the Jews and Israel is no longer in the Jewish interest. Israel has become the gravest threat to Jewish survival since the end of World War Two."

"Was Israel ever in the Jewish interest, in your opinion?"

"Of course. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, Israel was the Jewish

hospital in which Jews could begin to recover from the devastation of that horror, from a dehumanization so terrible that it would not have been at all surprising had the Jewish spirit, had the Jews themselves, succumbed entirely to that legacy of rage, humiliation and grief. But that is not what happened. Our recovery actually came to pass. In less than a century. Miraculous, more than miraculous—yet the recovery of the Jews is by now a fact, and the time has come to return to our real life and our real home, to our ancestral Jewish Europe.”

“Real home?” I replied, unable now to imagine how I ever could have considered not placing this call. “Some real home.”

“I am not making promiscuous conversation,” he snapped back at me sharply. “The great mass of Jews have been in Europe since the Middle Ages. Virtually everything we identify culturally as Jewish has its origins in the life we led for centuries among European Christians. The Jews of Islam have their own, very different destiny. I am not proposing that Israeli Jews whose origins are in Islamic countries return to Europe, since for them this would constitute not a homecoming but a radical uprooting.”

“What do you do then with them? Ship them back for the Arabs to treat as befits their status as Jews?”

“No. For those Jews, Israel must continue to be their country. Once the European Jews and their families have been resettled and the population has been halved, then the state can be reduced to its 1948 borders, the army can be demobilized, and those Jews who have lived in an Islamic cultural matrix for centuries can continue to do so, independently, autonomously, but in peace and harmony with their Arab neighbors. For these people to remain in this region is simply as it should be, their rightful habitat, while for the European Jews, Israel has been an exile and no more a sojourn, a temporary interlude in the European saga that it is time to resume.”

“Sir, what makes you think that the Jews would have any more success in Europe in the future than they had there in the past?”

“Do not confuse our long European history with the twelve years of Hitler’s reign. If Hitler had not existed, if his twelve years of terror were erased from our past, then it would seem to you no more

unthinkable that Jews should also be Europeans than that they should also be Americans. There might even seem to you a much more necessary and profound connection between the Jew and Budapest, the Jew and Prague, than the one between the Jew and Cincinnati and the Jew and Dallas.”

Could it be, I asked myself while he pedantically continued on in this vein, that the history he’s most intent on erasing happens to be his own? Is he mentally so damaged that he truly believes that my history is his; is he some psychotic, some amnesiac, who isn’t pretending at all? If every word he speaks he means, if the only person pretending here is me... But whether that made things better or worse I couldn’t begin to know. Nor, when next I found myself *arguing*, could I determine whether an outburst of sincerity from me made this conversation any more or less absurd, either. *hms-15*

“But Hitler *did* exist,” I heard Pierre Roget emotionally informing him. “Those twelve years *cannot* be expunged from history any more than they can be obliterated from memory, however mercifully forgetful one might prefer to be. The meaning of the destruction of European Jewry cannot be measured or interpreted by the brevity with which it was attained.”

“The meanings of the Holocaust,” he replied gravely, “are for us to determine, but one thing is sure—its meaning will be no less tragic than it is now if there is a second Holocaust and the offspring of the European Jews who evacuated Europe for a seemingly safer haven should meet collective annihilation in the Middle East. A second Holocaust is *not* going to occur on the continent of Europe, *because* it was the site of the first. But a second Holocaust could happen here all too easily, and, if the conflict between Arab and Jew escalates much longer, it will—*it must*. The destruction of Israel in a nuclear exchange is a possibility much less farfetched today than was the Holocaust itself fifty years ago.”

“The resettlement in Europe of more than a million Jews. The demobilization of the Israeli army. A return to the borders of 1948. It sounds to me,” I said, “that you are proposing the final solution of the Jewish problem for Yasir Arafat.”

