

**The Schlemiel and Anomie: The Fool in Society**

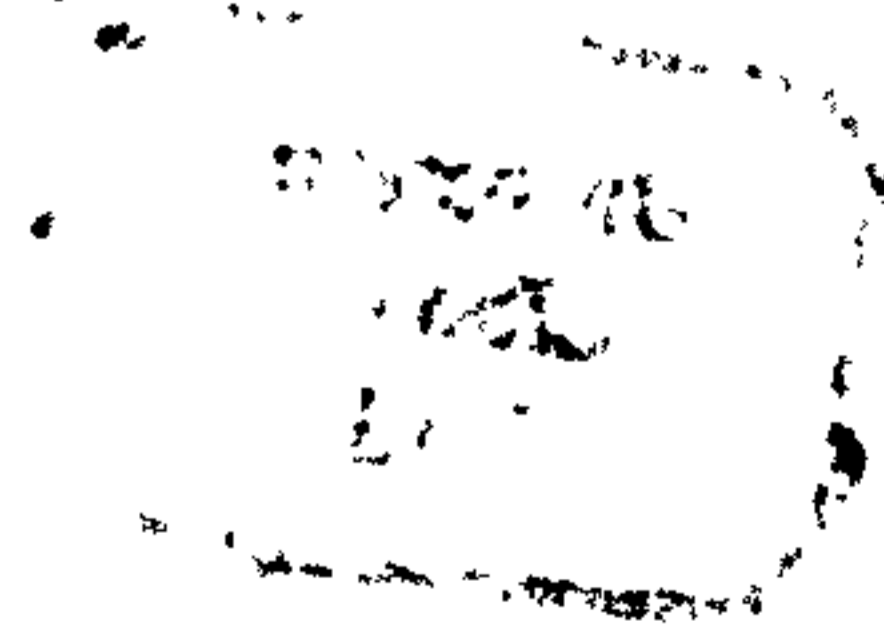
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## Abstract

This thesis examines the character of the schlemiel in comparative Jewish and Gentile American literature and cinema. It is the central claim that whilst the schlemiel is a strong Jewish character type this figure also appears in the texts of other socio-cultural groupings to an ever increasingly degree. With this in mind the character is examined in relation to the contemporary Western world, or Postmodern society.

To achieve this aim the study is divided into three sections. The first deals with traditional perspectives on the schlemiel, examining prior definitions and gives a brief historically linear overview. Key examples are given to provide 'case studies' in both literature and film. The examples chosen represent those characters considered to be archetypes; specifically Hyman Kaplan and the characters created by Woody Allen. Section Two examines processes of characterisation in literature and film to investigate whether there is anything at the most basic level of the text which identifies the traits and attributes of a schlemiel or from where an audience may derive information. This section examines a range of Jewish and non-Jewish texts via Structuralist and Narratological analysis. Section Three looks at the contemporary social function of the schlemiel, even if it is possible to clearly identify what schlemiels are their socio-cultural function remains important. The character is placed in a 'postmodern' context. The final chapter develops from this into looking at the function of the schlemiel as a comic character and theories of comedy.

Whilst the theoretical approaches utilised are there to test the character it is inevitable that the schlemiel will test the theories. It is the irrational and illogical nature of the schlemiel that dictates that they will have problems fitting into the rigid patterns created by any neo-Structuralist approach such as Narratology. The character also tests rationalist responses to the 'Postmodern condition' and this in turn provides a critique of the Aristotelian principles of Section Two and the socio-temporal definitions of Section One. This work attempts to provide a re-evaluation of a historically entrenched character for the late twentieth century and to provide a critique of theories, which purport to provide universal answers.

## Acknowledgements

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*This work is dedicated to the memory of Charles Percy.*

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The Schlemiel and Anomie: The Fool in Society

**Introduction:**

**The Schlemiel and Anomie: The Fool in Society - An Irrational Rationale**

The schlemiel is not a Jewish character, and yet the schlemiel is the most archetypically Jewish character of all. This paradoxical statement will form the basis of this study. The central claim is that the schlemiel exists in reaction to certain socio-cultural conditions, mainly different types of oppression. What cannot be ignored is that the word 'schlemiel' itself is a derivative of Yiddish and as such has a clear link to specific Jewish cultures. However, there is evidence of a number of schlemiels, or schlemiel-like characters, in a variety of other cultures around the world throughout history, albeit to varying degrees at different periods. Whilst this is undoubtedly the case, an Eastern European Jewish tradition (continuing in America) has had the most reverence for this character type. That is until the contemporary, where schlemiel-like characters appear in a range of different narratives in an increasingly homogenised world. This suggests that there was something specific about the Jewish experience, which differed (largely in the period of modernity) from the rest of Western Gentile society. Whilst this must be the focus of a significant proportion of this work, it is also important to consider other factors relating to the character as a textual entity. Historically literature has been the primary medium in which these characters have appeared. This must be the initial point of connection with the character. Both film and television are important in the way they disseminate messages and meaning to a worldwide audience. It would be impractical to attempt to investigate both mediums, and film has a historical dimension which television lacks. Another particular failing of television is that it fails to include much of the early part of this century and the mass influx of immigrants into the United States. The distinctions between literature and film are vitally important in considering the reception of the character. The two mediums seemingly have fundamentally different ways of presenting characters to an audience and it is important to consider whether these are so different in terms of characterisation and audience reception of character. This in some way debates whether the characters themselves are not just limited to one textual form or to one genre.

Whilst it is in some ways pedantic to detail the problems of semantics it would be an ill conceived study that failed to take into account the prior work that has been conducted on the schlemiel. It is essential for the first section of the thesis to identify key debates and to give some grounding in what the term means via the analysis of textual examples. Whilst this may later prove to be more problematic than at first thought, it is essential groundwork and is indicative of the shift from the highly structured to the (theoretical) collapse of structures. The schlemiel as a character in itself becomes a test case for the theoretical approaches that will be used to consider it. This study, then, has a twofold approach, to examine the character of the schlemiel and to use this character as a case study to examine the changes in late twentieth century thinking. Without adopting this approach it would be far too easy to take the theory for granted and apply it without question. If any conclusions can be drawn, the approaches utilised must be as carefully scrutinised as the character in question. It is in the first instance that purely Jewish examples will be used, these being archetypal examples of schlemiel literature and film. This will provide more of an exemplary and introductory initial chapter from which to base later theoretical and textual analysis.

It would be impossible to attempt any kind of deeper analysis of character as an ontological entity without first analysing the nature of characterisation in theoretical terms. This will constitute the second section of the study. Narratological theory in essence seeks universality in all things in addition to looking for the specific in individual texts. It is with this in mind that it is important to address both Jewish and Gentile texts to examine whether there is any distinction or correlation between the two at the level of the text. It would be negative in the extreme to suggest that there is nothing specific about the Jewish manifestation of this kind of fool and it would be impossible to deny the tradition that produced them; it is too strong. Where points of correlation are to be examined, it is in characterisation at a diegetic level and in a related social function. Whilst it is crucial to never lose sight of characterisation and the characterisation of the schlemiel more specifically, Narratology itself dictates that there are inter-relationships with other facets of narrative. To attempt to examine the entirety of Structuralist discourse would

dictate a thesis alone. What is crucial to examine is the characterisation that occurs either for or by an audience. The Structuralist approach is concerned with text and whilst it provides a useful vocabulary and detailed analysis of literary and filmic texts it does not allow for a consideration of the function of textual characters or this character in particular. This correlates with the move into more abstract and philosophical 'Poststructural' approaches to analysis. These approaches were not always intended for application but overall the Poststructural gives an insight into the limitations of the structural and has to become an implicit part of any analytical debate on the value of utilising Structuralist theory.

The move from the structural to the Poststructural would prove very little about a deeper function of character whilst maintaining a focus on the text alone. If section one analyses the standard viewpoints on the history of character and section two looks at the detail of the textual existence of the character then it falls to section three to analyse the social function of the character. They are rounded characters, they appear in a range of cultural forms, but why do they have continued appeal and increasing appeal to an audience? The move, then, is one away from the implicit historicism of section one to take on board Foucault's notion of an 'archaeology of knowledge' and specific epistemes rather than historical linearity. To examine the history of ideas and how this has influenced the development of the character across a range of cultures may reveal a great deal about the societies that have produced this character. The opening statement of this introduction indicates that there is a loss of this character from the texts of the ideologically and physically dominant through the period of modernity and this thesis must in part attempt to assess why that should be the case.

What is missing from all the approaches identified is a sense of humour; they really do not attempt to deal with the notion of the comic. The schlemiel is undoubtedly a comic character, whether this makes <sup>him or her</sup> positive or negative is largely irrelevant at this introductory point, but is of more importance later. It is of prime concern that the notion of the comic is conspicuous by its absence. The comic is founded on irrationality and (perhaps more fundamentally) is



rejected from any discourse that grounds itself in classical theoretical approaches. This applies as much to the Narratology of section two as it does to the theoretical approaches of section three. Whilst the notion of the comic must become part of an essential critique of the theory used, it can only be detailed once that theory has been identified and considered. The concern for the final chapter is not why the schlemiel is a comic character or what essentially makes something comic, but rather why a resurgence of the comic for the contemporary. The question becomes more particularly, why this form of comic character? There are potential reasons in the nature of the comic that need to be addressed to answer this question. To attempt to define what constitutes comedy would be to take to task some of the major thinkers of the last hundred years; it would be trying to rationalise what is essentially irrational. This is perhaps the most important point.

The condition of the contemporary is one of uncertainty and those who maintain any kind of faith in the metanarratives of the past are seen as naive fools. The notion of Postmodernity is used very hesitantly here and needs much more examination and consideration in the body of this text before it can be used adequately. It is taken as being an episteme that begins to impact on the Western world from the mid twentieth century, but the features that apply to society as a whole may have some correlation with the strictures imposed on Jewish societies throughout history. Schlemiels, as fools, do not question certainties, but nor do they deal with the certainties that others identify. This is what sets them apart from the rest of a 'faith ridden' society. They move by their own structures of logic, faith, and belief and it is this that makes them the most applicable character for the contemporary. The examination of whether the term 'fool' can accurately be applied to the schlemiel is of prime concern. Perhaps the biggest question to be asked is whether society has to re-examine its definition of 'fool' or whether it should re-evaluate the role of the intellectual. The schlemiel has always had a place of almost reverence within Jewish narratives; what must be considered is whether the traditional Gentile perspective on the hero has to give way to incorporate the fool as well. Is the fool becoming increasingly relevant and increasingly important to fictions and society?

What all this conjecture leads to is a bigger and more fundamental question - why devote a study to the schlemiel? The short answer is empathy. It is in the revelation that others find these characters appealing or even if they dislike the character, it is often because they feel uncomfortable recognising themselves or their predicaments in these characters. What makes schlemiels of significance is that they escape the entrapment that faces the rest of Western society. It is this 'success through failure' that is achievable only in a diegetic world, but for its audience is desired outside it. They do not just bring light relief - they bring hope.

*Throughout this study, American spellings have only been retained in quotations.*

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Section One:

Reviewing the Schlemiel

The Schlemiel and Anomie: The Fool in Society

**Chapter One:**

**Who Are You Calling Schlemiel?**

**Defining the Term and the Importance of Yiddish.**

Before addressing the nature of the schlemiel in terms of specific traits and attributes, it is essential to examine the socio-historic development of the character. This chapter is intended to provide a framework to supply essential background information from which to develop key analytical arguments in later chapters. The fundamental link between a wider conception and function of the character in relation to cultural identity requires a more detailed analysis of the Jewish socio-cultural condition. Potential comparisons can only then be made between this character and the broader 'human condition' in Western society during the late twentieth century and into the new millennium. The schlemiel is one character type amongst many and it is vital to distinguish between these variants to identify what the schlemiel is and what the schlemiel is not. The many character types on offer to the reader of Jewish texts seemingly overlap in terms of their traits and attributes. Identifying characteristics that are exclusive to the schlemiel means highlighting the traits and attributes of others to provide point of contrast and comparison.

What is most striking with the use of a term such as 'schlemiel' is the use of Yiddish, not only as being the source from which the term is derived but also in terms of defining reception of the character in relation to this socio-historical origin. The question has to be asked as to whether this link to Jewish culture is in perceived terms on the part of the audience via inferred information or in actual and quantifiable terms. This then raises questions of who perceives and for what purpose. It certainly appears that the Yiddish language and therefore Jewish culture has evolved a character that has subsequently been reduced to a single word which needs no further definition; however in many ways this is the nature of Yiddish. It is essentially a conversational, oral dialect that developed without rigid guidelines and is not subject to linguistic or social restrictions when written as other languages were and still are.<sup>1</sup> When Yiddish became a written language in terms of fiction, it had already developed in its own right but it had also started to become integrated with other languages. The status of Yiddish once the main Jewish centre became America (and in

particular New York) is something that needs to be highlighted along with the difficult and contentious debates surrounding the concept of 'assimilation'. This is indicated by the problems of reaching a consensus on the spelling of Yiddish terms in English. In many ways, it is based purely around phonetics, which relates directly to its oral origins. A single word used often summarises a variety of traits and attributes that can be ascribed to a character, which subsequently need no further explanation. It is the nature of an oral culture where folklore is based around the verbal retelling of stories that these terms should emerge to provide a quick guide and reference to character types. The fact remains that now we live in a world where these communities have all but gone and where new mediums have taken the place of verbal story telling in its traditional form. These mediums now take narratives to a significantly wider audience numerically and subsequently culturally. Certainly, in day-to-day conversation, it seems that the Yiddish word summarises a great deal, but it is then placed in context and it is this which potentially limits the variety of interpretations that can be given and so the number of traits that will be ascribed to a schlemiel-keit character.<sup>2</sup> In looking at fictions across mediums it is clear that there are a multiple of other potential factors peculiar to each specific medium that place the term in context.

To attempt to label a character 'schlemiel' with no inference from the character or characters as to the awarding of this status is where the essential problem lies. It seems contradictory that the centuries that have led to the reduction of the multiple to this single term now requires the reverse; to explain the seemingly simple requires a great deal of explanation. It is also impossible to separate the complex issues of Jewish identity from Europe via the move to America from any consideration of the schlemiel. Whilst a brief historical overview of the period leading up to the first wave of immigration in to the United States is important to note, it is post nineteen hundred America that must be the focus; examining how one culture does or does not integrate with

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<sup>1</sup> Although attempts have been made, ironically most of them for students of Yiddish and/or linguistics. For more detail see Joshua A. Fishman - Readings in the Sociology of Jewish Languages (1985) - Leiden, E.J. Brill – p.198

<sup>2</sup> The term 'schlemiel-keit' is Yiddish for 'like a fool' and is used in keeping with the specifics of and implications of the Yiddish term, schlemiel.

another. This examination of integration, or assimilation, or acculturation, is of prime concern in socio-economic terms.<sup>3</sup> It is also important to recognise the importance of Yiddish and the development of a Shtetl culture as it relates to this language.<sup>4</sup> A text which relates this process is Leo Rosten's [pseudonym Leonard Q. Ross] series of H\*Y\*M\*A\*N\*K\*A\*P\*L\*A\*N stories written for the 'New Yorker' from 1936 onwards. The series of Warner Brothers silent feature films featuring 'the Cohens' provides additional primary information about the representation of different ethnic groupings in America during the 1920s and 1930s and reveals (often negative) attitudes beyond the confines of these ostensibly comic tales.

It is essential to integrate the historical with the contemporary to allow the contrasts to emerge. The films and stand-up comedy routines of Woody Allen provide perhaps the most comprehensive example of the schlemiel for analysis; he maintains a strong link to a traditional conception of the schlemiel whilst bringing the character in to a contemporary setting. Allen is perceived to be the most archetypically and enduringly schlemiel-keit character across a range of fictions and perhaps more importantly in contemporary society. He comments on the relatively recent past of Jewish immigrants with films such as Annie Hall and Radio Days. Because Allen has been labelled as a schlemiel by so many, he provides a pivotal point around which to debate definitions. Many of the characteristics and traits that the textual Allen enjoys are also those shared by his assumed film 'idols' and influences many of which are clearly not Jewish, people such as Bob Hope and Charlie Chaplin.<sup>5</sup> The film Zelig provides the most interesting commentary on attitudes to the Immigrant in America from the perspective of late twentieth century America looking back, and this text will

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<sup>3</sup> These terms are difficult and contentious and need to be examined in more detail later in respect of the development and potential integration of fictions in this chapter and later in respect of text and identity.

<sup>4</sup> The Yiddish term *Shtetl* refers to the small enclosed villages in Eastern Europe prior to the general move to America, although the term has come to be metaphorical for enclosed Jewish societies within other locations. For more specific detail see Irving Howe - The Immigrant Jews of New York: 1881 to the present (1976) - London, Routledge and Kegan Paul - 1976 - pp.7-14 and Sol Gittleman - From Shtetl to Suburbia (1978) - Boston, Beacon Press - 1978.

<sup>5</sup> Although it must be noted that Chaplin's religious and cultural origins have been the source of much speculation and this is crucial in relation to the character of the 'little tramp' who embodies much of the immigrant experience in his role as outsider and it follows that an audience may want Chaplin the actor to fit this character type as accurately as possible.

become more important in relation to notions of identity in later sections.<sup>6</sup> To offer a literary counterpart, Philip Roth's Portnoy's Complaint clearly identifies certain issues, which are crucial to any examination of either the schlemiel or the Jewish condition in the second half of the twentieth century and beyond.

This analysis has to come before any consideration of the potential function this character plays in society can begin. Defining the character, and giving a broad analytical framework initially in respect of purely Jewish characters, allows the more extensive analysis of cross-cultural schlemiels later and in comparative terms. Only after a considered analysis of the potential reception of this character in the broad area of narrative analysis has been undertaken can the relationship between the schlemiel (as a comic figure) and society be considered. It is impossible to divorce the schlemiel from a consideration of comedy and it is this convergence with comedy (where the schlemiel breaks out into society in a wider cross-cultural dimension) is typified by the mythical notion of the 'melting pot'.

The nature of Yiddish is such that not only is it impossible to give one clear and simple definition of all the essential traits, but that any definition must also take into account a variety of other character types. In relation to both academic and popular study, terms such as *schlemiel*, *schmuck*, *nebech*, *shmo* and *yekl*, amongst many others, are used without any attempt to define in clear terms. The reasons for this are essentially two-fold; in an oral culture such as that developed in the Jewish *Shtetls* in Europe and during the first wave of immigration into America the terms needed no further explanation. They were part of an everyday language for a specific community and were accepted as such. The subsequent need to give detailed explanation of these terms into English would indicate that they are signifiers specific to one culture and one culture

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<sup>6</sup> The film concerns itself is shot in a pseudo-documentary style and is concerned with a second generation immigrant, Leonard Zelig, who has the ability to transform his physical appearance to that of the people around him to 'fit-in'. See Neil Sinyard - The Films of Woody Allen (1987) - London, Magna Books - 1988 - pp.68-71 and Maurice Yacowar - Loser Take All: The Comic Art of Woody Allen (1979) - Oxford, Roundhouse - 1991 - pp.237-240. Whilst this might be a crucial text for close analysis many of Allen's other films debate the existence of the Jew in America and the nature of the schlemiel.



alone. This is the first point at which generalisations are made about these characters being specific to Jewish culture and not existing in any other. What is of primary concern is that very point, just because 'short-hand' signifiers exist in one language it does not necessarily follow that the characters to which they refer do not exist in others. The fact is that even in Yiddish and in other Jewish languages these signifiers do not have a conclusive and single signified. Even within Jewish culture, the characters are subject to flux and change across time. Also of vital concern is the way that these terms, once peculiar to Yiddish, have now found their way into the English language. This is due to the two main factors of the economic and the cultural.

With Yiddish literature translated into English (amongst other languages) and the advent and subsequent dominance of new mediums (radio, film and later television) on popular culture for the masses, Jewish performers had to use English to reach a wide audience. The use of the English language inevitably imparted their experience to a larger proportion of the population. When Charlie Chaplin produced The Immigrant in 1917, he certainly drew attention to the experience but this did not specifically relate to the Jewish experience, only the experience of one 'clown'.<sup>7</sup> This film would have been the only point of reference about the experience for the majority and would have reached many more people than the Yiddish writings of (for example) Sholom Alecheim or Isaac Bashevis Singer. By using a medium and form designed for entertainment, this experience was covertly imparted to people who may not have been interested in something that was seemingly so distant from their own lives and yet related the initial encounter with America that was the experience of many. A text such as The Education of H\*Y\*M\*A\*N\*K\*A\*P\*L\*A\*N detailed this experience in a popular journal and whilst this did not reach the kind of audience that a feature film could, it used humour to represent a real experience, albeit via fictional characters. Jewish writers, producers, artists and performers were also engaged in the inevitable act of integrating aspects of their own lives and language into their

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<sup>7</sup> The image of the Immigrants entering a new 'promised land' is echoed in Au Revoir Les Enfants, dir: Louis Malle, France, 1987, where the image of the dispossessed being roped together in their plight is reaffirmed. The notion of an experience shared across time and cultures is encapsulated by Chaplin and resonates throughout the twentieth century until it reaches Malle and a whole new audience.

performance. This had the effect of broadening the reception and subsequent usage of those terms and concepts. This would seem to be the apparent reason for the development of Yiddish and is perhaps a strong contributing factor in the spread and integration of Yiddish with other languages. It would seemingly explain the spread of Yiddish terms from America to Britain, via the Hollywood product. Morris Kertzer highlights the importance of this in the introduction to his text, which deals with the unanswerable question, What is a Jew? He says of both Jews and Gentiles alike:

‘There are ... many learned volumes dealing with Jewish history, law, custom and belief. But most of these are, because of their very depth of scholarship, somewhat forbidding ... [people turn] to the mass media: newspapers, magazines, radio, television, motion pictures.’<sup>8</sup>

This is certainly true of a religion which exists with many variations world-wide; the title or prefix ‘Jewish’ refers to a great quantity of differing peoples with differing beliefs and to a great many cultures which become subsumed under this one generalised term.<sup>9</sup> The products of one cultural centre (which still dominates the world in terms of both literary and filmic production) cannot be discounted. The effect these products have had and continue to exert on Jews and Gentiles alike is of undoubted importance. To take a specific example, Britain certainly had a much smaller Jewish community, and the force of immigration into America was both more concentrated in particular cities and more widespread in cities throughout the whole of the country. This is particularly the case with the Northern states, most specifically New York with Ellis Island as the main centre of immigration, but with a spread across the major northern states.

There was an immediate meeting of cultures and languages. The specific characters that the Yiddish terms refer to already existed, and ‘fashionable’ Hollywood terms provided a new way of

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<sup>8</sup> Rabbi Morris N. Kertzer - What is a Jew? (4th ed.) (1958) - New York, Collier Books - 1978 - p.xv (introduction)

<sup>9</sup> This is not just true of Jewish groups but of all religions.

expressing them. They had certainly provided a new vocabulary of obscenities that were uncensored, specifically with terms such as *yenta* and *schmuck*.<sup>10</sup> The extension of this line of enquiry is that post nineteen hundred and after technological developments in the field of entertainment, characters such as the schlemiel became stronger and developed more fully, initially in America and then across the rest of the Western world. Characters that were once the exclusive property of Jewish societies were now becoming dominant in other socio-cultural groupings. The meeting of Yiddish and English is something that is identified in Leo Rosten's The Joys of Yiddish and it is both ironic and fitting that this 'light-hearted' text provides the most accessible 'dictionary' and guide to the Yiddish language. Although Rosten denies that this is the purpose of the book:

·What This Book is Not.