“No. Arafat’s final solution is the same as Hitler’s: extermination. I

am proposing the alternative to extermination, a solution not to Arafat's Jewish problem but to ours, one comparable in scope and magnitude to the defunct solution called Zionism. But I do not wish to be misunderstood, in France or anywhere else in the world. I repeat: In the immediate postwar era, when for obvious reasons Europe was uninhabitable by Jews, Zionism was the single greatest force contributing to the recovery of Jewish hope and morale. But having succeeded in restoring the Jews to health, Zionism has tragically ruined its own health and must now accede to vigorous Diasporism."

"Will you define Diasporism for my readers, please?" I asked, meanwhile thinking, The starchy rhetoric, the professorial presentation, the historical perspective, the passionate commitment, the grave undertones . . . What sort of hoax *is* this hoax?

"Diasporism seeks to promote the dispersion of the Jews in the West, particularly the resettlement of Israeli Jews of European background in the European countries where there were sizable Jewish populations before World War II. Diasporism plans to rebuild *everything*, not in an alien and menacing Middle East but in those very lands where everything once flourished, while, at the same time, it seeks to avert the catastrophe of a second Holocaust brought about by the exhaustion of Zionism as a political and ideological force. Zionism undertook to restore Jewish life and the Hebrew language to a place where neither had existed with any real vitality for nearly two millennia. Diasporism's dream is more modest: a mere half-century is all that separates us from what Hitler destroyed. If Jewish resources could realize the seemingly fantastic goals of Zionism in even less than fifty years, now that Zionism is counterproductive and itself the foremost Jewish problem, I have no doubt that the resources of world Jewry can realize the goals of Diasporism in half, if not even one tenth, the time."

"You speak about resettling Jews in Poland, Romania, Germany? In Slovakia, the Ukraine, Yugoslavia, the Baltic states? And you realize, do you," I asked him, "how much hatred for Jews still exists in most of these countries?"

"Whatever hatred for Jews may be present in Europe—and I don't

minimize its persistence—there are ranged against this residual anti-Semitism powerful currents of enlightenment and morality that are sustained by the memory of the Holocaust, a horror that operates now as a bulwark *against* European anti-Semitism, however virulent. No such bulwark exists in Islam. Exterminating a Jewish nation would cause Islam to lose not a single night's sleep, except for the great night of celebration. I think you would agree that a Jew is safer today walking aimlessly around Berlin than going unarmed into the streets of Ramallah."

"What about the Jew walking around Tel Aviv?"

"In Damascus missiles armed with chemical warheads are aimed not at downtown Warsaw but directly at Dizengoff Street."

"So what Diasporism comes down to is fearful Jews in flight, terrified Jews once again running away."

"To flee an imminent cataclysm is 'running away' only from extinction. It is running *toward* life. Had thousands more of Germany's fearful Jews fled in the 1930s—"

"Thousands more would have fled," I said, "if there had been somewhere for them to flee to. You may recall that they were no more welcome elsewhere than they would be now if they were to turn up en masse at the Warsaw train station in flight from an Arab attack."

"You know what will happen in Warsaw, at the railway station, when the first trainload of Jews returns? There will be crowds to welcome them. People will be jubilant. People will be in tears. They will be shouting, 'Our Jews are back! Our Jews are back!' The spectacle will be transmitted by television throughout the world. And what a historic day for Europe, for Jewry, for all mankind when the cattle cars that transported Jews to death camps are transformed by the Diasporist movement into decent, comfortable railway carriages carrying Jews by the tens of thousands back to their native cities and towns. A historic day for human memory, for human justice, and for atonement too. In those train stations where the crowds gather to weep and sing and celebrate, where people fall to their knees in Christian prayer at the feet of their Jewish brethren, only there and then will the conscience cleansing of Europe begin." He paused the-

think about. My father and his ranting are all I can think about. I think about his tears every day. And that, to my surprise, is who I am."

"What do you do here, Zee?"

Smiling at me benignly, he answered, "Hate."

I didn't know what to reply and so said nothing.

"She had it right, the expert on my mentality. What she said is true. I am a stone-throwing Arab consumed by hate."

Again I offered no reply.

His next words came slowly, tinged with a tone of sweet contempt.

"What do you expect me to throw at the occupier? Roses?"

"No, no," he finally said when I continued to remain silent, "it's the children who do it, not the old men. Don't worry, Philip, I don't throw anything. The occupier has nothing to fear from a civilized fellow like me. Last month they took a hundred boys, the occupiers. Held them for eighteen days. Took them to a camp near Nablus. Boys eleven, twelve, thirteen. They came back brain-damaged. Can't hear. Lame. Very thin. No, not for me. I prefer to be fat. What do I do? I teach at a university when it is not shut down. I write for a newspaper when it is not shut down. They damage my brain in more subtle ways. I fight the occupier with words, as though words will ever stop them from stealing our land. I oppose our masters with ideas—that is my humiliation and shame. Clever thinking is the form my capitulation takes. Endless analyses of the situation—that is the grammar of my degradation. Alas, I am not a stone-throwing Arab—I am a word-throwing Arab, soft, sentimental, and ineffective, altogether like my father. I come to Jerusalem to stand and look at the house where I was a boy. I remember my father and how his life was destroyed. I look at the house and want to kill. Then I drive back to Ramallah to cry like him over all that is lost. And you—I know why you are here. I read it in the papers and I said to my wife, 'He hasn't changed.' I read aloud to my son just two nights ago your story 'The Conversion of the Jews.' I said, 'He wrote this when I knew him, he wrote this at the University of Chicago, he was twenty-one years old, and he hasn't changed at all.' I loved *Portnoy's Complaint*, Philip. It was great, great! I assign it to my students at the university. 'Here is a Jew,' I tell

Zee

them, 'who has never been afraid to speak out about Jews. An independent Jew and he has suffered for it too.' I try to convince them that there are Jews in the world who are not in any way like these Jews we have here. But to them the Israeli Jew is so evil they find it hard to believe. They look around and they think, What have they done? Name one single thing that Israeli society has done! And, Philip, my students are right—who *are* they? what *have* they done? The people are coarse and noisy and push you in the street. I've lived in Chicago, in New York, in Boston, I've lived in Paris, in London, and nowhere have I seen such people in the street. The *arrogance!* What have they created like you Jews out in the world? Absolutely nothing. Nothing but a state founded on force and the will to dominate. If you want to talk about culture, there is absolutely no comparison. Dismal painting and sculpture, no musical composition, and a very minor literature—that is what all their arrogance has produced. Compare this to American Jewish culture and it is pitiable, it is laughable. And yet they are not only arrogant about the Arab and *his* mentality, they are not only arrogant about the goyim and *their* mentality, they are arrogant about you and *your* mentality. These provincial nobodies look down on *you*. Can you imagine it? There is more Jewish spirit and Jewish laughter and Jewish intelligence on the Upper West Side of Manhattan than in this entire country—and as for Jewish *conscience*, as for a Jewish sense of *justice*, as for Jewish *heart* . . . there's more Jewish heart at the knish counter at Zabar's than in the whole of the Knesset! But *look* at you! You look great. Still so thin! You look like a Jewish baron, like a Rothschild from Paris."

"Do I really? No, no, still an insurance man's son from New Jersey."

"How is your father? How is your mother? How is your brother?" he asked me, excitedly.

The metamorphosis that, physically, had all but effaced the boy I'd known at Chicago was nothing, I had come to realize, beside an alteration, or deformation, far more astonishing and grave. The gush, the agitation, the volubility, the frenzy barely beneath the surface of every word he babbled, the nerve-racking sense he communicated of someone aroused and decomposing all at the same time, of someone

in a permanent state of imminent apoplexy . . . how could that be Zee, how could this overweight, overwrought cyclone of distress possibly have been the cultivated young gentleman we all so admired for his suavity and his slick composure? Back then I was still a crisscross of personalities, a grab bag of raw qualities, strands of street-corner boyishness still inextricably interwoven with the burgeoning high-mindedness, while George had seemed to me so successfully imperturbable, so knowing in the ways of life, so wholly and impressively *formed*. Well, to hear him tell it now, I'd had him wrong in every way: in reality he'd been living under an ice cap, a son trying in vain to stanch the bleeding of a wronged and ruined father, with his wonderful manners and his refined virility not only masking the pain of dispossession and exile but concealing even from himself how scorched he was by shame, perhaps even more so than the father.