This is not a book about Yiddish. It is not a dictionary of Yiddish. It is not a guide to Yiddish. It is not written for experts in, or students of, Yiddish.

What This Book Is.

This is a book about language - more particularly, the English language.<sup>11</sup>

Despite Rosten's disclaimer, the book's usefulness for the gentile who has no background in Yiddish is immense. What concerns him at one level is the way that Yiddish has become integrated with English, what Rosten terms 'Yinglish'. However, what is also interesting is the fact that it is also essential for the Jewish reader who may have an understanding of the cultural significance of Yiddish and yet may have no background in the language him or herself. What this text highlights is the problem of attempting to define these specific terms in English. What is not highlighted in the preface or introduction is the fact that these Yiddish terms may now be used in English because they provide the best summary of certain character types or emotions. They compress and describe with emotion in a way that English cannot, but it is this that makes them

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<sup>10</sup> It is certainly the case that with the advent of the 'talkies' came a plethora of new texts from the previously unknown continent of America and connected individual states and even smaller areas in America itself:

<sup>11</sup> Leo Rosten - The Joys of Yiddish (1968) - London, Penguin - 1970 - Preface, vx.

even more difficult to define. Yiddish refers not just to specific Jewish character types, but character types that can only be defined through the Yiddish language.

The nature of Yiddish is such that it developed primarily as an oral language devoted to small isolated groups as opposed to a written language used for wide consumption and as such was in a constant state of flux and change. The appearance of written Yiddish at the turn of the century with fiction was not the initial function or reason for the development of the language itself. The function it served was essentially to maintain an isolated and protected community where the Jewish population did not initially speak the language of a new culture:

Hebrew, the language of prayer and the Bible, is spoken only by Israelis and a handful of scholars ... a generation ago the vast majority of Jews in the Western world could read and write Yiddish.<sup>12</sup>

Yiddish was not the only Jewish language in existence; specific dialects developed depending on the region and country involved. Judezmo, as the dialect of Spanish Jews, was perhaps the most specific in terms of the population using it, but none were as widely used as Yiddish. It is important to note in each case that the use, intent and development of each language was similar to the development of Yiddish. Yiddish represents the dominant language that was transferred to America with the specific ethnic groupings of immigrants in question. Yiddish was of more widespread usage in Europe because it appeared where Jewish settlements were more concentrated. These became the people who moved to America in large numbers. With growing anti-Semitism in Europe leading to the horrific pogrom in the middle of the twentieth century, America became the world centre of Judaism, certainly up to the birth of the state of Israel. The distinction must be made between the European Jews who were the primary immigrants into the United States and the Jews of Israel.<sup>13</sup> This difference is not just geographic but also cultural and

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<sup>12</sup> See Kertzer - Op.Cit. - 1978 - p.117 and Howe - Op.Cit. - 1976 - pp.421-462 & pp.522-555

<sup>13</sup> For further information see Howe - Ibid. - pp.627-629

the relationship between location and identity is crucial to this debate. The dominance of Yiddish was in part due to a perception of it as the only Jewish language beyond Hebrew.<sup>14</sup> What this highlights is the nomadic nature of Jewish society throughout history, not in terms of the mythical quest for the Promised Land but because of a swelling tide of anti-Semitism that existed elsewhere in the world.<sup>15</sup> The promise that lay with America was one of stability and the provision of a place where a specific Jewish identity could be allowed to develop alongside all others in the 'melting-pot':

Jews ranked second ... among the new arrivals. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries over 2 million of them left eastern Europe, more than 70 percent of these coming from Russia. Over 90 percent of the Jews headed for the United States, while the minority removed themselves to cities in central and western Europe, Canada, and Latin America. If others were victimized by a changing agricultural economy, the Jews were aliens in the land of their birth.<sup>16</sup>

This highlights the attempt to move from oppression but does not deal with the fact that there was already a Jewish community in America and the process of immigration started much earlier. This period at the turn of the century represented the most concentrated influx of new immigrants in to developing urban areas. In an earlier time immigrants were, perhaps, more readily accepted. As Gutt man comments of the early nineteenth century:

Enthusiasm for American conditions led from political to religious acculturation, to a reformed Judaism compatible with the doctrines of the Enlightenment.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For a more detailed examination of the development of the Jewish languages see Joshua A. Fishman (ed.) - Readings in the Sociology of Jewish Languages (1985) - Leiden, E.J. Brill - 1985

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed account of the move to America see Howe - Op.Cit. - 1976 - pp.24-28 & pp.34-57.

<sup>16</sup> L. Dinnerstein & D.M. Reimers - Ethnic Americans : A History of Immigration and Assimilation (1975) - New York, New York University Press - 1977 - p.37

<sup>17</sup> Allen Gutt man - The Jewish Writer in America : Assimilation and the Crisis of Identity (1971) - New York, Oxford University Press - 1971 - p.18. For a more detailed analysis of this whole period see Chapter Two, 'The Promised Land', pp.16-92

This concept of acculturation is crucial to the debate surrounding assimilation. There is an apparent dichotomy between the resident Jews and the new immigrants. Although they both technically were bound by their religion, it is clear that they came from completely different cultures. It is restricting to use the term 'assimilation' and the processes involved within it as actual events, specific to immigrants. Assimilation relates not purely to immigrant Jews but to all new arrivals in a country with a differing culture; what seems more apparent and prevalent diachronically throughout 'immigrant literature' is a process of 'acculturation':

The key terms 'assimilation' and 'acculturation' require precise definition. The first refers to an entire process by which one group, usually a minority within a society, is absorbed into another group ... 'Acculturation' is the adoption of the values and behavioural patterns of the 'host ' society ... [this] is followed logically ... by structural assimilation ... into [the superstructure] of the dominant group.<sup>18</sup>

It is therefore more apt to use the term 'acculturation' with reference to the immigrant experience in America. However, it is a process that the schlemiel denies through his/her own unawareness of what their own traits are and what their own inability to comply is. This is exemplified in the character of Hyman Kaplan whose own linguistic shortcomings and inability either to assimilate or acculturate is connected with his use of vernacular and dialect which both excludes him from society and others from his own 'world'. Despite his apparent desire to integrate, he is never allowed to - he is never promoted to the next grade at the preparatory school. What is important to note is that the constituent elements of culture are difficult to define and where culture is represented tends to be through artistic mediums. What must be debated is who controls the mediums and produces the texts and to what effect.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. - p.8

The fact that the use of a 'Jewish language' is now disappearing seems to suggest that assimilation has taken place, but this is slim evidence on which to base an argument about a whole community. What Kertzer further debates is the fact that in many places Yiddish is seen as the sacred language; the sacred language perhaps not in religious but in historical and cultural terms.<sup>19</sup> The distinction identified, but which requires further development, is between religious and cultural Judaism. This is further emphasised by the relationship between Hebrew as the exclusive property of the *Yeshiva*, which in turn was the exclusive property of the male.<sup>20</sup> The two languages separate not only Jewish communities from the rest of the country in question but also the Jewish community itself. With this initial exclusion of the female from holding the 'sacred tongue', alternative dialects develop from the women to communicate, developing Yiddish as the *Mamma-Loshen* (Mother-Tongue). This indicates that towards the end of the century Yiddish was the communal language of both male and female. It was for those who were not involved on a daily basis with religious practice or religious instruction, it was for those who were subsequently excluded on social grounds which develop from that religious base, the Rabbi being at the top of the Jewish Shtetl social strata.

In pre-1945 Europe and America, the schlemiel was clearly and exclusively male. (A contention for which philosophical and social reasons will be identified.) It would indicate perhaps that the character is not tied to religion alone and that the character develops from a language that was seen to be primarily the property of Jewish women. It is a fair contention to suppose that these attitudes were passed from the mother to her children. The male would have been the one dealing with other communities via business, this being the structure of the Shtetl. The sense of rejection and alienation may have been stronger for this particular sub-group or at least prompted the need to defend their own role. In the later part of the twentieth century, there is evidence of the emergence of female Jewish schlemiels and comparative non-Jewish schlemiels, (both male and

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<sup>19</sup> See Kertzer - Op.Cit. - 1970 - pp.116-118 for notions of the preservation of a culture.

<sup>20</sup> Yeshiva refers essentially to the Rabbinical colleges. See Kertzer - Op.Cit. - 1970 - pp.131-133 and Rosten - Op.Cit. - 1972 - pp.439-442 & 536-537 and William B. Helmreich - The World of the Yeshiva: An Intimate Portrait of Orthodox Jewry (1982), New York, The Free Press : Macmillain - 1982.

female).<sup>21</sup> The accepted argument is that this is due to the process of assimilation - in this instance of Jewish peoples into WASP society. It is this over simplistic argument that must be contested, rather than assimilation these two cultures have come together (perhaps not willingly, deliberately or even consciously) through the mediums of both literature and cinema.

Before more fully analysing of the function of Yiddish or the Jewish experience in any detail, it is vital to give some preliminary definitions of the central characteristics of the schlemiel. To take Rosten's seven point definition as a starting point:

1. A foolish person; a simpleton. 'He has the brains of a shlemiel.'<sup>22</sup>

Certainly not many definitions of the schlemiel would contradict the notion of foolishness but deeming the schlemiel 'a simpleton' is limiting in the extreme. There are many cases where the schlemiel may have a hand in his/her own downfall and yet remains firmly an intellectual (Saul Bellow's Herzog being the classic example). Wisse states that 'the schlemiel is the Jew as he is defined by the anti-Semite, but reinterpreted by God's appointee.'<sup>23</sup> This statement addresses the origin of the character in sociological terms. The schlemiel when taken as purely a Jewish character was invented by and for a Jewish community. The anti-Semite may wish to see all Jews as fools but having a character that is stupid as opposed to foolish means it would be impossible to have the same inherent degree of wisdom as the schlemiel:

2. A consistently unlucky or unfortunate person; a 'fall guy'; a hard-luck type; a born loser; a submissive and uncomplaining victim. 'That poor shlemiel

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<sup>21</sup> The two texts which exemplify this best are Annie Hall, dir: Woody Allen, USA, 1977 and Forrest Gump, dir: Robert Zemeckis, USA, 1994 and these will be dealt with in more depth later, but not at the expense of Jewish texts.

<sup>22</sup> Each point referred to subsequently comes from Rosten's The Joys of Yiddish, pp.352-353 except where indicated. (I retain Rosten's spelling of schlemiel here).

<sup>23</sup> Ruth R. Wisse - The Schlemiel as Modern Hero (1971) - Chicago, University of Chicago Press - 1971 - p.6



always gets the short end of the stick.' A Yiddish proverb goes; 'The shlemiel falls on his back and breaks his nose.'

However, they are not always uncomplaining victims, and they may not always be so submissive. The main facet of the schlemiel across fictions is the consistency of foolishness, not poor luck. Anyone, even a schlemiel, may be unlucky but it does not have to be all the time; that is the prerogative of the *Schlimazel*.<sup>24</sup> The fact that they are perceived to be unfortunate is purely related to the reaction of readers and their perspective not just on the foolish character but also on the Jew as foolish. This aspect of reader interpretation of character is crucial to further analysis:

3. A clumsy, butterfingers, all-thumbs, gauche type. 'Why does a shlemiel like that ever try to fix anything?'

The short answer is because they believe they can; their faith is crucial as a defining feature, unlike the *Nebech* who may act out of an uncontrollable desire or the *schlimazel* who may be perfectly capable but whose actions will undoubtedly result in failure. This highlights the problem of trying to define terms that refer to character types too briefly; for example, a stumbling luckless creature could mean *schlimazel*, *nebech* or *schlemiel*.<sup>25</sup> What this highlights is that schlemiels can incorporate the characteristics of others (luckless, clumsy, etc.), but has additional qualities. That is the strong notion that they are being persecuted, although their foolishness and gullibility may obscure that perception to a degree. The schlemiel is a character that incorporates others. Rosten describes a *shmendrick* as *small, short, weak, thin, a young*

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<sup>24</sup> The distinction between the schlemiel is a difficult one to make and the conflation of the two is often the case. For example in Carla Johnson - 'Luckless in New York: The Schlemiel and the Schlimazel in Seinfeld' in *The Journal of Popular Film and Television* - Vol., Part 3 - 1994 - pp.116-124. Both Jerry and George are schlemiels and both have schlimazel tendencies. Anyone can be or suffer from schlimazel but a schlemiel is always a schlemiel. Sanford Pinsker makes the distinction clear by commenting: *when a schlimazel's bread and butter accidentally falls on the floor it always lands butter side down; with a schlemiel it is much the same - except that he butters his bread on both sides.* Sanford Pinsker - *The Schlemiel as Metaphor* (1971) - Illinois, Southern Illinois University Press - 1971 - p.5 (I retain Pinsker's own spelling of Schlimazel here).

<sup>25</sup> Op.Cit. - Howe - 1976 - p.686

*nebech, perhaps even an apprentice shlemiel.*<sup>26</sup> The implication is that to achieve the lofty status of schlemiel is a high aspiration. Even the *yold* does not reach the level of the schlemiel. They are the simpletons that the schlemiel does not have to be; a schlemiel may be aware of the bleakness of a situation, a *yold* never would be.<sup>27</sup> It is often said that a *nebech* picks up the things that a schlemiel knocks over, indicating that a *nebech* lives with automatic reaction whilst the schlemiel may question their situation or even their foolishness. In these terms they then become the 'wise fool', a status that still means that they might face rejection:

4. A social misfit, congenitally maladjusted. 'Don't invite that shlemiel to the party.'

People do invite them to the party, or the schlemiels invite themselves because they fail to realise that people will not want them there. This links to the notion that the schlemiel is:

5. A pipsqueak, a Caspar Milquetoast. 'He throws as much weight as a shlemiel.' 'No one pays attention to that shlemiel.'

This is clearly not the case with fictional character on the part of the reader as schlemiel-keit fiction continues to flourish. This distinction between the fictional use and development of the character and the term as a form of abuse is important to highlight:

6. A naive, trusting, gullible customer. This usage is common among furniture dealers, especially those who sell the gaudy, gimcrack stuff called 'borax.'

The furniture dealer may see a 'real' person in terms of their schlemiel-keit tendencies but this does not refer to a fictional character type who is exclusively a schlemiel. In day-to-day usage, it would be more usual to hear an insult like *Schmuck*, which has a direct referent with 'penis' (also

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<sup>26</sup> Op.Cit. - Rosten - 1976 - p.363

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. - pp.45-46

*Shmo*).<sup>28</sup> Someone looking at the bad deal may consider them 'luck-less' and yet it is the persistent gullibility of a character, which dictates their schlemiel-keit status on one level. It is the schlemiel having their hand in their own misfortune that is exemplified with:

7. Anyone who makes a foolish bargain, or wagers a foolish bet. This usage is wide in Europe; it probably comes from Chamisso's tale, Peter Schlemihl's Wunderbare Geschichte, a fable in which the protagonist sold his shadow and, like Faust, sold his soul to Satan.

This readiness to believe is crucial to the character. It is this questioning and subsequently being duped into belief that the schlemiel alone embodies.<sup>29</sup> Even though schlemiel may have been wrongly convinced in an action, it is their own comfort with the new situation that is vital to their success. It is the subsequent acceptance of and happiness with the status quo as they themselves see it that is vital to their character.<sup>30</sup>

Although Rosten comments on the integration of Yiddish and English there remains no consideration of what happens to notions of identity when there is this move from Shtetl to assimilation or acculturation. It seems ironic that many immigrants came to America to escape oppression and yet the first act they were compelled to undertake to lead to the goal of naturalisation (which also theoretically meant security) was to adopt the host language. In respect of Hyman Kaplan, this is to join the beginner's grade of the American Night Preparatory School for Adults:

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. - pp.365-367 & pp.363-364

<sup>29</sup> The character of Peter Schlemihl is interesting in his role as the most archetypal schlemiel character in existence and his absence of overt links to any Jewish origins. The links that can be made between Faust and Peter Schlemihl further indicate that certain key characteristics that appear with Jewish schlemiels may also appear in other cultural representations.

<sup>30</sup> The debate surrounding the historical origin of the schlemiel is of more relevance to later analysis but a brief breakdown of this can be found in Pinsker - Op.Cit. - 1971 - pp.4-22 and Wisse - Op.Cit. 1971 - pp.3-40

'Each of you in coming to America, has had direct experience with a dock,'  
He smiled almost gaily, and waited.

The class went into that coma which signified its collective memory of 'coming to America.' Mrs. Moskowitz closed her eyes as the recollection of her sea-sickness surged over her like a wave, and searched her memory no more. Mr. Kaplan, desperate to make the kill, whispered his associations tensely:

'Dock' ... Coming to America ... boat ... feesh ... big waves ... cremps.'  
It was clear they were getting nowhere.<sup>31</sup>

However, this is not purely the case with the character of Hyman Kaplan. He presents a difficult case in terms of assimilation. He can only make attempts to learn and he himself is quite happy with his own compromise of a meeting between the English language and a Polish accent. It is the teacher, Mr Parkhill who cannot cope with these many and varied problems in the context of the class. In fact, Mr 'Pockheel' eventually has to meet Hyman Kaplan somewhere in the middle:

Mr. Kaplan looked back [at Mr. Parkhill] and answered promptly.

'Vell, I'll tell abot Prazidents United States. Fife Prazidents United States is Abram Lincohen, he has freeink de neegers; Hodding, Coolitch, Judge Vashington, an' Bonjamin Frenklin.'<sup>32</sup>

He turns Lincoln, arguably the most respected president of America, into a Jew at a time of strong anti-Semitism. He also adopts the racist slang of American society in discussing the freeing of slaves; ironically a slang that many would use against immigrants such as Hyman Kaplan himself. The intent is not abuse merely clear misuse. The language and dialect are essentially arbitrary, but the result is the same particularly on Mr. Parkhill who to understand has to see things through Mr. Kaplan's eyes. When faced by Hyman Kaplan he becomes the fool, he is merely failing to operate by the same conventions as Mr. Kaplan. No one can it is just that some people are just closer than others:

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<sup>31</sup> Leo Rosten [Leonard Q. Ross] - The Education of H\*Y\*M\*A\*N K\*A\*P\*L\*A\*N, 'Mr K\*a\*p\*l\*a\*n and Vocabulary' (1937) - London, Constable - 1972 - p.35-36

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. ('The Rather Difficult Case of Mr Kaplan') - p.6

Mr Parkhill studied the picture of 'Abraham Lincohen' on the back wall ... he wondered whether he could reconcile it with his conscience if he were to promote Mr. Kaplan to Composition, Grammar, and Civics - at once. Another three months of Recitation and Speech might, after all, be nothing but a waste of Mr Kaplan's valuable time.<sup>33</sup>

This is not just a waste of Hyman Kaplan's time but of Mr. Parkhill's too, for it is he who cannot make the breakthrough. Hyman Kaplan has everything to offer them; instead of detracting from the correct pronunciation, he is enriching it. Perhaps the most important point in relation to the schlemiel is that he does not realise he is breaking any of the rules of the English language, coming from a community that spoke Yiddish it would be even more difficult to accept such rigid guidelines. This develops into what Rosten terms 'Yinglish' with humorous intent, but this is an accepted linguistic verbal style that develops alongside the rising population of Jewish immigrants.<sup>34</sup> Hyman Kaplan manages to level everything, not with malicious intent but with subversive result. This progression from one mistake to another is not based on stupidity but rather on a connection which deviates from the norm; a facet of his character that generally might be termed foolish:

'For a long time Mr Parkhill had believed that the incredible things which Mr. Hyman Kaplan did to the English language were the products of a sublime and transcendental ignorance ... Mr. Parkhill began to feel that it wasn't ignorance which governed Mr. Kaplan so much as impulsiveness ... then came Mr. Kaplan's impetuous answer to the question:

'And what is the opposite of 'rich'?'

'Skinny!' Mr. Kaplan had cried.

Now a less conscientious teacher might have dismissed that ... Mr Parkhill thought it over with great care.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. - p.9

<sup>34</sup> Op.Cit. -Rosten 1970 - The preface to The Joys of Yiddish breaks down the ways in which Yiddish has integrated itself with the English language and also with already established American variations.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. ('Mr. Kaplan's Dark Logic') - p.143



It transpires that Mr. Kaplan sees things as a whole. This is not to say that his world-view is incorrect, merely an alternative and more all-encompassing perception. The connection here being simply that the rich are generally fat and so the answer must be 'skinny':

The more Mr Parkhill thought this over the more he was convinced that it was neither ignorance nor caprice which guided Mr Kaplan's life and language ... it was logic.<sup>36</sup>

This is a logic that baffles Mr. Parkhill; he is not privy to the experience of immigration and of a culture that produced a character like Mr. Kaplan. He annoys the rest of the group with his ebullience but he never confuses them in the same way as he does Mr. Parkhill. This realisation of the underlying logic of Hyman Kaplan's thought processes comes as an epiphany for Mr. Parkhill, but he still never manages complete tolerance. Hyman Kaplan never lets this intolerance affect him, he never notices, and it is this aspect of his character that changes with later schlemiel-keit characters. In many cases this rejection and alienation results in neurosis about their own status and abilities and in a few it results in anger and resentment. Hyman Kaplan places his faith in the American system to which he is new. It is this as an object of faith that does not satisfy later schlemiel-keit figures they then strive to find other systems of belief.

Although texts demonstrate both attitudes towards American Jews and Immigrant Jews and Jewish attitudes to their own condition, it is essential to comment specifically on the social status of Jews in America. From the turn of the century, it would seem to be the case that business involvement in the most expansive mass medium of film would be all-important. The relationship between film and literature is interesting in this instance. The nature of Yiddish being primarily oral means that by the time Yiddish writers were producing for mass

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. - p.144

consumption or were being presented to a mass audience in translated forms film had already developed. It is possible to trace this development through writers such as Sholom Alechem and Isaac Bashevis Singer who wrote initially for isolated and specific communities. This is distinct from those filmmakers who were producing for a mass audience in a medium that demanded profit. The initial intention of literature was to remain specific to Yiddish speaking groups, the initial intention of filmmakers had to be to appeal to a wide audience purely in economic terms. How they use the medium on a socio-cultural level is a different question. The effect of this is crucial to debate alongside the potential dissolution of Yiddish into English, or at least in to American English. As Wisse comments of the character, 'like so much else in America, he stands cut loose from his roots, and neither he nor his audience seems aware of his origins.'<sup>37</sup> In examining the character in a wider cultural context, the question is of the relevance of these origins, particularly from the perspective of the reader.