Emotionally, his voice quaking, Zee said to me, "I dream of Chicago. I dream of those days when I was a student in Chicago."

"Yes, we were lively boys."

"I dream about Walter Schneeman's Red Door Book Shop. I dream about the University Tavern. I dream about the Tropical Hut. I dream about my carrel in the library. I dream about my courses with Preston Roberts. I dream about my Jewish friends, about you and Herb Haber and Barry Targan and Art Geffin—Jews who could not *conceive* of being Jews like this! There are weeks, Philip, when I dream of Chicago every single night!" Taking my hands tightly in his and shaking them as though they were a set of reins, he said suddenly, "What are you doing? What are you doing *right this minute?*"

I was, of course, on my way to visit Apter at his room, but I decided not to tell this to George Ziad in the state of agitation he was in. The previous evening I had spoken briefly on the phone with Apter, assuring him once again that the person identified as me at the Demjanjuk trial a week earlier had merely been someone who looked like me and that I had arrived in Jerusalem only the day before and would come to see him at his stall in the Old City the very next afternoon. And here, like virtually every other man I seemed to meet in Jerusalem, Apter had begun to cry. Because of the violence, he told me,

because of the Arabs throwing stones, he was too frightened to leave his room and I must come to see him there.

I did not want to tell George that I had a cousin here who was an emotionally impaired Holocaust survivor, because I did not want to hear him tell me how it was the Holocaust survivors, poisoned by their Holocaust pathology, against whose "will to dominate" the Palestinians had for over four decades now been struggling to survive.

"Zee, I have time for just a quick cup of coffee—then I've got to run."

"Coffee where? Here? In the city of my father? Here in the city of my father they'll sit down right next to us—they'll sit in my *lap*." He said this while pointing to two young men standing beside a fruit vendor's stall only some ten or fifteen feet away. They were wearing jeans and talking together, two short, strongly built fellows I would have assumed were market workers taking a few minutes off for a smoke had Zee not said, "Israeli security. Shin Bet. I can't even go into a public toilet in the city of my father that they don't come in next to me and start pissing on my shoes. They're everywhere. Interrogate me at the airport, search me at customs, intercept my mail, follow my car, tap my phone, bug my house—they even infiltrate my classroom." He began to laugh very loudly. "Last year, my best student, he wrote a wonderful Marxist analysis of *Moby Dick*—he was Shin Bet too. My only 'A.' Philip, I cannot sit and have coffee here. Triumphant Israel is a terrible, terrible place to have coffee. These victorious Jews are terrible people. I don't just mean the Kahanes and the Sharons. I mean them *all*, the Yehoshuas and the Ozes included. The good ones who are against the occupation of the West Bank but not against the occupation of my father's house, the 'beautiful Israelis' who want their Zionist thievery and their clean conscience too. They are no less superior than the rest of them—these beautiful Israelis are even *more* superior. What do they know about 'Jewish,' these 'healthy, confident' Jews who look down their noses at you Diaspora 'neurotics'? This is health? This is confidence? This is *arrogance*. Jews who make military brutes out of their sons—and how superior they feel to you Jews who know nothing of guns! Jews who use clubs to