Woody Allen stands outside the Hollywood factory system. It is this progression from Hollywood to New York, back to the seat of immigration that is crucial.<sup>38</sup> The cultural divide between East and West and North and South cannot be ignored as highlighting fundamental differences between the many cultures in America. It is textual representations of Jewish culture, in any medium, that highlights both the similarities and differences between these groups. This is perhaps most noticeable in Allen's work where there is a clear dichotomy between what is perceived to be the 'cultural' East coast and the 'vulgar' West coast. However, not just texts that are directly and overtly about Jewish cultures deal with Jewish issues, non-Jewish texts may also deal with schlemiel-keit characters. Films, such as The Apartment integrates Jewish characters and places them in the heat of the action. In this instance the character of Doctor Dreyfuss is pivotal in the way he inspires C.C. Baxter to act. He does this using terms such as *Mensh* and *Shmuk*; instead of

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<sup>37</sup> Op.Cit. - Wisse - 1971 -p.xi

<sup>38</sup> It is important to address the notion of Allen as Auteur. This debate becomes crucial in respect of reception of character in chapter four. To refer to a film as being 'Allen's' provides a shorthand route to analysis at this stage.

remaining a *Shmuk* Baxter must become a *Mensch* and it is crucial that this message comes from the Jew to the Gentile through the Yiddish language.<sup>39</sup> Other films certainly used the term schlemiel with no special reference made to this usage, for example a film such as Attack! still uses it in direct reference to a Jewish character. A film such as The Princess and the Pirate uses the term in a different way, the film was essentially a 'star vehicle' for Virginia Mayo and Bob Hope; it is the gentile Hope who utters the term. The result is one of integration for the population who would not automatically be aware that the term is Yiddish in origin and may subsequently adopt it with the connotations that are inferred from the setting in which they heard it used in and the characters to which it refers. However, it is to what degree a text can actually have non-Jewish schlemiels, which becomes a crucial point of debate. These characters may have all the traits and attributes of the schlemiel but they are not Jewish; the fact remains that the character (as a textual entity) functions in exactly the same way. Independence Day, which shares no generic boundaries with any of the aforementioned texts, uses the term schlemiel. In this instance, a Jewish character that has saved the world speaks it. In this example it has an incorrect usage; it is wrong suggest that someone could *look like a schlemiel*, as it is only possible to behave like one. The term is misused, but the character goes on regardless - they may not be defined in the same way but they behave in the same way.

It is ironic that although Hollywood had a strong Jewish element, particularly in management and writing, the main characters portrayed in the majority of movies were not Jewish.<sup>40</sup> The film world into which Woody Allen emerged was different from the world of early filmmakers, where Jewish characters were never wholly ignored, but were often portrayed as stereotypical. This applied to other immigrant groups too, for example, in the film The Cohens and the Kellys, part of

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<sup>39</sup> It is interesting to note that Doctor Dreyfuss perceives Baxter as a nebech whilst his Gentile colleagues see him as a Shmuk; a character Rosten defines as a pitiful but likeable schlemiel. Op.Cit. - 1970 - p.368

<sup>40</sup> For more detail of this see Neal Gabler - An Empire of their Own (1989) - New York, Anchor Books - 1989



a series using the Jewish family, the Cohens as the central figures, along with an equally stereotypical Irish family, the Kellys. Although a happy balance was maintained, the main characters were seen as culturally exclusive, but still managed to exist harmoniously. Whilst films such as The Jazz Singer provided a positive view of Jewish life and culture, the rest of mainstream Hollywood paid little reference to this socio-cultural grouping. This trend apparently continued through subsequent decades, and whilst Jewish leads often became stars, (for example Tony Curtis, Walter Matthau, Edward G. Robinson and Lee J. Cobb,) they were not overtly Jewish and did not necessarily tackle Jewish issues, particularly in the early stages of their careers.<sup>41</sup>

[Hollywood and mainstream American society evaded] the reality of racial and religious tension, but not the underlying process, which was to bring Jews ... into fuller participation in American life. The price for that was a slice of ham. <sup>42</sup>

The sixties proved to be a decade that sparked debate on all manner of political issues, and began to bring about a change of attitude in the minds of ethnic America. Films such as Exodus debated the worldwide plight of Judaism and figures such as Lenny Bruce troubled the conscience of intellectual American society. 'All my humor is based on destruction and despair ... if the whole world were tranquil and without disease and violence I'd be on the headline.'<sup>43</sup> This acidic attack on social structures did not exist with such ferocity in the late sixties and seventies, a period in which Allen began his career as a filmmaker, but this is where his ideas developed along with his

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<sup>41</sup> This selection of actors is completely arbitrary and exists only as an example. This area of Jewish film analysis is beyond the scope of this study, but for a more complete examination of this subject see Lester Friedman - The Jewish Image in American Film (1987) - New Jersey, Citadel Press - 1987.

<sup>42</sup> R.A. Burchell & E. Homberger - 'The Immigrant Experience' - in M. Bradbury and H. Temperley - Introduction to American Studies (1981) - Harlow, Longman 1989 - p.174

<sup>43</sup> Lenny Bruce - cited in Michael Goldfarb - 'Laughter and the Art of Survival', The Guardian - (26/7/90) - p.21 - Goldfarb notes that 'Jewish humour is a response to millennia of violent oppression and ostracism. When you've just had your shop looted, watched your wife gang-raped, seen your father's head staved in and been forced to eat unclean food in other words lived through a typical day in a pogrom and when you've cleaned up the mess only to be evicted to another village a thousand miles away, you have to laugh, otherwise you go mad. But the laughter will be born out of bitterness and despair.' - p.21

contemporaries in film, literature and television. The reaction to the radical mood in the sixties was a retreat into the more peaceful issues dealt with by Hollywood in the past. However, Jewish characters began appearing in 'Gentile America', in films such as Blazing Saddles, Funny Girl and The Heartbreak Kid. Prior to this it was common to use 'stand in Jews'; for example 'Gregory Peck' in films such as Elia Kazan's examination of post-war anti-Semitism, Gentlemen's Agreement. Although this text dealt with contentious issues, it had to involve Gentile actors to appeal to middle America as a whole. Peck had the kind of box office draw that few overtly Jewish actors had, to use a Jewish actor would have revealed their own Semitic roots. John Garfield was certainly not hidden as a character in Gentlemen's Agreement but is noteworthy that he plays second fiddle to Peck. It is difficult to suggest that a figure such as Kazan would be swayed by anyone in his portrayal of racial prejudice, even the people in charge of finance, but the intention is largely irrelevant in relation to effect it may have on representation. The choice of actors, particularly in the early period of Hollywood is worthy of consideration, for example a film such as Crossfire deems it acceptable to have a Jewish actor playing a secondary character who is also a murderer. The debate about race may be hidden within a plotline which is subsumed under a much stronger and more obvious one. However to follow this line of inquiry to its logical conclusion raises the example of films such as The Vikings, with Kirk Douglas and Tony Curtis featuring as the lead actors. It is the degree to which ethnicity is an issue in a particular film that identifies the role of the actor and their socio-cultural and religious origins as important. Woody Allen embodied the mood of the time and was quick to criticise the token ethic; his work reflects his society and the representation of ethnic characters reflects this.<sup>44</sup> In early stand-up routines the story of Allen as a token Jew is told, 'I used to read my memos right to left ... they eventually fired me for taking off too many Jewish holidays.'<sup>45</sup> Jewish characters are not always used to be politically correct, or to make a point about Jews. Although Allen is Jewish this is not central to

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<sup>44</sup> Much criticism has been made of poor representation of other ethnic groupings and also of women. Whilst it is not the purpose of this study to examine this it needs to be mentioned in relation to Allen's cultural Jewishness.

<sup>45</sup> Op.Cit. - Woody Allen - Woody Allen : The Nightclub Years, (audio-cassette) EMI, 1989

his work - Allen is a filmmaker who happens to be Jewish. References are made and imply an essential Jewishness and the question arises as to what purpose these references are used. Allen exists in opposition to the contemporary Hollywood norm. 'Allen's fantasy of an ideal cinema is represented as a sort of transcendental Jewishness, an absolute apartness.'<sup>46</sup> This implies that Allen is taking his past and using it, it is an essential part of his character. His Jewishness is therefore cultural and implicit rather than religious and explicit, but culturally specific to New York and his own particular cultural grouping.

On the part of the audience, it remains impossible to separate Allen from his Jewishness; his use of Jewish images and Jewish culture is a facet of his work that needs to be addressed. Allen is linked to Jewish culture not purely through his personal history, but also through his conceived and perceived character. He is a 'schlemiel' in Rosten's terms:

A consistently unlucky or unfortunate person; a born loser ... 'That poor schlemiel always gets the short end of the stick' ... a social misfit ... 'No one pays attention to that schlemiel.'<sup>47</sup>

However, the schlemiel Allen portrays may not necessarily be essentially and exclusively Jewish and this is the crux of the debate. The character of the schlemiel is certainly one that Allen embraces and yet by using the figure in differing circumstances the character becomes trans-cultural. In Annie Hall, Jewish references are still made:

Alvy : Right, right, so get back to what we were discussing - the failure of the country to get behind New York City is anti-Semitism.

Rob : Max, the city is terribly run.

Alvy : But the - I'm not discussing politics or economics. This is foreskin.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Romney - 'Shelter From the Storm', Sight and Sound - February 1994 - p. 9

<sup>47</sup> Op.Cit. - Rosten (1970) - p.352

The references are to the problems encountered by the 'New York Jew', and yet this is not the central message of the movie. The image and character are used to comic effect and are part of the schlemiel character, but with the comment relating to 'foreskin' this is metaphoric of the physical appearance of the character being a Jew, as opposed to being something unstated and hard to pin down. The character of Annie Hall is initially 'schlemiel like' and yet is overtly Gentile.<sup>49</sup> When the Singer and Hall families meet (via the meta-fictional device of the split screen) the divide is essentially one of class and period. What is created is a problem with authorship; the Jewish Woody Allen is writing and directing a film and his influence is paramount. This problem cannot be avoided, but whilst there may be cultural references back to a Jewish culture, Allen is taking the figure into a 'Goyische world'. The schlemiel is relocated in the figure of the wealthy middle-class Catholic, Alice (the eponymous hero of the movie). She comes to realise the faults in her life through the faith of the eastern mystic herbalist, Dr. Yang, not through her own religious belief, and not through Allen's Jewishness. Robert Benayoun places Allen's characters alongside Portnoy, Gimpel and Herzog, and whilst there are obvious comparisons to be made it must be remembered that these are figures from literature, they are not people in their own right. As with Roth, Singer and Bellow, a particular character is used for particular effect depending on the text and subject matter in question. Alvy Singer is not Allen, Annie Hall is not Diane Keaton, and neither character is Allen or Marshall Brickman (as co-writer):

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<sup>48</sup> Linda Sunshine (ed.) - Woody Allen - The Illustrated Woody Allen Reader - (1993) - London, Jonathan Cape - 1993 - p.68

<sup>49</sup> By using the term 'schlemiel like' the implication is that Annie Hall behaves in the same nervous, neurotic manner as Alvy Singer. As with any work of this kind a problem that will be addressed arises, namely authorship. The screen play was written by Allen and Marshall Brickman. However the characters are taken as being separate and unique in their own right.

I was unmoved by the synagogue ... the Sedar ... the Hebrew school, I was not interested in being Jewish ... I had no interest in being Catholic or in any of the other Gentile religions.<sup>50</sup>

The Jewish influence is undeniable, but not only from a religious base (which Allen then denies). It also comes from an American cultural base that embraces not merely Jewish but Gentile artists alike:

The well-spring of modern Jewish humour is the lower East Side of Manhattan, a ghetto of mythic proportions ... [but it] isn't a ghetto any more ... you are more likely to hear the Nuyorican patois than Yiddish.<sup>51</sup>

This comment in mind, the nature of Jewish-American history becomes so deep rooted and 'mythic' that anyone exposed to it in the form that Allen was, would find it difficult to divorce themselves from the inherent cultural references. Despite a love for 'Borscht Belt' performers such as Burt Lañr, Jack Benny and Mort Sahl, Allen's humour, and particularly his stand-up material, owes an equal amount to the likes of Groucho Marx and Lenny Bruce and their radical verbosity. Despite being indebted to the radical strain of sixties comedian, Allen pays tribute to the most overtly and archetypically Jewish of all, the Catskill Mountain entertainer in the guise of Broadway Danny Rose. Danny is Jewish, but the character is concerned with a particular tradition of entertaining rather than a cultural exclusivity. The comic tradition may owe a great deal to New York Jews and the reasons for their personal, cultural, and humorous development, but this is not essentially where the character comes from. The film is not centrally about Jews telling Jewish jokes - it is about one person, an exaggerated caricature. Many critics have linked the stories Allen tells (through all his work) to the European Jewish oral tradition, although not directly to Yiddish. It is this facet, perhaps more than any other that explains the initial Jewish

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<sup>50</sup> Woody Allen - *cited in* Eric Lax - Woody Allen: A Biography (1991) - London, Jonathan Cape 1991 - p.40-41

<sup>51</sup> Op.Cit. - Goldfarb - 2/7/90 - p.21

involvement in American film; there is no better way of telling a story to a large audience than through film.<sup>52</sup> The stories are not always concerned with Jewishness, but can be seen on one level to broaden what was once a Jewish tradition into Gentile culture. The fact remains that these characters might appeal to non-Jews because they were already familiar figures in Gentile society.

In examination of Allen's inherent Jewishness, it is essential to analyse texts that appear to address Jewish problems, particularly those of assimilation and subsequent success. However much Allen attempts to deny his religion and even the need to fit in, the need to belong is prevalent in his work. He is not separable from his physical Jewishness and this in itself presents problems for society. The examples that overtly deal with problems of assimilation and understanding are Zelig, the critically maligned Shadows and Fog and the short feature Oedipus Wrecks.<sup>53</sup> Zelig is the prime example of the problems of, and the perceived need for assimilation on the part of the immigrant. The Klu Klux Klan consider Zelig to be a serious threat, a Jew who can transform into an Oriental, a Negro, an Indian, even a WASP and (paradoxically) a Nazi. Zelig is seen as sinister from the perspective of Jewish society looking back at the attitudes of Gentile America. However, with the case of The Education of H\*Y\*M\*A\*N\*K\*A\*P\*L\*A\*N and The Cohens and the Kellys, both produced at the time in question, the 'foolishness' and 'innocence' of the characters is the main focus and is used to facilitate humour. Their function may remain the same as Zelig's but the sinister influence is not there. Despite Zelig's ability to fit in to any situation, he is still a threat and there remains a desire to *lynch the little Hebe*.<sup>54</sup> Even on becoming a media personality renowned the world over Zelig still lives to regret never completing Moby Dick, an example of what he should aspire to. It is ironic that much of the

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<sup>52</sup> For American Jews perhaps the only way to tell their story was through film.

<sup>53</sup> This 'short' can be found in the 'feature' New York Stories, USA, 1989 along with contributions directed by Martin Scorsese and Francis Coppola.

<sup>54</sup> Zelig, dir: Woody Allen, USA, 1993

study surrounding Herman Melville now focuses on his supposed homosexuality, perhaps indicating even the most revered American texts are in some sense produced or constructed, or feature outsiders. Validity is added to the story and plight facing Zelig by the inclusion of the noted Jewish intellectuals, Saul Bellow and Susan Sontag. It is this intellectual content that also appears in Portnoy's Complaint with the character of Dr. Spielvogel, absent from earlier texts. Bellow, Sontag and Spielvogel are all Jewish intellectuals and there is a clear distinction here between the intellectual and the fool. In the case of The Education of H\*Y\*M\*A\*N\*K\*A\*P\*L\*A\*N this is not the case, Mr. Parkhill remains a fool himself because he cannot comprehend Hyman Kaplan's logic. This is seemingly contradictory because in other texts there remains a figure that can become the opposite of the fool, who can explain and then redeem his/her actions, or at least attempt to; this is often a character within the text but can also be the narrator. The Cohens, along with other early schlemiel texts do not have this saving grace of a figure, which (in the case of the aforementioned texts) is also Jewish. This figure serves to demonstrate to Gentile America that whilst one Jewish figure may be a fool there are many others who are not. In many cases, this character exists just to show that these figures cannot be redeemed, as the explanations they give are more often than not without substance or are inconclusive. This is clear with the leveling of Mr. Parkhill and with the end comment from Doctor Spielvogel in Portnoy's Complaint. This explanatory figure does not appear in a text such as The Cohens and the Kellys where the 'foolish' behaviour of the immigrant characters is clearly open to uninterrupted and seemingly unaffected interpretation on the part of the audience. It is in contextualising characters that certain patronising (at 'best') and racist (at worst) overtones can be seen. A contemporary audience might interpret the character as innocent or the texts as products of their time. Where there exists no figure to explain the peculiar logic that the schlemiel uses it is purely the prerogative of the reader to interpret and it is the other factors that are present in the text which may affect the judgment of the characters being either Jewish schlemiels or non-Jewish schlemiels. It is these additional factors and the operation and

reception of these characters that will be dealt with in more detail in later chapters, through Narratological analysis and through an examination of the social function of the character.

In *Zelig* the final act of 'assimilation' in conventional and traditional terms occurs with the eventual marriage to the Gentile Dr. Eudora Fletcher. Rather than assimilation, all the 'Ellis Island' immigrant can achieve is a process of acculturation, a process where the immigrant adopts 'the values and behavioural patterns of the 'host society.'<sup>55</sup> Allen has been part of this process of acculturation, and yet he denies definition on standard religious/cultural terms. Allen has commented that *Zelig* represents 'a minor malady that almost everybody suffers from - carried to an extreme.'<sup>56</sup> The idea of America as melting pot is denied, *Zelig* represents the eternal other, and the other is everybody. Allen too retains the image of an idealistic other, in both his private, public and artistic life: revered, unorthodox and revolutionary, separate and private.

This dislocation is exemplified in Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*, in copulating with Naomi as a member of the Israeli army:

Let it spread forth from her unto all those brave and virtuous Jewish boys and girls! A dose of clap will do them all good! This is what it's like in the Diaspora, you saintly kiddies, this is what it's like in exile! Temptation and disgrace! Corruption and self-mockery! Self-depreciation - and self-defecation too! Whipping, hysteria, compromise, confusion, disease! Yes, Naomi, I am soiled, Oh, I am impure - and also pretty fucking tired, my dear, of never being quite good enough for The Chosen People!<sup>57</sup>

Portnoy is not 'at home' in either America or Israel. This is connected with his rejection in both places but can also be linked to the long quest for the Promised Land. This may not necessarily be

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<sup>55</sup> Op.Cit. - Guttman - 1971 - p.8

<sup>56</sup> Woody Allen - *cited in* Sinyard - Op.Cit. - 1988 - p.71 The concept of the 'Melting Pot' is further criticised in *Manhattan Murder Mystery*, dir: Woody Allen, USA, 1993 when the comment is made, 'We could be living next door to a murderer' To which the response is, 'Well ... New York is a melting pot.'

<sup>57</sup> Philip Roth - *Portnoy's Complaint* (1967) - London, Penguin - 1986 - p.242



a geographical location, perhaps more a spiritual one, where rejection is not the norm. The fact remains that this sense of rejection for Portnoy manifests itself as a psychoanalytic disorder:

Portnoy's Complaint ... n. {after Alexander Portnoy (1933- )} A disorder in which strongly felt ethical and altruistic impulses are perpetually warring with extreme sexual longings, often of a perverse nature ... neither fantasy nor act issues in genuine sexual satisfaction, but rather in overriding feelings of shame and the dread of retribution.<sup>58</sup>

This implies that this sense of dislocation is an inherent part of the Jewish European immigrant's psyche and character. It seems that if Portnoy had 'suffered' from the same affliction as Zelig he would have been quite happy. In fact, Gentile America considers Zelig to be suffering. It is quite incorrect however to suggest that either Zelig or Portnoy should have to resort to this extreme behaviour. Neither Gentile America nor Jewish society (in the figure of the mother for Portnoy and Mills) will let them rest in either situation. Fulfilling either role is not acceptable but the irony is that they are not allowed to rest in the middle, Zelig's condition being metaphoric for this. What later sections must determine is whether this is a facet of American-Jewish identity that the schlemiel embodies. What must also be debated is whether this is a condition of dislocation: a condition that does not reflect the Jewish condition alone but a contemporary Western condition, (neither gender nor race specific).

Evidently prevailing and in many ways central to the Jewish psyche, is the figure of the Jewish mother. Friedman argues that Danny Rose, in supporting his 'terrible' clients, assumes the role of mother.<sup>59</sup> It is in becoming his mother that he demonstrates how all consuming and representative of social pressure the figure is. Giving visual form to a joke that appears in his early work, for example, on leaving college, 'my mother opened the furnace door - and got in.'<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid. - p.5

<sup>59</sup> Op.Cit. - Friedman - 1987 - p.231

<sup>60</sup> Op.Cit. - Woody Allen - Woody Allen: The Nightclub Years - 1989

This is nowhere more eloquently and visually portrayed than in Oedipus Wrecks.<sup>61</sup> The risk of taking the character of Sheldon Mills as representative of Allen is particularly easy in this case.

The scenario appears to fit not only Allen's life, but also all the 'typical' Jewish mother jokes:

Two women meet while shopping at the supermarket in the Bronx. One looks cheerful, the other depressed. The cheerful inquires:

'What's eating you?'

'Nothing's eating me.'

'Death in the family?' ...

... 'Well, if you must know, its my little Jimmy.'

'What's wrong with him then?'

'Nothing is wrong. His teacher said he must see a psychiatrist.'

Pause. 'Well, what's wrong with him seeing a psychiatrist?'

'Nothing is wrong. The psychiatrist said he's got an Oedipus complex.'

Pause, 'Well, well, Oedipus or Shmoedipus, I wouldn't worry so long as he's a good boy and loves his mamma.'<sup>62</sup>

The domineering figure in the sky is representative of more than just the Jewish mother and the unavoidable Oedipal links; it is the social pressure that exists from a community to belong to a tradition. Mills does not belong in a Gentile world, or in a traditional Jewish world. He has attempted to assimilate in every way possible, but oppositional forces will not allow him to. In portraying the mother and son, as of an older generation, the scenario is brought up to date and is set in stone. A scenario started by Roth and his contemporaries in the fifties and early sixties, which Allen contemporises and reinforce. For example Neil Simon with his 'Brighton Beach' trilogy that portrays the development of Eugene Jemme from adolescence to manhood with the

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<sup>61</sup> It is interesting to note that in Oedipus Wrecks, as in Alice, dir: Woody Allen, USA, 1987 and to an extent in Stardust Memories, dir: Woody Allen, USA, 1980, the conjurer is used as a metaphor. In this case it is to remove what Sheldon Mills thinks is the last Jewish pressure, his mother. Only to find that she is inescapable.

<sup>62</sup> Arthur Koestler - The Act of Creation (1967) - London, Hutchinson - 1967 - p.32-33

omnipresent figure of the mother being the constant.<sup>63</sup> 'The Jewish mother has served as a projection of fantasy and sometimes revenge ... the limitations of WASP parents ... are less reprehensible than those of ethnic parents.'<sup>64</sup> In reference to Allen's work, this is not universally the case. This is clearly also true of Alexander Portnoy who comments on the relationship between his father and mother but never between his mother and himself. His mother's actions cause him undoubted psychological problems but these are accepted as the cultural norm, partly due their status in folklore and from that originating point in popular fictions. There is a dichotomy between those texts intended for a traditional Jewish audience (who would be aware of the conventions of the genre) and a Gentile audience who may take these as accurate representations. In relationship to Oedipus Wrecks, and in relation to much of Allen's stand-up material, Erens' generalisation fits. Nevertheless, this does not so dogmatically fit the image of the Jewish mother in Radio Days, or Annie Hall. In fact the opposite appears to be true, particularly the character of Duane, and his bizarre obsession with causing a car accident. This reinforces the notion that in Oedipus Wrecks and Portnoy's Complaint. These examples are only a marginally rooted in what is perceived to be fact.

The film tackles more than just fundamental belief in a Jewish God, something that Allen admits to have debated and has come down on the side of the agnostics. Whilst Allen appears to enjoy being the loyal opposition to God, the character of Treva embodies a faith that Mills lacks. As always, there are obvious links between Allen and the character of Sheldon that lead to the belief that they are one in the same. The faith Treva holds is not necessarily that of Judaism (proved by her 'paganistic' attempts to dispel his mother) but it is still something that Sheldon does not have. His only faith is in the 'American Dream,' in capitalist success and assimilating into the world of high finance, which in this case means adopting the trappings of Gentile culture. This does not

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<sup>63</sup> This trilogy includes Brighton Beach Memoirs (1986), Biloxi Blues (1988) and Broadway Bound (1991)

<sup>64</sup> Patricia Brett Erens - 'No Closer to Eden', Sight and Sound - 6/93 - p.21

work and could never have hoped to, his mother lets slip all the details that give away his past and his history. Sheldon can run, but he cannot hide. The psychiatrist's couch is no longer sufficient, and even he sends Sheldon to Treva and thus to his mother. Lisa, the *Shiksheh*, does not embody the reliable qualities that seem essential for Sheldon, as his mother's son. Culturally rather than religiously Treva is Jewish and it is this facet that is explored:

**Mother** : Look, Sheldon, don't get married.

**Sheldon** : Mom, I don't wanna discuss it.

**Mother** : I wanna discuss it. What do you know about that? After all, where do you come to a blonde with three children? What are you, an astronaut?

... **Sheldon** : ... She's always telling me I look terrible, and she's critical. You know, listen, what can I say? I love her but I wish she would disappear. <sup>65</sup>

Sheldon falls in love with Treva, or rather with her tasteless boiled chicken and the fact that, like his mother, she considers him 'too thin'. Although the mother is archetypically Jewish, and Sheldon is reduced to a *nebbech*, cross-cultural empathy is still possible.<sup>66</sup> Professor Levy in *Crimes and Misdemeanors* propounds this sentiment, when he comments:

The paradox consists of the fact that when we fall in love we are seeking to re-find all or some of the people to whom we were attached as children.

**The attempt to return to the past and the attempt to undo the past.** <sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Woody Allen - *Oedipus Wrecks* cited in *Sunshine Op.Cit.* - 1993 - p.125

<sup>66</sup> To reiterate the point Leo Rosten defines the term *nebbech* 'as the kind of person who always picks up what a schlemiel knocks over' ( *Op.Cit.* - 1970 - p.268) The lovable schlemiel has been reduced even further, but this time by someone of his own ethnic grouping.

<sup>67</sup> *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, dir: Woody Allen, USA, 1988 (My emphasis)

What Allen is portraying is a trans-cultural phenomenon by using a highly quoted cultural reference. It happens to be more overt in Jewish mythology and is more easily recognisable.

Crimes and Misdemeanors exemplifies another feature of Allen's relationship not merely with Jewishness, but with religion in general.<sup>68</sup> The subject of the piece is the nature of what constitutes a crime and what constitutes a misdemeanour in the absence of a God. The metaphors of the eyes and the all-seeing gaze of God are used through the character of the Rabbi, Ben. He comments to Judah:

'It's a fundamental difference in the way we view the world. You see it as harsh and empty of values and pitiless, and I couldn't go on living if I didn't feel with all my heart a moral structure with real meaning and forgiveness and some kind of higher power. Otherwise there's no basis to know how to live.'<sup>69</sup>

Whilst his path may be the more pious and righteous, he still loses his sight. Judah is a successful ophthalmologist and yet is unable to save Ben's eyesight. Although Judah may be, in Ben's terms, amoral, he manages to live with the guilt of the murder. They are both happy and successful, but on different terms. The debate as to whether or not to choose God is never resolved - the conclusions are subjective and certainly not Jewish. Allen subtly subverts the traditional happy ending and emphasises that it is a Hollywood fantasy, an industry that Allen himself is not part of. Judah comments that, 'if you want a happy ending you should go see a Hollywood movie.'<sup>70</sup> A sentiment that is comparable with the typically tongue-in-cheek yet analytical statement made by Jill Robinson:

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<sup>68</sup> In Manhattan Murder Mystery, Allen/Larry becomes identified with the cultural side of being a Jewish-American intellectual via a long tradition of 'Woody Allen' movies and also by other visual indicators, for example holding a bag, carrying the logo 'H&H Bagels'.

<sup>69</sup> Op.Cit. - Allen - Crimes and Misdemeanors - 1988

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

Hollywood - the American dream - is a Jewish idea. In a sense, it's a Jewish revenge on America. It combines the Puritan ethic ... with baroque magnificence. The happy ending was the invention of Russian Jews, designed to drive Americans crazy.<sup>71</sup>

The whole seemingly attractive notion of the American Dream, of rights, equality and ability to progress is embodied by the standard Hollywood product and yet the irony is that life is never like this. Judah has used his own skills to progress and have a happy life yet it is at the expense of those around him and Ben still goes blind despite following the 'right path'. Judah may have broken the law but ultimately he has followed the mythic American dream. A further angle to the film is one of the nature of high culture in relation to the acts of morality. Morality is discussed outside the constraints of religion and Judaism and it is a facet that must be debated alongside conceptions of identity.

To say that 'Woody Allen is postmodern America's cinematic moralist' is to imply that his work is a series of morality tales that finish with a definite conclusion on the nature of morality.<sup>72</sup> This argument is expressed by Bradbury and Ruland who claim that the work of postwar American Jews can be seen as 'a fiction of shaken survivors [of the Holocaust] **hunting for the recovery of moral truths.**'<sup>73</sup> The search for some kind of reconstruction of morality after the move to America and post-holocaust is prevalent in Allen's work, but there is no easy solution presented.

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<sup>71</sup> Jill Robinson - 'Fantasia' in Studs Terkel (ed.) - American Dreams : Lost and Found (1980) - New York, Pantheon Books - 1980 - p.52

<sup>72</sup> N.K. Denzin - Images of Postmodern Society (1987) - London, Sage Publications 1987 - p.82 - The relationship between the schlemiel character and 'Postmodern' society is the central concern of later chapters.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Ruland & Malcolm Bradbury - From Puritanism to Postmodernism (1992) - London, Penguin 1992 - Page 375 (My emphasis)

It is interesting to note that when debating the vital role that morality plays in his world Allen chooses to use Hassidic Jews as the central figures. It is not just that the Hassidim are considered more religiously devout and not just that in many ways they have a more distinctive physical appearance to associate them with religious Judaism, but as Kertzer highlights:

[The Hassidim] thought of worship as a thing of joy. Religion must not be too solemn. The equation of pious devotion and a long face was a misunderstanding of true religion. God wants to be worshipped out of happiness - out of a love for His world.<sup>74</sup>

It is this consideration of religion as a joyful thing that is most strikingly absent from the work of Allen and his contemporaries. It tends to be the case that Hassidic Jewishness is treated lightly on many occasions and on others is used for the development of humour. (Although this is not an exclusive rule.) The Hassidic Jewishness that is parodied in some movies is treated sympathetically in Crimes and Misdemeanors, in the conversation on morality that takes place around the dinner table. The characters being caricatured more often than not wear a Shtreimel or a Yarmulka; they are the extremes. It is a peculiar action for Allen to commit, and hints at some form of embarrassment of fundamental Judaism. However, it does not always occur, for example, Allen undergoes a transformation into a Rabbi in Take the Money and Run and in a similar vein in Zelig. The latter film also contains a Hassidic production of Shakespeare, which is intended to invoke humour. Alvy Singer turns into a Rabbi in Grammy Hall's eyes and it is this that gives a clue as to the difficulty to be found with this most pious and traditional of all sects. The Gentile majority tend to view Jewishness in terms of the extreme, Allen, by parody, is distancing himself not from Jewishness (he cannot), but from Judaism and absolute religious belief. This is after all a form of religion to which Allen, as an American Jew cannot relate. It is in Crimes and Misdemeanors that a joyful wedding is portrayed and it is Clifford and Judah who sit outside alone

<sup>74</sup> Op Cit. - Kertzer - 1978 - p.126

and miserable. Their lack of faith does not just guide them to commit sinful and criminal acts. The real sense of loss is connected to the fact that they have no concept of sin, they have escaped the criminal justice system but they still feel there is something lacking in life. This is distinct from Portnoy's Complaint where the notion of sin is not against religion but against the will and values inherited from the mother figure and is something more fundamentally culturally ingrained. This clutching for a basis for faith is a sentiment re-iterated in Shadows and Fog:

**Irmy** : Do you pray ever?

**Kleinman** : My people pray in a different language. **I never understood it. For all I know, they were requesting their own trouble.**<sup>75</sup>

This emphasises the lack of reverence for religion and the absence of a belief in the benevolence of God that Allen feels. Louvish comments of Shadows and Fog that Allen presents a negative and regressive image of the Jew, as eternal victim, and begs him to return to his earlier funnier films.<sup>76</sup> Comments such as this are unduly critical on two counts, not only in limiting Allen to making overtly comedic movies, but in seeing the film as wholly representative of Jewishness. By constantly presenting the schlemiel as fool, Allen would be doing an injustice to a figure that is generally recognised as archetypically Jewish. The portrayal of the Jew as hunted in a pre-holocaust setting, but with post-holocaust attitudes, lends itself to impressing the plight of the twentieth century Jew, but perhaps not the Jew alone:

'There are certain cultural differences between Jews and non-Jews, I guess, but I think they're largely superficial. Of course, any character I play would be Jewish, just because I'm Jewish. I'm also metropolitan oriented. I

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<sup>75</sup> Woody Allen - Shadows and Fog - cited in Sunshine Op.Cit.- 1993 - p.219 (My emphasis) - In this case it is important to note that Kleinman literally means 'small man' and is represented as the figure of the oppressed.

<sup>76</sup> Simon Louvish - 'Out of the Shadows' - Sight and Sound, June 1993 - pp.18-20



wouldn't play a farmer or an Irish seaman. So I write about metropolitan characters who happen to be Jewish. <sup>77</sup>

What Allen and Roth both highlight is not just the alienation from the Gentile America that they are expected to aspire to but they also suffer isolation from what they **have been told** is, or rather should be, their own culture by sources that are not just Jewish. This process of apparent acculturation does not necessarily mean that Jewish authors lose all sense of Jewish identity. As Edward Abramson comments of Jewish authors:

American Jews though they have largely accepted American cultural values, have yet produced major novelists who appear to represent a distinctive tradition. Even so, their preoccupations have ceased to be purely Jewish; instead they have become effective literary spokesmen for educated urban men in contemporary America. There is an obvious compatibility between the witty, sophisticated temperament which marks many modern Jewish fictions and the sense of smart alienation of the bourgeois American intelligentsia. <sup>78</sup>

It is this sense of alienation that was once seen to be the prerogative of the 'other' that the schlemiel denies in many ways. By using the schlemiel and by this character sometimes succeeding he becomes an overall winner. This very action raises the profile of the contemporary Jew and the schlemiel becomes subversive. Anger is not Allen's technique and whilst not appropriate to a feature length film it fits well with the desperate character of Alexander Portnoy. It would seem that the schlemiel is one character that whilst associated with Jewishness is one that

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<sup>77</sup> Woody Allen - cited in Sam Grigus - The Films of Woody Allen (1993) - Cambridge, Cambridge University Press - 1993 - p.112 (My emphasis) In this statement Allen shows all the signs of the schlemiel, but is aware of that status. As has been discussed, Kleinman is not the schlimazel that he first appears, there is clear evidence that he is concerned about his own hand in his downfall and this relegates him to the status of schlemiel, although with a definite absence of luck. It is 'I' who fails to understand, specifically locating it with the individuals. The note of pity exists with both characters but it is the inevitability of the fate of the schlimazel that is missing from Kleinman, the distinction is blurred and this heightens the sense of empathy.

<sup>78</sup> Edward A. Abramson - The Immigrant Experience in American Literature (1982) - Durham, British Association for American Studies (Pamphlet 10) - 1982 - p.36

has also integrated with society as whole. This clearly indicates that when the schlemiel does not have a strong religious faith there still exists a strong belief. In Shadows and Fog, it is in magic, in Hannah and Her Sisters, it is medicine, and in Crimes and Misdemeanours, it is psychoanalysis and philosophy. In Oedipus Wrecks, it is in the inevitability that he will remain subjugated under his mother's rule. For Portnoy the mother is the figure he is trying to escape and it is only by placing his faith in his analyst that he sees a way out. The ironic statement at the end undermines this:

#### PUNCHLINE

'So' {said the doctor} 'Now vee may perhaps to begin. Yes?''<sup>79</sup>

The contrast here is directly between the mother of the 'Mama-Loshen' and the perceived requirements of Gentile America. The 'melting-pot' does not result in everyone coming out of the same mould. For Portnoy, and Mills like him, the result is to split groups between two cultures, the minority culture grasping for some recognition against the dominant. It is clear that these groups have made moves to reassert their own status within films such as David Mamet's Homicide, but they still exist outside the Hollywood norm. The distinction remains cultural, not religious. Religion does not even have to provide the basis for guilt, as can be seen with Oedipus Wrecks and Portnoy's Complaint. It is vital to note that these issues are never even raised in texts such as The Cohens and the Kellys, where the characters remain innocent but are located firmly within their own communities. They stand outside the realities of experience of Gentile America. Hyman Kaplan remains innocent but as a first generation immigrant the issue of division between two cultures never arises. His faith in the American system is unshakable, the confusion and alienation that others may come to feel is left for later generations. This is clearly seen in the second generation Zelig and the third generation Portnoy and Mills.

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<sup>79</sup> Op.Cit. - Roth - 1986 - p.250

To look upon Allen as a representative of Jewishness and Jewish culture is to place too much responsibility on a person who is a filmmaker. He is a Jew who remains without religion and a filmmaker who is able to construct and use references as he chooses. Allen's choice of Jewishness as a theme is not arbitrary. However, when he appears on the screen his physical Jewishness is apparent and viewers references made in relation to this are unavoidable. That is where the problem lies, should Allen and his contemporaries be held accountable to a Jewish tradition and a Jewish culture? Placing Jewish authors in a diachronic tradition is limiting. This assertion suggests that they owe everything to a culture to which they might only partly relate. T.S. Eliot argued that 'no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone.'<sup>80</sup> Allen takes references from many sources, not just Jewish-American texts but American and European texts of many kinds and genres. Allen comments on this himself:

One still cannot take those things too seriously, they're still jokes. They're interesting from a Freudian point of view in that they may or may not reveal something, and that something they do reveal - if they do reveal anything - is arguable as to what it is. **But to put too much weight on jokes, or even art in general has always been a mistake.** <sup>81</sup>

The fact remains that people do place importance on them. This is perhaps more of a comment on Allen's own perspective rather than the real importance of jokes and art. Humour is after all the central to Jewish folklore and the schlemiel.

What assimilation implies is complete integration, but what the characters of Kaplan, Portnoy, the Cohens and Zelig show is rejection. The only possible way to avoid being perpetually considered the 'other' is through the process of acculturation. This is an attempt to move the responsibility

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<sup>80</sup> T.S. Eliot - Tradition and the Individual Talent - in David Lodge - 20th Century Literary Criticism (1988) - Harlow, Longman 1988 - p.72

<sup>81</sup> Op.Cit. - Woody Allen - *cited in Romney* - 1994 - p.9 (My emphasis)

on to the individual, for example to make it wrong to sound or look like an immigrant. The oppositional forces that come from the rest of America certainly make this a difficult process if indeed it can be considered an acceptable one for the individual. However, this process is something that (in contemporary terms) does not just apply to the immigrant, theoretically it should apply to anyone who is 'different'. The object of section three is to examine whether textual representations of the experience of the 'other' in the late twentieth century attempt to promote and celebrate these differences. It is crucial to emphasise that the schlemiel becomes the only character maintaining stability in life.

Before detailing any effect of potential assimilation or acculturation and the process that this involves, it is essential to examine how the character of the schlemiel functions both within written and visual texts and also how these characters may be interpreted and received. This examination of how an audience might receive and interpret these texts is vital. What must be examined is how character functions within literary and filmic texts as the two dominant mediums prior to the advent of television. What is also of prime importance is how the character of the schlemiel might be defined and interpreted in literature in relation to other narrative functions, such as the author. Definitions will also be affected in film with other associated narrative functions, such as the writer, the director, the stars and the role of the movie heads. Only when these areas of debate have been analysed can the wider social function of the schlemiel be debated in texts that are considered both Jewish and non-Jewish. It is these detailed narrative readings which lead to an examination of the schlemiel as a representative of a contemporary Western human condition in relation to debates surrounding identity, cultural location and religious belief.

The Schlemiel and Anomie: The Fool in Society

Section Two:

Finding Order from Chaos?

The Schlemiel and Anomie: The Fool in Society

**Chapter Two:**

**The Origins of Character Analysis in Narrative Study**

Character has always played a dominant role in narrative analysis, but the study of character in its traditional form remained unchallenged until recent times. The very concept of a fictional character is difficult to contain and the notion of what constitutes character has always created problems. Character studies were carried out as if characters were a people divorced from their fictional existence within the text. It is far too easy simply to relate what appear to be a character's historical origins but this yields nothing more than speculation and a desperate grasping for some coherent traits across fictions of many kinds; traits which may be subject to change across modes of interpretation, time and also cultural and even geographic differences in location. Chapter one provides some basic speculative information as to the possible origins of what is perceived to be the character of the schlemiel specifically, but does not come to any clear conclusions: in fact it could never hope to do so. Much work that has been done on the schlemiel and indeed much work that has been done on character in general fails to construct a model by which to study character alone, and never debates the potential impossibility of ever doing so.

A great deal of work has however been carried out by Russian Formalist and Structuralist theorists on narrative, within which the role of character tends to be seen as secondary to other narrative functions. If providing a working model is found to be an impossibility, rather than negating any prior study, it further opens up the potential for characters to be interpreted and subsequently created in many different ways; depending upon the reader and author, and their socio-cultural and geographical location. Although much of the introductory and background work on character is Narratological in origin, and therefore reductive, it does provide an essential terminology for further analysis of narrative structure and character in fiction, film and other texts.<sup>1</sup> It cannot be ignored as a theoretical approach; it is an essential precursor to any further discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'text' in recent years has become problematic and has fallen under the scrutiny of theorists. To try and limit the range of 'texts' that these various theoretical approaches can refer to is

What becomes vital in the case of this study is an investigation into how the character of the schlemiel has developed to the point it is at now and how the character in question operates in contemporary society. What cannot and must not be ignored in this study of the current trends in character analysis is how the schlemiel interacts with the reader of the text and how the rhetoric of criticism reflects this two way process. This interaction with the reader must after all be the primary concern in the analysis of the essential purpose of, or need for a character. Although it may seem too reductive and structured to devote distinct sections to the literary and filmic, it must be remembered that the two are very different mediums and if any comparable study of character is possible across two textual forms then it is only going to be evident after separate considered analysis in the first instance. In consideration of these theoretical areas, it is necessary, in this chapter, to limit exemplification from literary texts. This will allow more detailed analysis of specific examples in later chapters. Isaac Bashevis Singer's short story 'Gimpel the Fool', is an eminently applicable choice for primary analysis due to its critically determined long standing reputation as a piece of 'schlemiel literature'. It is also essential to deal with non-Jewish literature from the beginning to break from the traditional view that schlemiels appear in fictions produced by one socio-cultural or religious group. The Jewish example breaks with mere religious considerations and moves to a cultural formation, although the base of all Jewish societies is undoubtedly religious in origin. Singer, as a first generation immigrant writer working in the Yiddish language and often writing about the Shtetl culture of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe, is perhaps the most critically acclaimed Jewish-American author, fitting much of the 'first phase' immigrant characteristics. Gimpel is in turn perhaps one of the most celebrated and one of the most archetypically schlemiel-keit characters in existence.<sup>2</sup> It would seem fitting that in any close analysis of the schlemiel, particularly with

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impossible and limiting. For the purpose of this particular study it is essential to set parameters, in this case to novel and film.

<sup>2</sup> Although it appears contradictory at this stage to take this character on face value and on the advice of others to be particularly schlemiel-like it is the very fact that Gimpel has been and still is considered in this way that makes him such a valuable character for analysis.



the perception that the schlemiel is purely a Jewish creation in mind, the most revered schlemiel story in the Jewish canon should be chosen. It must also be remembered that the term schlemiel, although being of Eastern European Jewish origin is merely the most convenient way of defining the character at this stage, prior to a more detailed analysis of the operations of the character in a wider cultural context, beyond Jewish references and perhaps beyond expected fictions. Although 'Gimpel the Fool' is to be used for primary analysis, this does not negate the use of other texts where applicable. It is the comparative analysis of both Jewish and non-Jewish texts that will ultimately demonstrate the impossibility of fixing characters so simply and reductively.

The question remains as to whether all characters can be analysed in the same way or whether schlemiels are a unique example. In many cases the reader of a novel will often be far more interested in what a character 'is like' rather than the function s/he plays within a text. For example, Gimpel's reaction to his domestic situation is far more vital on the level of reading than is his role within Jewish culture, or even as a part of Singer's work as a whole. Of course, this is outside the cloistered cells of academic institutions, but the theory can never be divorced from the practice, from the act of reading. This form of 'three dimensional' inquiry is often seen to be irrelevant to plot and often almost impossible to consider. As Michael Toolan states:

It is a paradox ... that the one dimension that attracts so many readers and listeners to novels and short stories in the first place - a revelatory portraiture of character and personal motive, the refreshingly distinct views of their world of different individuals - is they are apparently least amenable to systematic analysis.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Michael J. Toolan - Narrative: a Critical Linguistic Introduction (1988) - London, Routledge - 1988 - p.90

In attempting a study of this kind it is essential to work through the models relating to character that have already been constructed to define parameters within which to work. Detailed analysis of the methods needs careful consideration in the specific case of the schlemiel. Otherwise, the reductive statement that 'characters are least amenable to systematic analysis' cannot be made. The question must be raised that in any totalising theoretical stance it be seen that characters should be at best sidelined or at worst ignored because they do not fit patterns or are 'hard to deal with'.

The initial point that is essential to make is the (rather obvious) statement that characters in novels are not real people. However, the act of reading is invariably based on the reader bringing to the text a series of socially determined criteria by which to define a character (as an archetype and as an individual). This is where the conception of character divides between the ontological and Structuralist, between characters as 'real people' and characters as nothing more than words on a page or as products of a language. This process of 'cultural determinism' also works in what might be dangerously termed an external reality.<sup>4</sup> In the act of reading 'real' people who exist in an external reality, a sense of history and 'being' has to be imposed upon them in order to understand how they have reached the position in which they are found. Therefore, comprehension can be seen to come from the individual being exposed or exposing themselves to the text. (The distinction between the two is important to any consideration of reception.) The first reading of a text is equivalent to first meeting another person. For example, imagine you were listening to a conversation in which was said:

'My wife had a child today, but I'm sure I'm not the father.'

'Don't be stupid, your wife would never be unfaithful to you.'

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<sup>4</sup> Although to a Structuralist the term 'external reality' may hold no fears in these days of a debate surrounding the blurring of boundaries between the fictional and factual and loss of definition of both terms into hyperreality it is safer to show the problems as they arise. Jean Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality is more fitting in relation to film and mass media, but its application to literary texts is something that requires further investigation and will be dealt with subsequently.

'But I've been out of the country for the last eighteen months, alone.'<sup>5</sup>

The resulting effect of filling in the details and then comprehending the cultural and geographic location and the implications of the conversation would have much the same effect as reading:

'Do you think this is the way to use an orphan?' I said. 'You have borne a bastard.'

She answered. 'Drive this foolishness out of your head. The child is yours.'