break the hands of Arab children—and how superior they feel to you Jews incapable of such violence! Jews without tolerance, Jews for whom it is always black and white, who have all these crazy splinter parties, who have a party of *one man*, they are so intolerant one of the other—these are the Jews who are superior to the Jews in the Diaspora? Superior to people who know in their bones the meaning of give-and-take? Who live with success, like tolerant human beings, in the great world of crosscurrents and human differences? Here they are *authentic*, here, locked up in their Jewish ghetto and armed to the teeth? And you there, *you* are 'unauthentic,' living freely in contact with all of mankind? The *arrogance*, Philip, it is *insufferable*! What they teach their children in the schools is to look with disgust on the Diaspora Jew, to see the English-speaking Jew and the Spanish-speaking Jew and the Russian-speaking Jew as a freak, as a worm, as a terrified neurotic. As if this Jew who now speaks Hebrew isn't just *another kind of Jew*—as if speaking Hebrew is the culmination of human achievement! I'm here, they think, and I speak Hebrew, this is my language and my home, and I don't have to go around thinking all the time, 'I'm a Jew but what is a Jew?' I don't have to be this kind of self-questioning, self-hating, alienated, frightened neurotic. And what those so-called neurotics have given to the world in the way of brain-power and art and science and all the skills and ideals of civilization, to this they are oblivious. But then to the entire *world* they are oblivious. For the entire world they have one word: goy! 'I live here and I speak Hebrew and all I know and see are other Jews like me and isn't that wonderful!' Oh, what an impoverished Jew this arrogant Israeli is! Yes, they are the authentic ones, the Yehoshuas and the Ozes, and tell me, I ask them, what are Saul Alinsky and David Riesman and Meyer Schapiro and Leonard Bernstein and Bella Abzug and Paul Goodman and Allen Ginsberg, and on and on and on and *on*? Who do they think they *are*, these provincial nobodies! Jailers! This is their great Jewish achievement—to make Jews into jailers and jet-bomber pilots! And just suppose they were to succeed, suppose they were to win and have their way and every Arab in Nablus and every Arab in Hebron and every Arab in the Galilee and in Gaza, suppose

every Arab in the world, were to disappear courtesy of the Jewish nuclear bomb, what would they have here fifty years from now? A noisy little state of no importance whatsoever. That's what the persecution and the destruction of the Palestinians will have been for—the creation of a Jewish Belgium, without even a Brussels to show for it. That's what these 'authentic' Jews will have contributed to civilization—a country lacking every quality that gave the Jews their great distinction! They may be able to instill in other Arabs who live under their evil occupation fear and respect for their 'superiority,' but I grew up with *you* people, I was educated with *you* people, *by* you people, I lived with *real* Jews, at Harvard, at Chicago, with *truly* superior people, whom I admired, whom I loved, to whom I did *indeed* feel inferior and *rightly* so—the vitality in them, the irony in them, the human sympathy, the human *tolerance*, the goodness of heart that was simply *instinctive* in them, people with the Jewish sense of survival that was all human, elastic, adaptable, humorous, creative, and all this they have replaced here with a stick! The Golden *Calf* was more Jewish than Ariel Sharon, God of Samaria and Judea and the Holy Gaza Strip! The worst of the ghetto Jew combined with the worst of the bellicose, belligerent goy, and that is what these people call 'authentic'! Jews have a reputation for being intelligent, and they *are* intelligent. The only place I have ever *been* where all the Jews are stupid is Israel. I spit on them! I *spit* on them!" And this my friend Zee proceeded to do, spat on the wet, gritty marketplace pavement while looking defiantly at the two toughs in jeans he'd identified as Israeli security, neither of whom happened to be looking our way or, seemingly, to be concerned with anything other than their own conversation.

Why did I drive with him to Ramallah that afternoon instead of keeping my date with Apter? Because he told me so many times that I had to? Had to see with my own eyes the occupier's mockery of justice; had to observe with my own eyes the legal system behind which the occupier attempted to conceal his oppressive colonizing; had to post-