'How can he be mine?' I argued. 'He was born seventeen weeks after the wedding.'<sup>6</sup>

In this particular case, 'I' may be interpreted as a fool based on a reader's prior knowledge of Gimpel, or Gimpel may be interpreted and validated in terms of 'I'; the two narratives work together. An audience would have to know with whom did his wife conceive, did she have an affair, was it an immaculate conception, generally why, etc., ad infinitum. The narrative has to be completed if there is no clear sense of closure or merely 'gaps' in the story. In this instance, it is probable that less information would be available about or rather from 'I' that could be gained by reading further on in 'Gimpel the Fool'. Although this may appear to compound the problem further, it does highlight the difficulty in distinguishing between the real and the imaginary, between fictional character and real character. Through the act of reading, characters are transformed into real people in the same way that real people are often based upon fictional assumptions. Toolan confirms this idea in summarising that approach of many theorists:

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<sup>5</sup> This example relates to the subsequent quotation from 'Gimpel the Fool', but any speech act would have a similar effect. There is a problem created by this itself being now written, but this is unfortunately unavoidable. The type of language that is used in verbal communication is variable and contextual but is not the same as the language used in written fictions. The act of reading recognises that change in medium and therefore the change in convention that accompanies it, of language in this case.

<sup>6</sup> Isaac Bashevis Singer - 'Gimpel the Fool' (trans. Saul Bellow) in The Collected Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer (1953) - London, Penguin 1982 - p.7

[If] we think of the semiotic constructedness of people, things, and non-fictional texts as of the same order as the semiotic constructedness of novels, then we may come to see a middle way ... where art and the rest of life are both seen as **representational**.<sup>7</sup>

The novel cannot replicate life but exists along the same plane, with characters 'being' in the same way, and being representational but never 'real'. As if to confirm this from the opposing side of the quill Aristotle notes that '[It is a] fact that beginners succeed earlier with the Diction and Characters than with the construction of a story'.<sup>8</sup> This statement is telling about the necessary human emotions that precede even the act of creating a text. This is not to say that characters have some implicit depth in their own right. The point of debate is that it is in the act of reading that people perceive them as having both a surface and a depth in the same way we perceive others and ourselves as having an inherent depth.<sup>9</sup> As Todorov notes of theory in general and perhaps more specifically his own brand of narrative analysis:

Things begin to change somewhat with the Renaissance, in several regards. First of all, Aristotle's Poetics is exhumed and made to play a role comparable to that of holy writ: works of poetics will now be nothing more, so to speak, than commentaries on the Poetics!<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Op.Cit.. - Toolan - 1988 - p.93 - (My emphasis) - It is the **representational** that will become of paramount importance in subsequent discussion.

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle - The Art of Poetry [or Poetics] - (translated by Ingram Bywater 1920) - Oxford, Oxford University Press - 1988 - p.38 - (My emphasis) - The use of the term succeed is interesting in its implication that character is one of the easiest aspects to relate to, to comprehend. Future references will refer to the text as Poetics, its more common reference and title.

<sup>9</sup> This aspect of modern theoretical and philosophical thought is the mainstay of much academic Narratological study up to the present. However, it is this Cartesian distinction between subject and object as being part of the perceptual facet that the reader will have that must be the prime concern when studying how characters of both the order of the 'real' and the imaginary operate.

<sup>10</sup> Tzvetan Todorov - Introduction to Poetics - (1967 - translated by Richard Howard) - Sussex, The Harvester Press Limited - 1981 - p.xxiv (preface)

Todorov might have included the Enlightenment as developing the ideas of the classical age alongside the others he mentions. This would seem imperative in terms of not just an awareness of these ideas but also an absolute trust in their validity and accuracy. From the statement made by Aristotle it can be seen that characters (*ethos*) have to be developed prior to the plot and therefore are the carriers of emotion, the holders of intratextual thought and the controllers of plot (*mythos*) although this lies in contradiction to Aristotle.<sup>11</sup> The implication is again that they exist as real people, capable of carrying events in a diachronic fashion, just as people in 'reality' perceive themselves as doing. It is impossible to comprehend narrative structure without placing individuals within that narrative, without 'being in the world'.<sup>12</sup> It seems paradoxical for Aristotle to then continue to claim that 'the first essential, the life and soul, so to speak, ... is the Plot; and that Characters come second.'<sup>13</sup> However, in the act of reading people view character's thoughts as existing in some kind of external reality and therefore they are part of the plot: the two are inextricably linked.<sup>14</sup> The schlemiel is essentially a comic character, and Aristotle's *Poetics* gives no guidelines as he claims that the action (*praxis*) is the most important feature of any text and that this action is singular <sup>this</sup> denies the reader's bestowal of three-dimensional characteristics on any of the featured characters. The influence of Aristotle

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<sup>11</sup> The term *intratextual* is used to denote within the text, but also it will become evident that this also refers to outside the text. The term has been used in the right context but now it has been broadened to incorporate not just how narratives in other fictional mediums operate, but how all narratives operates.

<sup>12</sup> The phrase 'being in the world' is in this case applicable to narrative and character study, but stems from the work of Martin Heidegger. It is a concept that has not previously been connected with the study of character and analysis of this concept will be dealt with in more depth later.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. - p.49 - The interconnectedness of fiction with life is something that cannot be ignored. Once read who could imagine the world without a Gimpel or for that matter without an Allen or a DeNiro. Although the importance of the name is essentially subjective it is none-the-less important as a wider conception of the function of any character, or indeed any perceived character type.

<sup>14</sup> It would mean involving huge and irreconcilable philosophical quandaries to even begin to discuss the existential existence of characters. The point must however remain that for the period of engagement with a narrative the individual reader will still be investing in the text and in the characters a personal emotive response. They have been brought into being and will remain so in a constantly revised way each time the same text is read, criticism is read or the text discussed with someone else. Perhaps more pertinently these textual characters will feature when a similar text is read or even when a similar event occurs in an 'external reality'. The reader will have interacted with the characters in exactly the same way they would have done with anyone else. Perhaps with a little more interest and commitment.

and his linking of character and plot and the subsequent prioritisation of action can be seen in the critical writings of the twentieth century, particularly in the work of Henry James.<sup>15</sup> On another level subsequent study into action and plot sees the structure of narrative (for Aristotle beginning, middle and end) as giving the action the room to develop into a plot. Characters play an essential part in giving structure to action, on the part of the reader, and seemingly on the part of the author.<sup>16</sup> It is just as possible to claim that without characters there will be no plot, just a series of events. The implication is always that characters are indispensable. Character is wholly tied up with narrative and is an inherent part of narrative form, not just as a sideline or structuring agent but also as the catalyst of plot. It is important to consider the implications of the term narrative in its widest context:

The narratives of the world are without number. In the first place the word 'narrative' covers an enormous variety of genres which are themselves divided up between different subjects, as if any material was suitable for the composition of the narrative: the narrative may incorporate articulate language, spoken or written; pictures, still or moving; gestures and the ordered arrangement of all these ingredients ... the narrative is present at all times, in all places, in all societies; the history of narrative begins with the history of mankind; there does not exist and has never existed a people without narratives.<sup>17</sup>

In light of Barthes' comment, it is the case that narrative and the understanding of how narrative operates is no longer merely an abstract concept; the narrative is the key to knowledge, the holder of ideology. Character is an indispensable part of the narrative and brings the narrative

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<sup>15</sup> Henry James - Selected Literary Criticism (1963) - London, Penguin - 1963 (edited by Morris Shapira) - Chapter Eight, 'The Art of Fiction' (1884) - P.78-97. As James notes

'What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?' - p.88.

<sup>16</sup> It is the consistent or inconsistent behaviour of a character in earlier sections of a text that may ultimately lead a text to develop and conclude in the particular way it does.

<sup>17</sup> Roland Barthes - Introduction to the Structural Analysis of the Narrative - Birmingham, The University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Stenciled Occasional Paper, General Series - Communications No.8, 1966 - p.1

back into the realm of the recognisable, back into the realm of the human. Barthes claim that 'there has never existed a people without narrative's begs the question has there ever existed a narrative without people, in terms of characters or narrators, or both. Narratives are no longer purely modes of representation, they are a mode of understanding with character and particularly characterisation as essential parts in the process of comprehension, 'the history of narrative begins with the history of mankind'. It is also essential to note that 'the narrative scorns division into categories of good and bad literature: transcending national, historical, cultural barriers, the narrative is there where life is'.<sup>18</sup> Understanding narrative and character is an essential part of comprehension, beyond the literary, beyond the filmic. It resides in every part of human interaction, it is a part of how we recognise the world around us, and it is an essential part of how we understand ourselves. This process of interaction with and interpretation of the world reduces everything to 'textual' narrative analysis.

If the narrative is there where life is then character is also there where life is. As an essential mode of comprehension, the two are inseparable. Character brings the narrative back into the realm of the human; character brings the narrative back into 'being' via this process of interaction. The study of how narratives operate denies any value judgments on any given texts, but it is narratives that inform our judgment on the world by giving a sense of completeness and continuation.<sup>19</sup> However, in terms of the literary, whilst character may not have been an essential part of the systematic and structural analysis of the plot, characters are in fact a fundamental part of the process of narrative comprehension of a text, beyond their role as mere *actants* of a plot.<sup>20</sup> Without being able to relate characters to ourselves and without creating a

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. - p.1 - (My emphasis) - At this stage in his argument Barthes does not attempt to impose structure on narrative but uses it in a broader sense. Barthes analysis tends to be less reductive than other Structuralists (Propp, Shlovsky, Griemas, Todorov, etc.) but there still remains an imposition of structure.

<sup>19</sup> The idea essentially being that one event follows another; connections might not naturally be there. In fact it is us that make them.

<sup>20</sup> Actants in the sense of being functional purely to the development of plot rather than existing as separate entities, and sustaining their own category for analysis. This idea which has been central to critics

• world for them to live in they do not exist, either as words on the page, images on the screen, or in front of our eyes. Often the location is the same or is visualised as being the same as ours.

Although the previous discussion has tended towards the ontological, it is essential to devote some attention to what has been the dominant form of narrative character analysis. Although characters may be perceived by the reader as truly existing, Structuralist theoretical investigation has limited the study of character. If Jonathan Culler's statement, that to Structuralists characters are myths, is taken as representative then there is nowhere else to develop to. Characters in written narratives do not exist beyond two dimensions, but this is perceptually not the case<sup>21</sup> Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan is therefore correct in her assertion that:

whereas the study of the story's events and the links among them has been developed considerably ... that of character has not. Indeed, the elaboration of a systematic, non-reductive but also non-impressionistic theory of character remains one of the challenges poetics has not yet met.<sup>22</sup>

The question as to why it has not been an area of analysis, which has been adequately dealt with within the field of narrative study, is a topic itself. A large part of the problem is the wide ranging and irreconcilable perspectives that exist on character, that do not (for the most part) relate to each other. The reason that Rimmon-Kenan seems to have overlooked is that a poetics for character is unreachable (particularly in light of certain Post-structural and Postmodern theories which deny such neat boxes of theory).<sup>23</sup> It would seem appropriate in light of this that

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for centuries stems from nothing more than subjective speculation. A subjective viewpoint which may have come from nothing more than speculation.

<sup>21</sup> Jonathan Culler - *Structuralist Poetics* (1975) - London, Routledge and Keegan Paul - 1975 - p.230

<sup>22</sup> Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan - *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (1983) - London, Routledge - 1993 - p.29

<sup>23</sup> Although it's importance should not be underestimated I use the term Postmodern guardedly at this stage and do not imply that it can be treated as a homogenous and coherent body of work along the lines of other 'theoretical' approaches.



narrative study should reconcile itself to the fact that there may never be one single model that can be provided by which to study character. Perhaps a *dialogic* response is the only one that will ever fit, although this in itself does not fix meaning conclusively, but contextually which may be the closest that is possible.<sup>24</sup>

Aristotle's ascribed traits seem highly influential on early character study and need to be dealt with before any development of character analysis. He ascribes four main functions to characters:

first ... they shall be good. There will be ... a certain moral purpose. The second point is to make them appropriate. The third is to make them like the reality. The fourth is to make them consistent and the same throughout.<sup>25</sup>

Implicit within a Structuralist approach, is the idea that a particular character in one narrative will have some coherent traits that can be ascribed to all characters. The origins of Formalism and Structuralist analysis of character can once again be traced back to Aristotle's Poetics and his assertion that traits are ascribed to conform with the action prior to any form of characterisation on the part of the author. In Narratological terms, the process of characterisation is reducible to the traits that are attributable via the narrator in direct telling or via indirect information. (For example, from an interior monologue or stream-of-consciousness or from a simple third person narration.) Aristotle's analysis never questions the role of the author and never questions the potential differences between author and narrator. Ascribing a specific identity to the narrator as controlling voice is an issue that needs to be considered.

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<sup>24</sup> *Dialogic* in the sense of multi-vocal, developing from the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, and in particular, Discourse in the Novel in The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays (translation: Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist - 1981) - Austin, University of Texas - 1981

<sup>25</sup> Op.Cit. - Aristotle - 1988 - pp.55-56

Determining the character's function within a narrative becomes of paramount importance in this instance. This then leads to a reduction of character to the role of characters as actants rather than as individual entities in their own right. This form of thinking was propounded by theorists such as Vladimir Propp who ascribed similar functions to character as those proposed by Aristotle. In these terms characters form the linking threads to the story (*fabula*). Whilst Propp's is a potential tool for analysis it remains highly reductive. Propp's focus was on the Russian folktale, a form of narrative clearly distinct from 'schlemiel literature or Yiddish folktales.

It is clearly the case that the reader requires at most empathy with, or at least understanding of certain characters within the text. There is a necessity for emotional attachment, for characters as 'real' people although this attachment does not always have to be positive; this implies consistently recognizable traits rather than characteristics. If Aristotle's claim that the agent should have some form of moral elevation were to be seen as true then a great deal of contemporary fiction would be negated. By following his Talmudic teachings, Gimpel maintains a form of moral elevation, but it is to the detriment of his general domestic situation. What is of paramount importance to this aspect of Gimpel is his and the reader's relationship with God, the God of the Talmud or Gimpel's own interpretation of God's will. The conception of Gimpel as a fool hinges on the reader's perception of the role of God in determining his actions. Although it is a generalisation to say it, it is arguably the case that a reader with a culturally determined perception and understanding of the God of Judaism and the Talmud will still perceive Gimpel as a fool in believing his wife, but will also see him as morally correct in staying with her. He will remain morally correct for remaining true to his convictions despite the origins of his dominant faith.

The grave waits and the worms are hungry; the shrouds are prepared - I carry them in my beggar's sack ... when the time comes I will go joyfully ... God be praised: there even Gimpel cannot be deceived.<sup>26</sup>

In an overall conception of Gimpel as a schlemiel, it is important to remember that Gimpel, accepts all that life has thrown at him, but his faith remains unshakable. **He still maintains belief.**<sup>27</sup>

The reader who believes in the God or Gods of another religion with no understanding of or exposure to the Judeo-Christianic modes of morality may see Gimpel as fool in all his actions. Therefore, the central focaliser within a text may often not always have any fixed moral elevation. Think, for example, of Malamud's *Fidelman*, or in a wider cultural context, Barthelme's *Arthur*, Conrad's *Kurtz*, Irving's *Meany*, Goethe's *Faust*, Buchan's *Hannay* or Lowry's *Consul*. For example, as a central character it is debatable as to whether the Consul can be seen as moral in any sense, due to his alcoholism; although some critics maintain he is in some sense elevated above all the other characters in his personal exploration of the depths of alcoholism. Kurtz could be perceived as retaining a moral high ground by his belief that what he is doing is correct, certainly up to the point of his death. The character of Richard Hannay undoubtedly retains some moral high ground of a positive kind throughout a series of novels. This elevation comes from both first person intradiegetic narrators as well as the extradiegetic narrator. This moral superiority is contextual, as a reader in the late twentieth century it is debatable as to whether he is morally superior or an ultra right-wing nationalist. What is different about schlemiels is that they are almost excused this divergence from the norms of society because they have no strong link to those norms in the first place. Contextually we might forgive Hannay, the problem would never arise with schlemiels. Their essential

<sup>26</sup> Op.Cit. - Singer - 1982 - p.14

<sup>27</sup> It is this aspect that will be developed in subsequent chapters in relation to the collapse of meta-narratives in contemporary society.

foolishness lets them get away with the kind of social blunders for which any other character type would be chastised. This is not to forget that the schlemiel is almost never arrogant, so the path of forgiveness and acceptance on the part of the reader is made easier. A more overt example in relation to the Jewish schlemiel is when Fidelman manages to sleep with the artist he so desires by playing on her neurosis and by immorally assuming the garments and role of a Catholic priest; immoral of course by Western Judeo-Christianic principles:

She grabbed his knees. 'Help me, Father, for Christ's sake.' ...  
 'The penance,' she wailed, 'first the penance.' ...  
 'In that case,' Fidelman said, shuddering a little, 'better undress.'  
 'Only,' Annamaria said, 'if you keep your vestments on.' ...  
 Annamaria undressed in a swoop. Her body was extraordinarily lovely, the flesh glowing. In her bed they tightly embraced. She clasped his buttocks, he cupped hers. Pumping slowly he nailed her to the cross.<sup>28</sup>

Fidelman is essentially displaying a disregard for what would be considered the norms of society in both his flagrant mis-use of religious clothing and in the seduction, which plays upon Annamaria's neurosis. Fidelman can be forgiven, because he remains true to his character because of his schlemiel-keit characteristics. The eponymous character in John Irving's A Prayer for Owen Meany displays many of the same character traits as the Jewish schlemiel and yet this character is firmly rooted in the Christian faith, although he admittedly shifts between denominations.<sup>29</sup> For example, Meany's relocation of Dr. Dodder's car to the school hall as vengeance on his nemesis, the Headmaster, is justified in these religious terms:

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<sup>28</sup> Bernard Malamud - Pictures of Fidelman : An Exhibition (1969) - London, Penguin - 1972 - p.52

<sup>29</sup> John Irving - A Prayer for Owen Meany (1989) - London, Black Swan, 1993 - Although Owen Meany may be very strongly associated with the Christian religion, and very much with non-Catholic denominations he is still endowed with some kind of strong faith along the lines of the Gimpel. He is free to do as he pleases because he maintains a strong justification; albeit a very personal one.

It was after morning meeting before I had chance to speak to Owen Meany.  
 'I don't suppose you had anything to do with all of that?' I asked him.  
 'FAITH AND PRAYER' he said. 'FAITH AND PRAYER - THEY WORK,  
 THEY REALLY DO.'<sup>30</sup>

The effectiveness of prayer in this instance is not conclusive; it is Owen Meany who decides his own future, but does so in the absolute belief that God is guiding him. What this does highlight is the problem of claiming that characters should retain moral elevation. Conceptions of what constitutes morality are subjective and the reading of character as being moral is invariably based upon the reader's socially and culturally determined being and where and how the reader culturally, temporally and socially locates the characters in question. However, Aristotle's claims are directed towards all agents within a fable, Gimpel's wife is the character who retains little moral elevation in her ungracious cuckolding of Gimpel and her deception.

Fidelman's 'rebirth' as a priest is not an act of foolishness on his part, and indeed is not in keeping with his role as a schlemiel. Without this deviation from, and incongruity with, the norms of behaviour the tale would have no comic effect to maintain his schlemiel-keit status. It is this aspect that once again draws attention to Aristotle's initial thesis where his conception of characterisation and character traits remains reductive and conflicting. On the one hand, he states that all characters exist as actants but only ascribes the above 'essential' traits to the *agents*.<sup>31</sup> He prioritises the characters that move the events along and ignores all other characters that do not fit so neatly into this system – the schlemiel being an example of this operation.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. - p.412 - The use of capital letters is Irving's and their use emphasises the 'unique' nature of Owen Meany's voice.

<sup>31</sup> The term *agents* in this case being taken from the *Poetics*, and referring to what Aristotle calls the main characters within the tale, definitions beyond this from the aforementioned text are unclear, but have been elevated to the status of fact.

The notion of *stock characters* is one that needs to be mentioned in the debate around character, characterisation and traits. Stock characters are more commonly associated with comedy and more specifically in their early form with Menippian satire and later the Commedia dell Arte, although Stock characters also feature in contemporary visual mediums as well. Discussion of this type of character (in relation to the theorising of character and humour) is something that needs to be considered in more detail. The point to be debated is whether characters actually exist as archetypes, as recurrent forms of stock character or whether they have types imposed upon them in order for them to be conceptualised and explained by the reader, the critic or the theorist. Whether there can be any such thing as stock characters that do not change from one story to the next is something that needs to be considered as a general principle of all texts rather than merely as of one broad character type. What does not change is the fact that the narrative still cannot exist without the character in the same way the character cannot exist without plot. To Structuralists these characters are never defined in psychological terms as people, but this begs the question as to whether this is impossible or whether it merely exists outside the imposed structure from the perspective of the critics, not the author. As Seymour Chatman comments on one of the functions of narrative in relation to this issue:

To me the question of 'priority' or 'dominance' is not meaningful. Stories only exist where both events and existents occur. There cannot be events without existents. And though it is true that a text can have existents without events (a portrait, a descriptive essay), no one would think of calling it a narrative.<sup>32</sup>

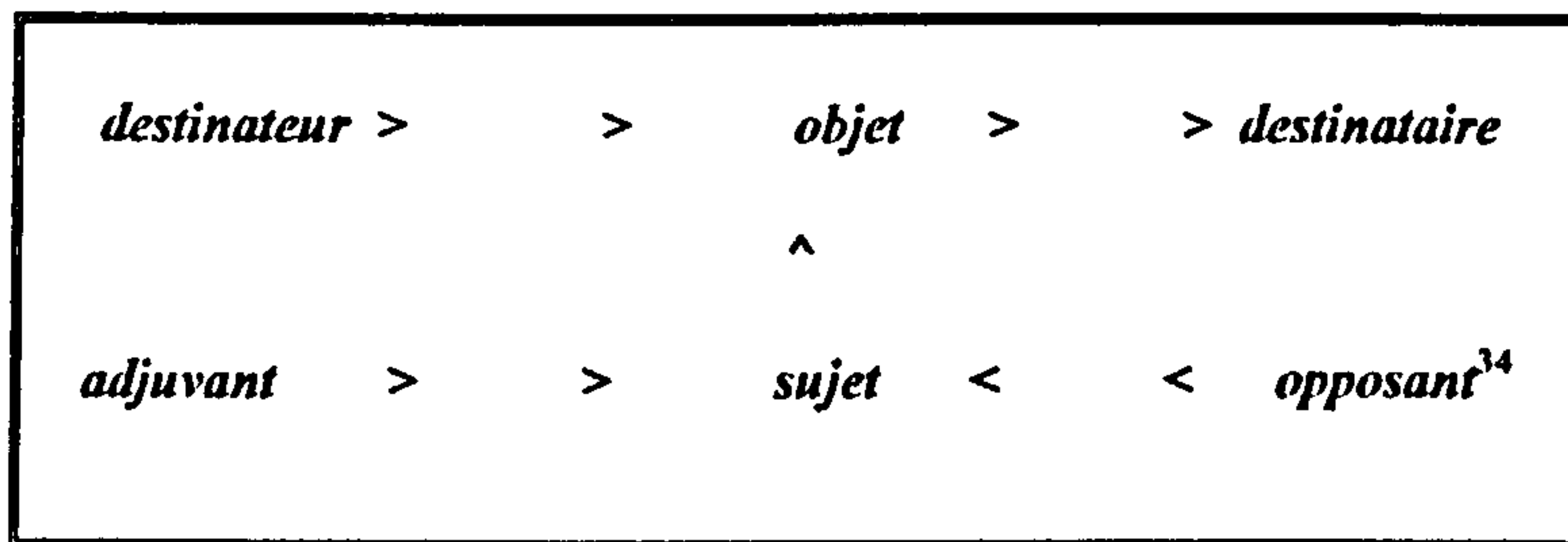
Chatman's statement that stories are an interaction between character, action and event is accurate; to attempt to prioritise is limiting and ultimately reductive. However, he does not develop the argument of the potential psychological nature of character in relation to formalist and essentially Proppian modes of analysis. To admit this psychological facet of character

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<sup>32</sup> Seymour Chatman - Story and Discourse : Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film (1978) - London, Cornell University Press - 1980 - p.113 - (My emphasis)

would completely negate the Aristotelian, formalist and subsequently Structuralist notion of character as myth. Still inherent within Chatman's comment, particularly in relation to the portrait, is the notion that the author is somehow still the sole creator of character.<sup>33</sup> The reader of a text, even a single still image, has the potential to create the three or even four dimensions (in the sense of time) surrounding any text.

A.J. Greimas does little to move beyond a narrow view of characters as nothing more than actants. His development of Proppian analysis does nothing but reduce these categories further, to:



In this case, the *destinataire* and the *sujet* have the same function, although seemingly (by Greimas' own definitions) they should then play different roles within the structure of a narrative. The table presented by Greimas links the character functions thematically along the syntagmatic axis, which potentially explains the duplicated actant trait of *destinataire* and *sujet* but does not explain the linking of the *desinateur* and *destinataire* adequately. In the case of the cuckolded Gimpel he becomes the receiver of instructions to be carried out, as hero. The sender of the instructions (these instructions being to stay with his wife) come from either the Rabbi or from Gimpel's own foolishness; or even from his own commitment to the notion of family or the Talmudic teachings he is 'compelled' to follow. In following this pattern, only one

<sup>33</sup> At this point it is not necessary to differentiate between the real author, implied author and narrator as Chatman later does. His statement implies a vague entity termed 'author', without question.

<sup>34</sup> A rough translation would give the roles as follows: *destinateur* - sender; *objet* - object; *destinataire* - receiver; *adjuvant* - helper; *sujet* - subject; *opposant* - opponent.

of the four instances mentioned exists outside Gimpel's own psyche. These traits then are not always so fixed; they exist as a function beyond simple single character referents. To return to Aristotle's idea that the agent must retain some moral elevation, Gimpel's morality is dependent on an external character, God, who is central to the narrative structure of events, but does not exist as a character with ascribable and therefore 'physical' traits. However, without the corporal and existential presence of God as an entity Gimpel's own actions could not be qualified. If he were purely an actant he could not operate. The non-presence of a character does not negate <sup>his or her</sup> subsequent characterisation. In the case of God, it is straightforward; everybody has some kind of conception of God and as will become evident, this reader interpretation of what constitutes 'God' is liable to affect an individual interpretation of a character's status; in this instance of Gimpel as a schlemiel. This form of characterisation also occurs with Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot. Godot never appears in the tale, and yet is characterised by the internal characters and subsequently by the reader.

Barthes provides a more workable model for narrative analysis in that it is the least reductive and consequentially the most vague in its definitions, thus allowing for wider interpretation. He retains the functions on which Propp and Greimas base their whole theory. However, rather than actions being related to characters (as actants) these actions are mediated by the characters to confirm overall cohesion within the narrative structure. Barthes is also the first to seriously consider the important factor of narration, or rather who directs the discourse. He is also the first to attempt an inclusion of the very notion of discourse within a structured pattern, thus developing narrative study beyond a simple series of fixed patterns, but he still maintains they are ultimately definable in the terms of Propp, Greimas and Todorov:

It is proposed that one should distinguish ... three levels ... the level of the function ... (Propp) ... the level of the actions (in the sense in which Greimas uses the word when he speaks of characters as actants [those who perform



actions]) and the level of the narration (which is loosely, the level of the discourse in Todorov) ... placed in a discourse which has its own code.<sup>35</sup>

As superior Barthes' model may be, the definition of role within a fable remains elusive, Characters do not always fit in to such a structured pattern, which highlights how essentially reductive and inadequate these attempts at formulisation are. The very fact that there exists room for debate raises problems for Structuralist analysis along the lines developed and propagated by Narratologists. The structure of 'Gimpel the Fool' is impossible to define in these simple terms. There remains room to debate how the characters fit in to the plot even merely as actants primarily in the form these Narratologists define. Gimpel's wife potentially fits into the role of *objet* or (female in distress) depending on the reader's perception of her moral status; or the moral elevation she does not have that she should be endowed with. Once again, this aspect alone brings back in to play the character, their behaviour and their dominant characteristics. Other aspects of these highly structured methods can be called into question in relation to Gimpel. With the role of dispatcher or *destinateur* (the person who gives the 'hero' instructions to carry out), wherever the impetus comes from, it is Gimpel himself who ultimately fulfills this role. He dispatches himself as *sujet* along the paradigmatic axis, an action that could not be carried out without some form of psychological dimension on the part of the character. There is a sense that Gimpel has acted out of choice, a dimension not fitting an actant and also not directing the narrative along any rigid lines. This suggests fundamentally that it is this potentially unpredictable action on the part of the character and the character alone that constitutes part of the definition of schlemiel literature. This one factor by itself would not just define schlemiel literature and even taken with the other recognised traits would not adequately limit it to purely Jewish literature. Although as a reaction to the rigidity of certain social structures it would certainly fit into the European to American Jewish literary canon more

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<sup>35</sup> Op.Cit.. - Barthes - 1966 - p.5 - (His emphasis)

strongly as a reaction to dogmatic single denomination religious constraints and a continuing Shtetl or 'ghetto' society.

The role of the hero can also be questioned in terms of conventional narrative structure. The classic perception of hero as valiant, physical man of action is broken down by Gimpel's verbal debate about his situation. The schlemiel is a potential form of hero not considered in conventional Narratology. For example, Barthes insists on 'defining the character in terms of his participation in a sphere of actions, these spheres being few in number and, typical, classifiable.'<sup>36</sup> Gimpel is certainly an actant of a sort, but without the character the fabula would not progress. Being an actant is not his only role, and tying him down to such a structured role is not possible, schlemiels do not behave like that. Aristotle's notion that there can be fables without characters does not apply to this example. Gerald Prince provides the best summary analysis of an approach to character that recognises the limitations of structural models that may apply to some tales, but not to all:

Whether they are protagonists or not, senders or receivers, heroes or villains, mainly defined by their actions or by their feelings, characters can be dynamic (when they change or grow) or static (when they do not); they can be consistent ... or inconsistent; and they can be round or flat, that is, complex or simple, multidimensional or undimensional, capable of surprising us or incapable of it.<sup>37</sup>

Prince allows the broadest definition of all Narratologists, but lacks development of his theorising of character beyond a structured model of characters as actants. The notion that they are difficult to contend with comes to the forefront again but the idea that characters are nothing

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. - p.16

<sup>37</sup> Gerald Prince - *Narratology: Form and Functioning of Narrative* (1982) - New York, Mouton Publishers - 1982 - pp. 72-73 - Prince provides only a short section on character (pp.71-73) and whilst his definition remains supposedly all encompassing it is telling that he still subordinates character and locates within another chapter heading and devotes only three pages to it.

more than actants itself seems to be largely the reason. If a theoretical position dictates that they do not exist as psychological entities then all they can ever be are linguistic constructs. What does not enter in to this aspect of the work of either theorist is the notion of narrator, and the question as to who directs the narrative voice in relation to character. What then becomes of importance is who creates or rather shapes character and who speaks (which character/s), both inside and outside the text. Ultimately who defines the characters as schlemiels?

In any culture and in any textual narrative (verbal, written or visual) it would appear to be obvious that there is always the presence of not just a story but also a story-teller and listener. Jakobson posits these as story, addresser and addressee and for him these are the **fundamentals of communication**. What this also suggests is that what the reader (addressee) is listening to is a voice, from a voice within the text. It is whose voice and perhaps more importantly whose voice the reader perceives it as that is of prime concern. Narrative perspective is an essential part of characterisation, who creates the character and gives the character a voice. This perspective exists outside the temporal plane of story, character and discourse, but is intricately tied up with these three factors that then give a text meaning. There is a distinction to be made between narrator and author. The more pertinent subject of concern at this stage is the role and identification of the character narrator. What is pertinent to the study of character is how the narrator or narrators operate within the composite narrative structure. Roland Barthes seminal essay The Death of the Author is of vital importance in freeing the reader to give the multiple interpretations of text and also multiple interpretations of character. Barthes' concept is tied to the traditional modes of literary education and literary consumption. As he comments:

The author is a modern figure ... emerging from the Middle Ages [into the Enlightenment] ... [this period] discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more notably put, the 'human person.' It is thus logical that in literature it

should be this positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the person of the author.' <sup>38</sup>

Barthes attaches no importance to the role of the author, the central concept of importance being that once the text has been written <sup>it</sup> is set free from the real author who no longer has any direct control over meaning. The act of creating the text or writing a text is left to the reader. <sup>39</sup>

The concept is an admirable and useful theoretical stand-point but the question needs to be debated, along with notions of implied author, that the reader can never, actually be free from inferred knowledge about the author in <sup>his or her</sup> 'writing' of a text, through the act of reading.

Whilst the position that Barthes adopts may be theoretically laudable and even accurate it is this critical rhetoric that often does not always feature for the individual interacting with the text. <sup>40</sup> For example, a reader picking up a book by Isaac Bashevis Singer will look on it very differently from the work of John Irving, although both may be dealing with similar subjects.

Châtman raises the perspective of narrator as a voice linked to author and which dictates the perspective on character:

Is the statement directly presented to the audience or is it mediated by someone we call the narrator? Direct presentation presumes a kind of overhearing by the audience. Mediated narration, on the other hand, presumes

<sup>38</sup> Roland Barthes - The Death of the Author in - David Lodge (ed.) - Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader (1988) - Harlow, Longman- 1992 - (pp.166-172) - p.168

<sup>39</sup> In S/Z (New York, Hill and Wang - 1974), Barthes categorises the possibilities for interpreting texts as either *readerly* or *writerly*. The ramifications of this for traditional literary studies are devastating, as Barthes ultimate thesis is one that denies any true meaning inherent within a given text. Or rather, any meaning that has been placed there by the author. Barthes claims readerly texts are those which lend themselves to wider interpretation due to a variety of factors, most dominantly their prose style and their status as a 'classic' within a literary canon. Factors which pre-shape a readers interpretation so that the act of reading becomes passive. However, Barthes examination of Balzac's Sarrasine gives rise to the idea that all texts are writerly (open to multi-vocal or dialogic interpretation) but in varying degrees.

<sup>40</sup> The role of the author in shaping a readers perception of a text in certain cultural terms (relating to the Foucaultian concept of *author-function*) is something that will and must be considered later, beyond notions of implied author. Further information will be drawn from, Michel Foucault - What is an Author? (originally published in 1979) - in Paul Rabin (ed.) - The Foucault Reader (1984) - London, Penguin - 1991 - pp.101-121

a more or less express communication from narrator to audience. This is essentially Plato's distinction between mimesis and diegesis, in modern terms between showing and telling. Insofar as there is telling, there must be a teller, a narrating voice. <sup>41</sup>

In terms of both reception and creation of a character Chatman's notion of what constitutes narrator is important, but still remains reductive. It is essential to make the distinction between a possible narrator as the agent within the diegesis and the narration, or the strategy of telling. What does need further clarification prior to any discussion of narrative voice is the distinction between mimesis and diegesis from the perspective of the reader interpreting the character in a particular way. The narrator does however feature in this distinction of Plato's. The concept that a text can ever be mimetic becomes of paramount importance to the study of character. It is possible that via 'imitation' the narrator will locate <sup>him or herself</sup> as a character to show (albeit in linguistic terms). This stands in opposition to the telling of the diegesis which comes directly via a variable narrator. However, contemporary theory has for a long time questioned this notion of mimesis, as Genette highlights:

no narrative can 'show' or 'imitate' the story it tells. All it can do is tell it in a manner which is detailed, precise, 'alive' and in that way give more or less the illusion of mimesis ... narration, oral or written, is a fact of language, and language signifies without imitating. <sup>42</sup>

Incorporating this into the debate means that narratives are never mimetic of actual events but are only words imitating other words. They can never be anything more, but in creating a text without some form of mimesis of conventional modes of expression a text would be

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<sup>41</sup> Op.Cit. - Chatman - 1980 - p.146

<sup>42</sup> Gerrard Genette - Narrative Discourse (1980) - London, Cornell University- 1980 - p.164 - (His emphasis)

incomprehensible. In that sense then, fables begin to mimic each other and is one of the reasons that generic differences emerge. The narrator must then be considered alongside the author as a character. The consideration of these figures is of vital importance to written fiction but also filmic fiction where it seems the conflation of 'authors' and characters is more visually based and equally as incorrect.

In considering the issues involved in Narratology and incorporating narrators and authors alongside characters, a problem arises with terminology. The idea of a fictional narrative covers a great deal, what must be dealt with, in relation to narrator, is the idea (from Aristotle) that stories can exist without characters, merely as a series of events. A fable in the classical sense is a tale with a moral ending, perhaps most notably those of Aesop, and developing in to the graphic narratives that are now common.<sup>43</sup> Within these fables, it is common that the characters are animals, but they are anthropomorphised into having human characteristics in order for them to be comprehended and this continues until today. It is impossible to retain a semblance of the recognisable and comprehension without characterisation tending toward the human. The Narratological distinction between *histoire/story* and *recit/account* (in Formalist terms between *fabula/story* and *sujet/plot*) makes very little difference to this concept of a tale without characters. It is clearly to separate the *histoire* as the story from the *recit*, as the narrative of events. Implicit within the *recit* is the idea that someone must have ordered them in that particular way, that much is undeniable. In 'Gimpel the Fool' the *recit* locates the initial monologue from Gimpel at the beginning, in ordering the *histoire* in logical progression the reader. What becomes important, particularly in discussion of fiction and film is the mode of narration and the question of who narrates. This is in distinction from the *recit* in terms of being

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<sup>43</sup> Take, for example, Isaac Bashevis Singer's 'Cockadoodle', which features a Polish Rooster as extradiegetic narrator and main character. ('Cockadoodle', *The Seance and Other Stories*, (1974), London, Penguin, 1979 pp. 78-86) Rather than adopting the clothing and behaviour of a human or of humanity in general the Rooster in this tale adopts a particular identity. This presents a clear distinction between the two tales. The tale which is firmly rooted in Jewish culture adopts the specifics to represent that culture rather than purely creating a 'representation'.

a perspective of telling as opposed to an ordering of events, which are in some way told. Although the mode of narration is distinct from the story and the account or plot it cannot be separated from the narrative. It is the ideological construction and positioning of the narrative by the reader that is given through the mode of narration. What this means is that where no internal character narrators feature there must be the presence of a narrating *voice* outside the narrative ordering the events.

The character within the text is free to narrate. In this sense, once the content has been sidelined by character the discourse is given free reign. In classical theory to reduce character to nothing more than an actant ignores the discourse inherent within any and every text and positions this firmly with the author. However, rather than existing in any physical sense within literary texts, authors are characterised by the reader from a variety of differing sources. Essentially the author may have no voice of authority but is re-introduced by the reader. Pre-conceived information about an author may, in a reader's eyes, align <sup>him or her</sup> with the protagonists within a text, or may positively or negatively influence the interpretation of a text. Even vice-versa, no prior knowledge of an author may lead to a reader believing that the main character or characters still bears some relation to the author. For example, imagine if the earlier biographical detail of Isaac Bashevis Singer had read, 'he was a German writer, who from the age of twenty-seven was a member of the Nazi Party and was subsequently convicted during the Nuremberg trials for war crimes.' The revelation that Singer was really an anti-Semite (which is, of course, untrue) would more than likely change a reader's perception of Gimpel as a positive character. On the other hand, if the reader were an anti-Semite with no prior knowledge of Singer, Gimpel would become not a holy, righteous fool, but an idiot to despise.

It is likely that the name Isaac Bashevis Singer might be easily associated with some form of Jewish origin and this will fix meaning and also more specific features of the narrative (particularly voice and setting) for the reader. However, taking the name John Irving presents

further problems. The name could easily be associated with any kind of cultural or geographical origin, Jewish amongst them and all the associated information that this brings. Although A Prayer for Owen Meany has neither explicitly Jewish characters or settings it may be read in a particular way due to an audience's perception of who Irving is and what he may have 'put in to' his text. The book opens:

I am doomed to remember a boy with a wrecked voice - not because of his voice, or because he was the smallest person I ever knew, or even because he was the instrument of my mother's death, but because he is the reason I believe in God; I am a Christian because of Owen Meany. <sup>44</sup>

This is significant in that Owen Meany is described in terms of schlemiel-keit characteristics and yet there is a basis in the Christian religion. There could be no confusion with any Judaic origins, but the crucial element of indefinable faith, in whatever terms, still remains at the forefront of the character and the novel. The nature of the character within Irving's text suggests that there may be similar interpretation as with 'Gimpel the Fool' or that the characters may operate in the same way despite any information about the author. Nevertheless, the critical interpretation of the author of any text remains of concern in placing the schlemiel within a particular cultural location.

This problem is confounded even further in a text such as Donald Barthelme's The King.<sup>45</sup> In this example the schlemiel is dislocated even further by being on one hand located in England during World War Two and also by being King Arthur. The reader is presented with something of a quandary with the 'character' of Donald Barthelme in same way as with Irving but the divergence from logical order that the spatial and temporal location of characters present in The

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<sup>44</sup> John Irving - A Prayer for Owen Meany (1989) - London, Black Swan - 1993 - p.13

<sup>45</sup> Donald Barthelme, The King (1991), London, Minerva, 1992



King is enormous. Even with these problems in mind, the character of King Arthur remains a schlemiel:

Arthur, Sir Kay, Sir Helin Le Blank, and Sir Lamorack de Gales inspecting the locomotive welded to the track.

'How does one unweld a weld?' Arthur asked. 'Chip at it with a crowbar?' ...

... 'If Merlin were still in business he could magic it away.' said the King.

'Avaunt!' he'd say, and the thing would be done. I'm afraid I never adequately appreciated Merlin.' He pauses 'Big bastard, isn't it.' ... <sup>46</sup>

Arthur's faith remains firmly with nationalism, 'the prophecy' and a mix of a pagan religion represented by Merlin and a version of Christianity. Although the deeper philosophical reasons for the dislocation of time and space are beside the point at this stage, what these examples demonstrate is the seemingly transcendental nature of the schlemiel. The figure appears across categories and across time. As Barthes notes:

Once the author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile.

To give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. <sup>47</sup>

It is difficult to decipher whether the author can ever be wholly or totally removed.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, perhaps whether it is necessary to impose order on texts by using the name of the author, to give what is perceived to be coherent meaning and stable order.<sup>49</sup> To limit something

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid. - pp. 53-54

<sup>47</sup> Op.Cit. - Barthes - 1992 - p.171

<sup>48</sup> What is important to note is the idea that the classic conception of the schlemiel, as discussed in the introduction, can be altered by these interpretative processes.

<sup>49</sup> It is the imposition of stability on a text that Michel Foucault drew attention to in his essay, What is an Author? Much of the article is devoted to a historical perspective on the author, but what is of paramount relevance is his conception of the notion of individualism that developed alongside an expanding middle class. Developing from this is the idea that the text must have an 'individual' attached who is the author. Foucault describes the historical development of the author as the first phase of the author-function: 'It is as if the author, beginning with the moment at which he was placed in the system of property that characterises our society ... systematically practicing transgression and thereby restoring danger to a

may be theoretically undesirable but eminently desirable for the reader wishing stability of a sort. It is not just the schlemiel character who offers stability but also the author who creates that character.

It is relevant to assign terminology to the individual narrator's function and positioning within texts if they are ever to be seen to develop beyond their roles as actants. The most seemingly pertinent and even obvious narrator level is that of *homodiegetic* narrator. In this case, Gimpel narrates a tale within which he features as a character, and also interrupts the narrative progression to add comments. For example, after being implicated as a guilty party in his wife's 'unaccounted for' pregnancy, Gimpel is 'allowed' home:

• 'You can go home then. You owe thanks to the Yanover rabbi. He found an obscure reference in Maimonides that favoured you.'

I seized the Rabbi's hand and kissed it.

I wanted to run home immediately. It's no small thing to be separated for so long a time from wife and child.<sup>50</sup>

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writing which was now guaranteed the benefits of ownership.' (What is an Author? – in Paul Rabinow (ed.) – The Foucault Reader (1984) – 1991 – pp.108-109) The perception that the author owns the text is the key function from the perspective of the reader. As a society historical importance has been placed on the role of the author in the creative process; the very thing that Barthes was arguing against as well, although Foucault does not dismiss the fact that even in contemporary readings the author has a function. This confirms the reality and involvement of the author in the text, from the perspective of the reader. The second feature of the author-function, as determined by Foucault, dictates that it is not only literary texts that have the 'character' of the author imposed upon them, but also all other types of narrative. For example, Gimpel the Fool was validated by the name Singer as was What is an Author?, by Foucault. Foucault's analysis further confirms the imposition of authorial authority on texts as an undeniable act, inherently tied up with modes of comprehension. This claim is supported by Foucault's third feature of author function: 'The result of a complex operation which constructs a certain rational being that we call 'author'. Critics doubtless try to give this intelligible being a realistic status, by discerning, in the individual, a 'deep' motive, a 'creative' power, or a 'design' the milieu in which writing originates ... these aspects of an individual which we designate as making him the author are only a projection, in more or less psychologising terms.' (Ibid. p109) The three facets of author-function therefore confirm the notion that there is an entity, which we can call the author who stabilises the text and gives it meaning. This character we call the author is a socially, historically and politically constructed being that is re-imposed by the reader in order to aid comprehension. As Foucault points out, modes of imposition of 'author' and modes of comprehension of 'author' are subject to change across time.

<sup>50</sup> Isaac Bashevis Singer - 'Gimpel the Fool' (trans. Saul Bellow) in The Collected Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer (1953) - London, Penguin - 1982 - p.10

The character then infers a sense of existence into time, beyond the two dimensional framework of the written word. However, Gimpel is also an *autodiegetic* narrator in the sense that he is narrating his own story, for example:

I wandered over the land, and good people did not neglect me. After many years I became old and white; I heard a great deal, many lies and falsehoods, but the longer I lived the more I understood that there were really no lies.<sup>51</sup>

The implications of this for schlemiel-keit literature are important in the sense that by the unmediated relation of events the character confirms their identity in a stronger sense than if the tale were being narrated by a *heterodiegetic* narrator. The heterodiegetic narrator still exists as a character but recounts events within which they do not feature. The distinctions between the main protagonist (or perhaps) hero of a tale are important to determine in that they are the levels at which the *extradiegetic* (framing) or *intradiegetic* (within) narrators operate. Gimpel is in effect an extradiegetic, autodiegetic narrator in that he frames the whole story and also recounts his own tale. For example, the opening lines of the tale:

I am Gimpel the fool. I don't think myself a fool. On the contrary. But that's what folks call me ... I was coming home from school and heard a dog barking. I'm not afraid of dogs, but of course I never want to start up with them.<sup>52</sup>

Within 'Gimpel the Fool' intradiegetic narrators also feature - they recount stories within stories. For example, the wife's tale of her unaccounted for pregnancy is an intradiegetic mode of narration in that it is a story aside from the general framing tale that Gimpel tells of his life to date. Her story is a separate and distinct narrative to that which Gimpel is relating, for example she tells Gimpel of the dreams she just experienced, a narrative outside the framing one imposed by the autodiegetic or heterodiegetic narrator.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. - p.14

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. - p.3

‘The things I have dreamed this night and the night before,’ she said, ‘may they come true and lay you low, body and soul! An evil spirit has taken root in you and dazzles your sight ... Get out, or I’ll scream all Frampol out of bed.’<sup>53</sup>

However, the intradiegetic narrator may not always be so obvious as Gimpel’s wife, in saying, “you owe thanks to the Yanover rabbi. He found an obscure reference in Maimonides that favoured you,” the Rabbi becomes an intradiegetic narrator in that he relates a tale about the Yanover Rabbi’s efforts to vindicate Gimpel.