security in "White Christmas" than in the Israeli nuclear reactor. I told them that if the Israelis ever reached a point where they believed their survival depended not merely on breaking hands but on dropping a nuclear bomb, that would be the end of Judaism, even if the state of Israel should survive. "Jews as Jews will simply disappear. A generation after Jews use nuclear weapons to save themselves from their enemies, there will no longer be people to identify themselves as Jews. The Israelis will have saved their state by destroying their people. They will never survive morally after that; and if they don't, why survive as Jews at all? They barely have the wherewithal to survive morally now. To put all these Jews in this tiny place, surrounded on all sides by tremendous hostility—how *can* you survive morally? Better to be marginal neurotics, anxious assimilationists, and everything else that the Zionists despise, better to *lose* the state than to lose your moral being by unleashing a nuclear war. Better Irving Berlin than Ariel Sharon. Better Irving Berlin than the Wailing Wall. Better Irving Berlin than Holy Jerusalem! What does owning *Jerusalem*, of all places, have to do with being Jews in 1988? Jerusalem is by now the *worst* thing that could possibly have happened to us. *Last* year in Jerusalem! Next year in Warsaw! Next year in Bucharest! Next year in Vilna and Cracow! Look, I know people call Diasporism a revolutionary idea, but it's *not* a revolution that I'm proposing, it's a *retroversion*, a turning back, the very thing Zionism itself once was. You go back to the crossing point and cross back *the other way*. Zionism went back too far, that's what went wrong with Zionism. Zionism went back to the crossing point of the dispersion—Diasporism goes back to the crossing point of *Zionism*."

My sympathies were entirely with George's wife. I didn't know which was more insufferable to her, the fervor with which I presented my Diasporist blah-blah or the thoughtfulness with which George sat there taking it in. Her husband had finally stopped talking—only to listen to this! Either to warm herself or to contain herself she'd enwrapped herself in her own arms and, like a woman on the brink of keening, she began almost imperceptibly rocking and swaying to and fro. And the message in those eyes of hers couldn't have

to live in an Arab sea. Jews accepted this fate rather than have nothing and no fate. Jews accepted partition and the Arabs did not. If they'd said yes, my father reminds me, they would be celebrating forty years of statehood too. But every political decision with which they have been confronted, invariably they have made the wrong choice. *I know all this*. Nine tenths of their misery they owe to the idiocy of their own political leaders. *I know that*. But still I look at my own government and I want to vomit. Would you write a recommendation for me to NYU?"

A big soldier armed with a pistol, a two-hundred-pound leader of men whose face was darkly stubbled with several days' whiskers and whose combat uniform foully reeked of sweat, and yet, the more he recounted of his unhappiness with his father and his father's with him, the younger and more defenseless he had seemed to me. And now this request, uttered almost in the voice of a child. "So—" I laughed—"that's why you saved my life out there. That's why you didn't let them break my hands—so I could write your recommendation."

"No, no, *no*," he quickly replied, a humorless boy distressed by my laughter and even more grave now than he'd been before, "no—no one would have hurt you. Yes, it's there, of course it's there, I'm not saying it's not there—some of the boys *are* brutal. Most because they are frightened, some because they know the others are watching and they don't want to be cowards, and some because they think, 'Better them than us, better him than me.' But no, I assure you—you were never in real danger."

"It's you who's in real danger."

"Of falling apart? You can tell that? You can see that?"

"You know what I see?" I said. "I see that you are a Diasporist and you don't even know it. You don't even know what a Diasporist is. You don't know what your choices really are."

"A Diasporist? A Jew who lives in the Diaspora."

"No, no. More than that. Much more. It is a Jew for whom *authenticity* as a Jew means living in the Diaspora, for whom the Diaspora is the normal condition and Zionism is the abnormality—a Diasporist is

a Jew who believes that the only Jews who matter are the Jews of the Diaspora, that the only Jews who will survive are the Jews of the Diaspora, that the only Jews who *are* Jews are the Jews of the Diaspora—"

It would have been hard to say where I found the energy after what I'd been through in just forty-eight hours, but suddenly here in Jerusalem something was running away with me again and there seemed to be nothing I had more strength for than this playing-at-Pipik. That lubricious sensation that is fluency took over, my eloquence grew, and on I went calling for the de-Israelization of the Jews, on and on once again, obeying an intoxicating urge that did not leave me feeling quite so sure of myself as I may have sounded to poor Gal, torn in two as he was by the rebellious and delinquent feelings of a loyal, loving son.