This leads to the contentious problem of reliable and unreliable narrators. Much of contemporary Narratological theory has tended towards the belief that the extradiegetic narrator, who does not feature as a character within a text holds some kind of reliability. The reliable narrator is that seen to be omnisciently relating events and character’s thoughts, but not featuring within the tale, for example in Pictures of Fidelman. The conferring of characteristics of unreliability within the narration given by characters further leads to their being perceived as real. To err is human, and when characters make mistakes, or mislead in their narration they are confirming this, or at least this is how they are characterised. The omniscience that an extradiegetic narrator may have is certainly not a human trait, rather a literary convention. The very unreliability that a character may have only goes to further confirm their (false) status as ‘real’. This notion is, at least in part, contradictory to Aristotle’s idea that characters should remain consistent, and to make unexpected mistakes as a narrative unfolds in a temporal sense is to be unpredictable and inconsistent. All narrators are essentially unreliable and the impression of reliability exists on different levels. Intradiegetic narrators, are often seen to be unreliable in that they bring personal perspectives to the text. If they bring a personal dimension to the narration, there must be a temporal dimension from which to bring this perspective. The

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. - p.11

autodiegetic or main featured character narrator, for example Gimpel recounting his past life, is seen to be fairly reliable in his conception of a whole period, although is subject to his personal bias. However, certain character types bring differing levels of reliability to the tale. Gimpel, as a schlemiel, is perceived to be less likely to tend towards unreliability, in a sense he does not have the moral qualities to lie. However, the very fact that schlemiel-keit literature features narrators (be they intradiegetic or extradiegetic) who are essentially fools of varying degrees implies that within the process of narration they may tend to be unreliable because of their foolishness. As Toolan confirms:

Some narrators are liars, or consciously flatter themselves and are clearly intended to be seen as attempting to deceive; other narrators mislead for less culpable reasons: e.g. they may have the limited knowledge of a young narrator, or be mentally retarded.<sup>54</sup>

He could have very well added naivety or the lack of confidence to lie to the list, both common facets attached to the schlemiel. To compound the problem further in the case of A Prayer For Owen Meany, John Wheeler as both extradiegetic and intradiegetic narrator has absolute faith not just in religion but in Owen Meany that he has to recount with accuracy. This is the same kind of accuracy as a disciple completing a parable.

Rimmon-Kenan highlights the personal involvement of the reader as being a key indication of potential unreliability.<sup>55</sup> Again the naivety and nervousness of the schlemiel implies that where others' personal views of events may be clouded by their involvement, yet the schlemiel is not often endowed with the quality of being able to understand the perceptions of those around him. In The King, the same features are apparent, but in this case, it is Arthur's unwillingness to

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<sup>54</sup> Op.Cit. - Toolan - 1988 - p.88

<sup>55</sup> Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan - Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics (1983) - London, Routledge - 1993 - p.100 (section on *Reliability* pp.100-105)

accept the comments directed at him, he is after all a legend and this is during a period of wartime propaganda. Rimmon-Kenan further highlights the potential value judgments of the character within the story:

The third potential source of unreliability is the colouring of the narrator's account by a questionable value-scheme. A narrator's moral values are considered questionable if they do not tally with those of the implied author of the given work.<sup>56</sup>

It is feasible to imagine that the reader may conflate the moral and value based judgments of the narrator as being those of an author, who never features. This is what Rimmon-Kenan posits in her analysis of reliability and unreliability. However, the basic concept is applicable, the value judgments of the narrator may cloud their judgment on the events. This is the case Gimpel's religious background in evaluating his wife's behaviour in getting pregnant and subsequently fooling him. It must be noted that in relation to this argument the issue of value judgment is not the same as the moral elevation that Aristotle posits. The characters do not necessarily have to stand above in terms of their morality; their judgments can be both positive and negative.

The potential also exists for narrators to be seen as unreliable in their speech acts, they may give indications as to their own status. For example, Cohn, an intradiegetic narrator of God's Grace, converses with God:

'After your first Holocaust You promised no further floods ... everyone who wasn't consumed in fire is drowned in bitter water, and a Second Flood covers the earth.'

God said this: 'All that was pre-Torah. There was no such thing as Holocaust, only cause and effect...'<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid. - p.101

<sup>57</sup> Bernard Malamud - God's Grace (1982) - London, Penguin - 1984 - p.12

It is unclear as to whether the intradiegetic narrator is or is not suffering from some form of aural hallucination. It is unusual to be addressed by God, even in fictions. However, this leads to a further questioning of the reliability of the extradiegetic narrator as this unnamed entity never supports or denies this unlikely event, but merely reports without opinion. This exists in opposition to John Wheeler whose commentary is affected by his perception of Owen Meany as 'a saint'; 'What faith I have I owe to Owen Meany, a boy I grew up with. It is Owen who made me a believer.'<sup>58</sup> The extradiegetic narrator of The King is perhaps the most interesting because the involvement is so minimal. This narrator never comments but only states, comments are then left to intradiegetic narrators. At this stage the characters are intricately tied to event. Their schlemiel-keit tendencies can reign unchecked.

A deciding factor as to the reliability and unreliability of a narrator comes from the reaction of the narratee. In the case of an unnamed extradiegetic narrator relating the tale directly to an external narratee there is little to suggest unreliability. On the other extreme, a narratee who was to scream 'you liar' after a character's narration would imply that they would in some way be unreliable. However, this would be dependent upon the reliability of the narratee as a character, which could only be determined through the debatable opinions of other characters, or via their own narration. The fact remains that it is left to the personal opinions of the reader to interpret the information presented and decide on reliability, Barthes, notion of the 'death of the author and birth of the reader' comes into play yet again, the writerly text dominates and applies to all. The narratee is always present, either in a covert or overt form. The covert narratee in the case of Gimpel narrating the tale is the reader who is being addressed directly, although not named as 'you' or in the sense of 'listen to me.' For example, in Gimpel's closing statement, 'so it is with dreams too. It is many years since I left Frampol, but as soon as I shut

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<sup>58</sup> Op.Cit. - Irving - 1993 - p.14

my eyes I am there again'.<sup>59</sup> However, Gimpel continues to say, 'and whom do you think I see?' The narratee becomes overt, there is no question as to who is being addressed by the presence of the qualifying term 'you.'

The narratee in 'Gimpel the Fool' is Gimpel himself. His wife's confused comments are communicated directly, for example, during Gimpel's dream of meeting with Satan and his subsequent conversation with his wife:

'You fool! Because I was false is everything false too? I never deceived anyone but myself. I'm paying for it all, Gimpel. They spare you nothing here.'<sup>60</sup>

Gimpel is addressed by name, leaving no doubt as to whom is the narratee. The very act of a character being addressed in either an overt or covert way implies that they are in some way real. To be addressed is to on the first level to listen and on the second, to respond, even if this is only the act of thinking about what has been said. Of course, a narratee cannot reflect directly on what has been said without becoming a narrator. Genette makes the distinction as intradiegetic narrators only addressing intradiegetic narratees.<sup>61</sup> Toolan is seemingly correct to highlight 'that the narratee position is not properly part of the framework of telling, but is an integral device in narrational strategy.'<sup>62</sup> However, this is not to say that the reader can never be a narratee, purely due to them not being named as recipients of information. Genette sets up the distinction as follows:

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<sup>59</sup> Op.Cit. - Singer - 1982 - p.14

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. - p.13

<sup>61</sup> Gerrard Genette - Narrative Discourse (1980) - London, Cornell University Press - 1980 - p.259 - Section on *The Narratee* pp.259-262, see also Toolan - 1988 - pp.79-80, Chatman - 1980 - pp.253-262, Rimmon-Kenan - 1993 - pp.86-89, Todorov -1981- p.40 & 103-105 and Gerald Prince - Narratology: Form and Functioning of Narrative (1982) - New York, Mouton Publishers - 1982 - pp. 16-25

<sup>62</sup> Op.Cit. - Toolan - 1988 - p.80



'The extradiegetic narrator ... can aim only at an extradiegetic narratee, who merges with the implied reader and with whom each real reader can identify. This implied reader is in principle undefined ... the extradiegetic narrator can also can also pretend ... to address no one, but this posture ... obviously cannot change the fact that a narrative, like every discourse, is necessarily addressed to someone and always contains below the surface an appeal to the receiver. <sup>63</sup>

In terms of Barthes theorising it is the reader who creates the text and interacts with the characters in the text as a narratee. To follow Genette's conception of a non-named narratee, the reader becomes part of the text, an entity that interacts with the extradiegetic narrator, again confirming a linguistic status on both parties. Both this action of the reader becoming a narratee and also intradiegetic narrators interacting with intradiegetic narratees, who in turn (and in verbal response) often turn into intradiegetic narrators, confirms linear interaction

It is through modes of *focalisation* that most readers will be positioned in terms of character. The *focaliser* of 'Gimpel the Fool' is Gimpel himself, as determined by the use of 'I'. The term *focalisation*, coined by Genette, is problematic in itself and it has been criticised widely.<sup>64</sup> Toolan's use of the term *orientation* sits better, in that it is less specific to who sees and is more applicable to who speaks as well.<sup>65</sup> This term is also better in application than Chatman's *point of view* which, which again is tied to the visual aspect of who sees.<sup>66</sup> However, Genette's earlier analysis of focalisation allows a much broader use of the term in application to all

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<sup>63</sup> Op.Cit. - Genette - 1980 - p.260

<sup>64</sup> For more detailed analysis of the reasons for criticism see: Genette -1980 - pp. 189-194, Chatman - 1980 -pp. 151-158, Toolan - 1989 - 67-76 and Rimmon-Kenan - 1993 - pp.71-85.

<sup>65</sup> Op.Cit. - Toolan - 1989 - p.63 - However, as Toolan suggests, to apply the term orientation will only add to confusion and therefore it is more applicable for the purposes of this brief analysis of the nature of focalisation to use the recognised term, but in opposition to Chatman's point of view.

<sup>66</sup> Op.Cit. - Chatman - 1980 - pp.151-152 - Chatman claims that point of view is through (a) someone's eyes (literal), (b) through someone's ideology (figurative) and (c) from someone's point of advantage (transferred).

aspects of the text. He differentiates between zero-focalisation (or non-focalisation), internal focalisation and external focalisation. However, these forms of focalisation are still from the perspective of 'who sees', without a detailed consideration of the effects of the act of seeing.<sup>67</sup> It is debatable as to whether it is ever possible to have zero-focalisation in a narrative. Rimmon-Kenan, in following Genette, but expanding on his theories of focalisation has a more pertinent and indeed far more useful argument for determining some kind of focalised perspective on character, which functions well in terms of fiction alone, but does not in any way take into account visual narratives.<sup>68</sup> Her consideration of these facets breaks them down to, the Perceptual facet, the Psychological facet and the Ideological facet.<sup>69</sup> The first of these three, the *sensoral* or *perceptual* facet is dependent on spatial and temporal perception of events. In the case of space, the reader may be placed alongside the character wherever they go, but may not remain with that character as a narrator. For example, the reader still maintains a link with Gimpel's own thoughts even when transported to Frampol. Yet in Florence Fidelman is never an extradiegetic narrator, so the reader is never party to his thoughts, but still remains in the same spatial location as Fidelman. In terms of the temporal dimensions of 'Gimpel the Fool', Gimpel focalises in two different ways, via the extradiegetic narration where he is clearly aware of at least the past and the present and is speculative of the future; and he also operates as an internal character focaliser. This two-part role of internal character and narrator focaliser from one named character indicates that all modes of focalisation must be, at some point through character. Even the non-named extradiegetic narrator of Pictures of Fidelman or God's Grace exists as a character. (As has already been stated this may be as a character designated by the reader as the unknowable 'author', but a

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<sup>67</sup> Op.Cit. - Genette - 1980 - pp. 189-190

<sup>68</sup> Op.Cit. - Rimmon-Kenan - 1993 - p.77

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. - See pp. 77-85 for further details. Toolan (Op.Cit.. - 1988 - pp.75-76) claims Rimmon-Kenan's distinctions are closely linked to those of narratorial perspective. This is true to a degree, but in terms of characterisation, modes of focalisation with the facets as described by Rimmon-Kenan give a closer perspective on the internal workings of a particular character (or focalised) further confirming their status as 'real'.

character never the less.) The switch between Gimpel as extradiegetic character narrator and intradiegetic character focaliser leads to the unfolding of events as they happen without switching the tense from the present to the past continually. It is the very existence of the intradiegetic narrator/focalisers that allows the events to happen, as opposed to merely linking the events together as actants.

Rimmon-Kenan splits her *psychological* facet into two distinct areas, the *cognitive* and the *emotive* and it is these two areas that are the most vital to perpetuating the deception that characters are real in that it deals with the focaliser's mind and emotions.<sup>70</sup> The cognitive takes into account the beliefs, memories and understanding of characters. An important differential is again with the omniscient extradiegetic narrator focaliser, such as Gimpel relating his own life, and the intradiegetic character narrator focaliser who is involved in the unfolding of events as they happen. Gimpel as extradiegetic narrator is aware that his wife has been sleeping with the apprentice, yet Gimpel the intradiegetic narrator remains unaware. Focalisation within 'Gimpel the Fool' therefore operates on a different level to a text such as God's Grace, where the extradiegetic narrator is non-named, but can still relate events, details of which Cohn is unaware of. For example:

That night, as he was stuffing his gear into duffel bags, a gang of chimps broke down his protective wall with a huge log they carried, and poured into the cave, Gottlob leading the way.<sup>71</sup>

The two-fold role of a single character in a text such as Gimpel the Fool is interesting, but within this example as a piece of schlemiel-keit literature it is important to note that due to the extradiegetic focaliser's role as a fool he is never totally aware of events, even from his

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. - pp.79-80

<sup>71</sup> Op.Cit. - Malamud - 1984 - pp.195-196

retrospective point of perception. For example, in his consideration of his wife's unexplained pregnancy he claims:

I'm doing her an injustice. And when I got so far in my thoughts I started to weep. I sobbed so that I wet the flour where I lay. In the morning I went to the rabbi and told him I had made a mistake.<sup>72</sup>

Even with a vague understanding of the situation, he remains blissfully unaware of the implications and the effect it is having on peoples' perception of him. It is in fact this very foolishness and unwillingness to accept the facts that leads him to return to his wife and in fact return to, if not happiness at least contentment. For the fool to remain a fool the extradiegetic narrator must either be non-named, not the schlemiel-keit character in question or remain blissfully unaware of events or at the very least the ramifications of events. The narrative structure of both A Prayer For Owen Meany and The King fulfill the same functions as texts that have previously been seen as schlemiel-keit because of their Jewish author.

The emotive constituent of the psychologising facet of focalisation along with the cognitive facet further guarantees the reader's perception of character as being, in some sense, 'real'. As Rimmon-Kenan explains, 'in emotive transformation, the 'external/internal' opposition yields 'objective (neutral, uninvolved) v. 'subjective' (coloured, involved) focalisation.'<sup>73</sup> An external focaliser can only imply the internal emotions of the focalised, unless that focaliser is the character in question. Gimpel is his own external focaliser, the focalised being the Gimpel in the past, in the narrative that is being narrated by the Gimpel of the present. In this way the confirmation of his emotions are seen as accurate. Whereas the emotions of Fidelman, as focalised, are speculative until Fidelman himself speaks. The emotional perspective of the

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<sup>72</sup> Op.Cit. - Singer - 1982 - p.9

<sup>73</sup> Op.Cit. - Rimmon-Kenan - 1993 - p.80

*schlemiel* as focalised can therefore only be perceived from the perspective of a narrator focaliser who cannot know the emotions of the focalised; unless the narrative takes the form of *'Gimpel the Fool'*, with the focalised also being the focaliser.

The ideological facet of focalisation that Rimmon-Kenan posits is the most useful in confirming for the reader that the author 'exists in the text' and (paradoxically) is a factor in conflating the extradiegetic narrator (be they a character narrator or not) with a perception of who the author is including their own ideological positioning. As Rimmon-Kenan comments:

In the simplest case, the 'norms' are presented through a single dominant perspective, that of the narrator focaliser ... Put differently, the ideology of the narrator focaliser is usually taken as authoritative, and all the other ideologies in the text are evaluated from this 'higher position'.<sup>74</sup>

The figure with the overall authority as far as the reader is concerned is the 'real author' who actually never features in the text. What follows is the ideological positioning of the reader in their judgment of the authority of characters, based not only on the omniscience of, but also empathy with the extradiegetic narrator and also empathy with the intradiegetic characters, both focaliser and focalised, narrator and narratee. There is the possibility of perceiving Cohn (God's Grace) with a sense of empathy due to his religious and ethical stand-point in the face of adversity which then may be shattered by the attraction and subsequent intercourse with Hattie the chimpanzee. The ideological positioning of the non-named extra-diegetic narrator is no less important than the ideological positioning of Cohn. However, the very fact that this narrator makes no value judgments and merely reports events gives free reign to the ideological positioning of the intradiegetic characters. In this case it is likely that Cohn will be perceived as the most dominant, he is after all human, but in a text such as Pictures of Fidelman with a

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid. - p.81

similarly uncontentious, unassuming extradiegetic narrator, there is little to place one character above another. The King presents a useful example in relation to Rimmon-Kenan's three facets, the extradiegetic narrator never actually narrates, this narrator only states. This is pushed to such extremes that events do not link from one chapter to the next; the sense of continuation and comment comes only from intradiegetic narration, through reacting to each other. Only from this is there a sense of narrative progression.

'Guinevere at a canter, Maying in woods and meadows, all clad in green, beashed with herbs, mosses, and flowers, in great joy and delights.

The Brown Knight appears.

'Stand,' the Brown Knight said.

Two of Guinevere's party, Sir Dodinas le Savage and Sir Ironside of the Red Lands, charging the Brown Knight. The Brown Knight's sword flashing.<sup>75</sup>

To suggest that these characters are actants to progress plot is unacceptable, they are the plot, and the only information that is available is through conversation with other characters. There exists no extradiegetic narrator who is able to change perception of characters to potentially position the reader or to perhaps suggest that one or another may be a schlemiel.

In all textual analysis of written narratives, the feature that exists in addition to character (whatever function or facet they are believed to have) and in addition to spatial-temporal events is *setting*. This is a factor that becomes all the more evident in filmic narratives. In a written narrative it can only be suggested, in a visual narrative it can be given. Toolan's conception of setting is perhaps the most pertinent in any analysis that seeks to expand character beyond the function of actant into the psychological.<sup>76</sup> As Toolan states:

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<sup>75</sup> Op.Cit. - Barthelme - 1991 - p.39

<sup>76</sup> For more detailed analysis of individual arguments on *setting* see Prince - 1982 - pp.73-74, Rimmon-Kenan - 1993 - pp.66-70, Chatman - 1980 - pp.138-145 and Toolan - 1988 - 103-111.

[Where] the human cohesion between members of society of a similar rank is displaced by a widespread atmosphere of alienation, anomie, and interpersonal relations ... the situation is different. Setting here may be much more than backcloth; it may be instrumental - like another character. <sup>77</sup>

The notion that setting may exist like another character is the fundamental purpose of a narrative having location. Like character, a setting can have certain qualities imposed upon it by the reader, which may then have implications for the characters within the narrative in question. For example, the village of Frampol (*'Crimpel the Fool'*) or the city of Venice (Pictures of Fidelman), as a 'real' geographical location, confers a stronger sense of grounding in 'fact' than the unnamed island that Cohn (God's Grace) finds himself on. However, this is not to say that one place has a stronger sense of location for a character than another. Certain preconceptions about a setting may limit or significantly alter a reader's perception of what character's persona is, before that persona is revealed. The prime example<sup>is</sup> of the village of Chelem<sup>where</sup>, it is note worthy that Singer's tale, *'The First Schlemiel'*, is set there prior to any form of characterization taking place. The setting determines that the characters will in some sense be foolish. It is interesting that Chatman has difficulty in reconciling setting in both fiction and film in the same way, through the two different mediums. His first major claim is that characters can become like settings, when they are not central to the narrative. This assumes that there are characters that are not central to the narrative. Obviously within a text such as God's Grace there is no doubt that all the characters are central, there only being those characters left alive. However, within Pictures of Fidelman a specific atmosphere of Florence is extenuated by the introduction of a minor character and by the mode of characterization of that minor character. This is an essential part of the setting to emphasize the dislocation of Fidelman:

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<sup>77</sup> Op.Cit. - Toolan - 1988 - p.103 - (My emphasis) - Toolan's ultimate idea is that setting can be dispensed with, however this contradict his earlier claims for setting existing *like another character*.

At the corner he stepped into midstreet, repelled by the old crone's door, the fortune-teller, the eighth of seven sisters to hear her talk, six thick hairs sprouting from the wart on her chin; in order not to sneak in and ask, for one hundred lire. 'Tell me, signora, will I ever make it? Will I finish my five years painting of Mother and Son? my sure masterpiece. I know it in my bones - if I ever get it done.' <sup>78</sup>

Within this example, the human character gives the city character. The reaction of the reader can never be judged one of disinterest towards a minor character. The very lack of detail may be the impetus to inspire the reader to discover more about the figure in question, or rather impose more than is given upon the character. Chatman employs this rationale to settings themselves by noting that it is important to fill in details around settings that are left 'incomplete':

we can always 'fill in,' so to speak, whatever is needful to authenticate a setting. If we are told in a novel that the scene is a New York street, we can mentally provide it with stock details ... but we cannot provide a hero: he is too special to 'fill in.' <sup>79</sup>

This further suggests that it is the very act of reading that gives the character the heroic status he maintains. The question must be asked of every reader as to whether Fidelman is heroic by taking his fake instead of the 'valuable' picture.<sup>80</sup> Chatman is correct in his idea that a setting can be 'filled in' with only the most meagre of details, but is character that may ultimately fill in these details for the reader. With the information that Gimpel is working bakery and sleeping on flour sacks it is unlikely that the action of 'filling in' would create a very tidy or well organised business.<sup>81</sup> Character becomes an integral part of the process of comprehending setting, but the characters themselves do not exist as part of the setting. Toolan, by indicating that setting is

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<sup>78</sup> Bernard Malamud - Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition (1969) - London, Penguin - 1972 -p.71

<sup>79</sup> Op.Cit. - Chatman - 1980 - p.141

<sup>80</sup> Op.Cit. - Malamud - 1972 - pp.68-69

<sup>81</sup> Op.Cit. - Singer - 1982 - p.12



both like another character and is a creator of mood, indicates a depth beyond the role of setting and character as actants in the progression of events. Also implicit within his statement is the idea (which he earlier rejects) that characterisation is a mode of understanding, essential in the process of narrative comprehension. In contemporary society the very notion of character can and is ascribed to anything and everything. It is undoubtedly the case that characters within written narratives behave in one sense as actants, but they also function beyond this limited role. Characters develop plots and narrate stories; the presence of a 'real' person is never felt. To characterise is to make something comprehensible, to make it human. In all forms of characterisation, the common feature is connected with identity and how a figure like the schlemiel either represents or constructs identity.

The question must now be asked as to how the study of character has developed beyond the Formalist and Structuralist lines that have dominated narrative study to the present day. The idea must be debated as to whether contemporary Post-structural and Postmodern theory and the study of film and other new mediums have generated any new perspectives on the study of character and more particularly on the character of the schlemiel. Modes of theoretical evaluation of character have been tied to the written word with the study of literature being dominant in most academic institutions and much work that has been carried out on the study of filmic narratives has been along similar lines to those applied to literature. The whole notion that the two different mediums of novel and film can be analysed in exactly the same way needs to be questioned if the study of character can ever move beyond the fixed notions that Narratology posits. Much of the work that is still being carried out is essentially hermeneutic in approach and this is applied to film more than anywhere else. The presence of the character on the screen is the dominant factor within this medium to perpetuate the notion that characters within fictional narratives are real.

With literature, it is easy, if flawed, to categorise the text in terms of the author and therefore decide what generic boundaries to impose upon it. It was written by Singer or Malamud therefore it is Jewish literature, it was written by Irving therefore it is not. This kind of logic, even on the part of the audience does not occur in quite the same way for the audience of cinema. What must now be considered in more depth is whether any analysis of the schlemiel can ever fully detail the trait, attributes and, indeed, their function.

The Schlemiel and Anomie: The Fool in Society

**Chapter Three:**

**Film and the Visible Character**

Film has been appropriated and utilised by sociologists, psychologists, cultural theorists, anthropologists and semioticians as well as by literary theorists.<sup>1</sup> The most plentiful source of narrative analysis has come from those whose study of narratives still stems from a literary base.

However, there is a general assumption that all narratives operate in the same way:

The study of cinema has ... been bound up with theories of narrative, so much so that its modern phase might be said to have been triggered by the Structuralist wave which over ran narrative theory in the early 1960s. Specifically, Christian Metz formulated his Grande Syntamatique in the atmosphere of Paris's Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes where he daily encountered Roland Barthes, A.J. Griemas, Gerrard Genette, Tzvetan Todorov ... A survey of these Structuralist approaches to narrative ... goes far in explaining the kinds of film theory and the methods of film analysis which have dominated our field.<sup>2</sup>

It is the purpose of the rest of this section to analyse Narratological approaches to film along with the structural analysis of narrative and character and to highlight the distinctions between literature and film in terms of narrative analysis. Examples will again be restricted to key texts, primarily Billy Wilder's The Apartment, and Woody Allen's Zelig.<sup>3</sup> Wilder, like Singer, is of Jewish immigrant origin and, whilst he does not work in Yiddish, he maintains strong Jewish

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<sup>1</sup> The reasons as to why this should be can only be speculated, but a major contributing factor is the lack of dominant theoretical approaches to film took in the early development of film. In addition to this no one single discipline of 'film studies' emerged until recent years, which then incorporated the areas which had previously utilised film themselves.

<sup>2</sup> Dudley Andrew - Concepts in Film Theory (1984) - New York, Oxford University Press - 1984 - pp.76-77

<sup>3</sup> Although the problematic nature of the concept of the 'Auteur' needs to be analysed in more detail the director's name often provides a useful shorthand, but one that must be treated with caution. For a biographical breakdown of Wilder and his work see Neil Sinyard - The Great Film Directors - (1985) - London, Multimedia Books - 1985 and Neil Sinyard and Adrian Turner - Journey Down Sunset Boulevard: The Films of Billy Wilder (1979) - London, BCW - 1979. For Wilder's own comments on The Apartment see 'Billy Wilder: a Cinema Interview', Cinema - No.4, October 1969 - pp.19-21

characters who use Yiddish terms in the course of their speech.<sup>4</sup> Wilder should be noted for this action at a time in Hollywood when it was less than the norm to do so.<sup>5</sup> In relation to 'Jewish-American' cinema, The Apartment has been chosen for extended primary analysis, but it will be essential to refer to other texts within what might be termed the 'Jewish filmic canon', although this term in itself is an unavoidable over generalisation.<sup>6</sup> It remains vital to also examine comparative texts, which utilise potentially schlemiel-keit characters that are not Jewish; in this instance extended analysis will be based around Forrest Gump.

The models that have been debated provide much of the framework that theoretical structures in film have utilised. The majority of early film theory tended towards the 'aesthetic' (for example that of Hugo Munsterberg, Rudolph Arnheim and Sergei Eisenstein) despite certain alternative attempts at analysis.<sup>7</sup> It therefore seems natural for those few early film analysts that perceived the need for a theoretical approach to film to appropriate whatever analytical structures already existed and use them in application to film. These structures included broad critical approaches

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<sup>4</sup> Hollywood has yet to produce a film entirely in Yiddish, however it is not the case that no films have ever been produced in Yiddish. It would seem militant to suggest that this is due to a strong anti-Semitic feeling in the Californian film industry, but more likely it is due to the limited audience that a film in this language would have. The tendency for Hollywood is to attempt to produce 'popular cinema' for mass world-wide consumption based on the whole on gaining profit rather than some form of artistic credibility.

<sup>5</sup> Wilder was certainly not the only person to construct films in this way, but his employment of openly Jewish characters and actors across a range of genres should be noted. The fact that his name is not overtly Jewish is perhaps a comment on the film industry of the time where Jewish involvement was high but overtly Semitic links were absent. Conclusions as to why this should have been so can be derived from texts with attitudes to Jewish immigrants in American society as indicated in chapter one.

<sup>6</sup> Although the term 'Jewish Filmic Canon' is problematic, I use it as a broad term to encompass all those films which have been the subject of critical enquiry about the nature of the content and/or the cultural or religious status of the director and/or stars. The nature of critical analysis has changed and where much of the work of Charlie Chaplin was analysed in relation to a supposed Jewishness now little analysis of this kind is undertaken. Only films by 'serious' directors are examined in a socio-cultural light., such as Homicide, dir: David Mamet, USA, 1991, which deal directly with overtly Jewish issues and characters, and A Stranger Amongst Us, Sidney Lumet, USA, 1994 which deals with the relationship between Gentiles and Hassidic Jews in New York.

<sup>7</sup> For a general overview of the work of these theorists see James Monaco - How to Read a Film (1977) New York, Oxford University Press - 1981 (Revised Edition) - pp.312-327. For a more detailed breakdown see J. Dudley Andrew - The Major Film Theories (1976) - New York, Oxford University Press - 1976 - pp.14-75

such as Russian Formalism, Marxism and Psychoanalysis, which deviated from an accepted approach, which was effectively 'Practical Criticism'. It is interesting to note that even where broader theoretical approaches were considered they were still tied to literary theories and this continues today. As David Bordwell comments:

For many critics, Propp has become the Aristotle of film Narratology; yet his influence has come at the cost of serious misunderstandings ... film scholars have taken Propp out of context and recast him almost out of recognition.<sup>8</sup>

Despite Bordwell's claims, it is problematic to return to an earlier 'original' text and begin again. The problem still remains that there is an attempt being made to apply what was intended for the written to the visual and aural without a great deal of further consideration.

In the specific case of character analysis, it would seem that both Propp's characteristics and Greimas' actant model should transfer from one medium to another with no additional complications. However, in terms of any study of this kind there are other problems to be encountered, particularly in relation to any ontological approach to character. In the case of film, there are visual representations and sounds as well as words, but perhaps more importantly given visual images that move and speak, that are placed in specific locations and that are reinforced by music and/or sound effects. It is these factors that must be considered in an analysis of how characters may be perceived and how the process of characterisation in this medium is distinct from literary perspectives.

In an examination of the role a character has within a filmic narrative, it is important to analyse the potential narrative structure of film. The problem remains that although the mediums of

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<sup>8</sup> David Bordwell - 'Appropriations and Improprieties : Problems in the Morphology of Film Narrative' - *Cinema Journal* - Vol. 27, No.3 - Spring 1988 - p.5. Bordwell calls for methodologies of analysis, not necessarily conclusions, but the question arises as to the purpose of a methodology which results in no result at all.

literature and film are distinct many Narratologists consider that their essential structures are the same. A consideration of the actant perspective on the function of character in film will yield the same kind of information about the character of the schlemiel as with written texts. To demonstrate this it is useful to take Propp's model in application to two films.<sup>9</sup> If C.C. Baxter is taken as the Hero and Miss Kubelik is taken as the 'female in distress' then it would seem to fit that Sheldrake is the villain.<sup>10</sup> However, this is dependant on the particular scene that is coming under scrutiny, there is a disparity between the film as a whole and individual scenes; it is not only in the act of reception and interpretation does the potential function of character change, it is across the narrative as a whole, highlighting the potentially dynamic nature of character. In terms of status 'within the company', Sheldrake is at the top and yet he is behaving no differently from any other member of the firm in his appropriation and subsequent use of the apartment. Others are certainly instrumental in sending Miss Kubelik's brother-in-law to assault Baxter and it is these forces that he eventually reacts against. It is a fact that they cannot make the break from the company that Baxter achieves, and they remain subservient to Sheldrake as metaphoric for the whole company. The character of Doctor Dreyfuss fulfils the roles of both donor and dispatcher in his prompting Baxter to become a *mensch* and also helper in his support

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<sup>9</sup> This type of analysis has continuing use and seemingly continuing validity, especially in light of Bordwell's claims. Graeme Turner - *Film as Social Practice* (2nd Ed) (1988) - London, Routledge - 1993 - p.71. In recent years Turner has applied this to contemporary film: *We can easily demonstrate a degree of fit between Propp's categories of 'spheres of action' and characterisation in film, too. A list of the main characters in Star Wars fits Propp's eight spheres of action quite neatly ... At the very least, it underlines the possibility that the modern feature film and the primitive fairy-tale serve similar functions for their respective audiences.* But it must be remembered that Propp's model is reductive and simplistic.

However, it is clear that rather than one being modern and the other being primitive the feature film *Star Wars* has been constructed in order to fit the category of 'fairy-tale'. Furthermore, fairy-tales are specific constructs in themselves. The film has status as a modern fairy-tale the characters are positioned in their roles to such a degree that Propp could have been the casting director. However, rather than this demonstrating the underlying Proppian structure to all fables the film has been constructed to emulate the traditional fairy-tale format. For example, the introductory, '*A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away ...*', which is instantly recognisable as the conventional introduction to many familiar folk-tales, overtly makes the film audience aware of what they are seeing. The result is a construct which itself is emulative of another construct. The limitations of analysis of filmic narratives in these terms are similar to those of the written form and ignore any form of depth that may be 'read' into the characters.

<sup>10</sup> Propp's categories are Villain, Helper, Donor (often Magician), Female in distress and her Father, Dispatcher, Hero and False Hero. Vladimir Propp - *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968) - Austin, University of Texas - 1979 - see Chapter Three, pp.25-65.

during Miss Kubelik's attempted suicide. However, Miss Kubelik also fulfils the roles of dispatcher in her affection for Baxter and donor in her prompting him to find a better situation. The role of false hero is equally shared by both Sheldrake, who the audience may initially have sympathies with, and also Baxter who does little to fundamentally change the behaviour of his less than traditionally moral bosses. The attempt to pin down these characteristics to one character alone is unworkable and the result is that the company stands as both the false hero and villain, with the characters who represent this institution as individuals metaphoric for the whole and the hierarchy within clearly places Baxter at the bottom.

To examine the metaphoric nature of the company itself is something that is certainly of interest to the character of the schlemiel in terms of the setting but is beyond the boundaries of structured Narratological analysis, which searches for underlying certainties rather than speculation. This is similarly the case with the character of Forrest Gump who is seemingly the hero and Jenny who fulfils the role of the 'female in distress'. The particular scene the critic chooses to analyse affects the positioning of the other characters. In the case of Forrest Gump, this is further problematised by the continually changing temporal perspective from the present in at the first narrative level to his recollected past and past events that he could not possibly recollect and also the diachronic temporal progression, which operates at the embedded narrative level. The most overarching dispatcher could possibly be his mother, yet in terms of his success as a shrimp fisherman, it could be Bubba, or, with his success in running the business, it could be Gump himself. The figure of the helper in Vietnam could be Bubba, by his friendship towards Gump; in terms of the shrimp fishing it is Lieutenant Dan; in his early life his mother (by sleeping with his headmaster); and again in later life it is again Gump himself, based on his own interpretation of an amalgamation of advice from others.<sup>11</sup> This leaves any final act of interpretation up to the individual perspective of the viewing audience and the critic, even

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<sup>11</sup> It is this aspect of Gump's own interpretation of advice that makes him as much a schlemiel as Gimpel in his own interpretation of Talmudic teachings, as indicated in previous chapters.



when attempting to adopt Propp's model. The donor could be Dan in the help that he gives to Gump on the boat, Bubba in the means to become a successful shrimp fisherman or perhaps, most paradoxically, those U.S. governmental forces which give him the opportunity to become a successful sporting star. This is a paradox due to the nature of the villain at this point in the narrative. Whilst there is clearly no discernible villain beyond Jenny's father and the many boyfriends she acquires (these figures are not fully developed as characters, but still act as a 'collective villain') it is the many societal forces and attitudes that conspire against him and also by the HIV virus that ultimately kills Jenny.<sup>12</sup> Those who leave him on the park bench because they refuse to believe that such a 'fool' could be a success exemplify this. Yet these societal and communal forces are also the ones that support him on his run but in subsequent scenes reject him (on the bench) thus featuring as false heroes. In examining the other characters, and their own individual narratives, as developed characters, Gump fulfils the role of villain (initially for Dan), dispatcher (for Dan and Jenny) and donor (for Jenny and his own mother). Which indicates that, (as with literary schlemiels), if the audience fails to have sympathies with a schlemiel-keit character then <sup>his or her</sup> status as hero is negated and the status as a schlemiel may be reduced to that of nebech or even schmuck. Whilst America itself, in the case of Forrest Gump and the company (as metaphor) in the case of The Apartment may be both the villain and the false hero, they are not characters (although it must be reiterated that setting can act like a character.)<sup>13</sup> It would seem that setting is crucial to the function and reception of the schlemiel within the fabula and more importantly that setting is characterised both for and by the audience on the backdrop of the screen in relation to character; the two shape each other. The notion of setting being visible is crucial to film analysis and is distinct from written narratives. This is an

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<sup>12</sup> This is again problematic in terms of the moral highground that Aristotle claims is part of characterisation. Jenny has been shown to be promiscuous and it is up to the individual member of the audience to determine responsibility for contracting the illness. In these terms the villain may shift between the virus itself and the effect Jenny's death has on Gump and their son.

<sup>13</sup> Michael J. Toolan - Narrative: a Critical Linguistic Introduction (1988) - London, Routledge - 1988 - p.103

aspect that needs to be developed later in respect of how it impacts on the character of the schlemiel, both within the tale and for the audience.

In respect of Griemasian terminology the further reduction of character poses similar and equally irreconcilable problems and to return to Aristotle creates even more. To look at morality as the motivating factor the sender or even the donor would be the one who would give this instruction. In The Apartment, Baxter's sense of morality comes from an external unnamed source and therefore cannot exist as a character with attributable and physical traits. Some moral guidance comes through the instruction of Doctor Dreyfuss, but this is not his own sense of right and wrong, which already exists. This instruction is essentially a catalyst to Baxter's own action. In Forrest Gump, it is via his mother but undoubtedly stems from an unshakeable belief in God. Due to the nature of the character that Gump represents, his belief in God both develops from the teachings of others and also from his own personal perspective. To begin to examine the relationship between Gump and his mother or the social construction of the individual in relation to this point would involve psychological speculation about the characters, which exists outside the Structuralist dictat of either Propp or Griemas. What such analysis fails to reveal is how and why these characters may operate and function in different ways. It does, however, demonstrate the similar formal structure of narratives, not only across mediums, but also across cultures. The central focus must then be to return to the point that the dimension that attracts so many people to a text is character and character in relation to event.<sup>14</sup>

Placing either the characters of The Apartment or the characters of Forrest Gump in the structured format of Aristotle, Propp or Griemas demonstrates the potential correlation, but is only one potential interpretation, it is never fixed due largely to the reductive nature of their analytical approaches. It must again be emphasised that development of the fabula along causal relationships, which is essentially the function of character for the Structuralists, is a logic that

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. - p.90

schlemiel by their very nature deny (as the example of Hyman Kaplan demonstrates). This relates to the basic problems of definition of the term, trying to quantify set patterns of behaviour that the schlemiel will conform to is impossible. The only certainty is that the schlemiel will not behave as expected, whether it is Baxter's refusal and resignation in front of Sheldrake or Gump's unmotivated decision to run around America and subsequently stop with as little discernible reason. The problem with performing any task such as placing the characters within a diagram or table as dictated by a Propp, a Griemas, or a Barthes, et al, is that it is always going to be ultimately reductive, and schlemiels will always break out and follow their own logical structures.<sup>15</sup>

This issue raises the related problem of causality, as with literature the 'unusual' logic of the schlemiel does not mean that the text will break from a neo-Aristotlean narrative progression but that unexpected causal links may follow. For example, Baxter's euphoria after being attacked by Miss Kubelik's brother in law, or Gump's desire to run, or Zelig's ability to transform his physical appearance. In the case of the last example, it is the responsibility of 'normal' scientific America to explain the problem and in fact to deem it a problem in the first place<sup>16</sup>. What this does demonstrate is that the problems that exist with categorising the schlemiel in 'Jewish' texts and 'non-Jewish' texts by these criteria are exactly the same.

No analysis of character in film can be accurate without an analysis of not only how modes of characterisation occur in the medium but also how they differ from the work already undertaken, including those texts which make potentially tenuous links with a literary based

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<sup>15</sup> Many attempts have been made to use this type of analysis across a wide range of films. Perhaps most notably Peter Wollen's analysis of *North by Northwest*. For further comment on the validity of this type of analysis see R. Lapsley and M. Westlake - *Film Theory: An Introduction* (1988) - Manchester, Manchester University Press - 1992 - pp.131-134 and Bordwell Op.Cit. - 1988 - pp.5-20.

<sup>16</sup> For a more detailed account of causality in film see David Bordwell - *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985) - London, Routledge - 1993 - pp.164-167 and pp.248-249 and David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson - *Film Art ; An Introduction* (4th edition, International Edition) (1979) - New York, McGraw-Hill - 1993 - pp.68-70 and pp.86-88

Narratological theory when separate consideration may be essential. Little research has been conducted on the schlemiel in film where much has been done in literary studies; perhaps with the notable exception of Woody Allen.<sup>17</sup> The assumption might be that there is a lower rate of occurrence of schlemiels in cinema; this is clearly not the case in taking a schlemiel as the amalgam of those characteristics indicated in Section one. The subsequent focus of this study must become an examination of how the specific traits of the characters may lead them to be deemed 'schlemiel' on the same grounds as their historically established literary counterparts. It is then vital to assess how filmic signifiers may link them to Jewish origins and so they may comfortably be given the title 'schlemiel' whilst other non-Jewish characters may also fit the same category.

The main focus of the camera tends to be with a character, with <sup>his or her</sup> a role being as focalised, the camera therefore ultimately acts as focaliser. There is also a clear distinction between the levels of diegetic voice that exist in literature and the levels of voice that occur in film in conjunction with the camera, which shows the characters and action. It is therefore important to differentiate between mimesis and diegesis in respect of this particular medium. It is crucial to highlight the two-dimensional nature of cinema, the fact that it exists on celluloid alone and that it is undoubtedly the case that it is nothing more than projections in light. This fails to adequately address the relationship between the character on the screen and the spectator, although spectator in these terms is something of a misnomer as it implies passivity. A great deal of debate surrounds the potential degrees of passivity that the audience may have.

What the audience is still left with is what Genette termed the *illusion of mimesis*, but this concept of the illusory nature of mimesis is equally problematic in terms of cinematic analysis. It is this very illusion of mimetic presentation, or an accurate representation of the world that

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<sup>17</sup> This provides an interesting case and what must be noted is that Jewish characters, for whatever reason, feature heavily in Allen's work. It seems to have become acceptable to discuss Allen in these terms whilst ignoring many others.

has been the concern of theorists from the advent of film as a medium. Whilst it is not the purpose of this study to debate the deep theoretical analysis of realism in literature or cinema, it is worth noting that the concept of mimesis implies an unbiased presentation of events. Whilst Genette's point is perfectly correct in relation to literary texts, the idea that that *no narrative can show or imitate that story it tells* does not fit the images that cinema creates.<sup>18</sup> In fact it is that cinema only shows, it cannot tell, yet this simple statement fails to take into account the variety of signifying practices that cinema utilises as a matter of course. Film is a complex system of signifiers all of which are active elements for interpretation on the part of the audience and all of them must be considered in any all encompassing analysis such as a Narratological approach. The investigation into film 'language' that Christian Metz undertook has not been without its critics, most notably Andre Bazin who claims an unbiased and accurate 'camera as recorder'; what Metz does highlight is that cinema has its own specific codes and conventions which break from literature, but more importantly break from a representation of 'reality'.<sup>19</sup> It is an examination of the channels of communications, and subsequently the channels of discourse, that Metz presents that demonstrate the heavily constructed nature of the cinematic product. Even in a silent film such as The Cohens and the Kellys the element of speech and noise are absent and the element of music would be open to interpretation on the part of the performer in the individual theatre (although the distribution of set scores became more and more commonplace). However, the use of print as speech is still there for the audience in a form that is absent from virtually all 'talkies'; although this element creates further problems in terms of film analysis. However, with the advent of sound and subsequent technological advances the apparent dissolution of certain signifying practices from the realm of the diegetic to the mimetic potentially leads to alternative interpretations. What is vital to filmic character analysis and to how a particular character may be determined as a 'schlemiel' is how these other

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<sup>18</sup> Gerard Genette - Narrative Discourse (1980) - London, Cornell University Press - 1980 - p.164

<sup>19</sup> For a more detailed analysis of this see Colin McCabe - Theoretical Essays: Film, Linguistics, Literature (1985) - Manchester, Manchester University Press - 1985 - 'Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Thesis', pp.33-57 and 'On Discourse', pp.82-112.

signifiers operate together with the visual image to produce an overall effect. Certain narrative features such as setting and also spatio-temporal location can come from the visual image. For example, Baxter being sat alone in a large office building wearing clothes which denote the 1960s. However, setting may also be connoted through the speech act:

'My name is C.C. Baxter, however most people call me Bud ... I very often stay on at the office and work for an extra hour or, er, two, especially when the weather is bad. Its not that I'm overly ambitious, its just a way of killing time until its alright for me to go home. You see I've had this little problem with my Apartment.

[Cuts to Apartment still maintaining voice-over narration].<sup>20</sup>

Through noise or at least through the complete absence of it in a setting (an open plan office) normally associated with activity and through the presence of melancholic, perhaps even pitiful music. It is quite common to focus purely on the visual images and discount all the other processes together. This is even the case where the focus is on character but discounts their role in telling their own stories.

Baxter as a schlemiel is instantly dislocated from what the audience may initially assume and indeed expect is the sanctity of his own environment. This is further disrupted by the revelation that his home is not even his own. Baxter conducts this explanation as an intradiegetic narrator along with other characters, and also as an extradiegetic autodiegetic narrator (in telling his own story). This is a point where the clear distinctions between literature and film can be made. Baxter does not just tell his own story; we are shown the events as well. It is this element that is vital in its effect on the audience if this immediate narrating instance comes via the spoken word for the audience and from Baxter then it is *reasonable* to expect the subsequent shown events to be directed through Baxter himself as focalised. There is still the element of showing, with

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<sup>20</sup> The Apartment, dir: Billy Wilder, USA, 1960

Baxter as both focaliser and focalised in this instance but with the omnipresent camera localising both with and outside Baxter's extradiegetic narration. The two elements which (in terms of their ability to communicate information on an overt level) are most apparent are the visual image and the spoken word. These two elements are the most immediately and easily quantifiable in terms of Narratological analysis and for the audience. The distinction made in great depth by Bordwell specifically in relation to the narrating instance, which is vital to an ultimate conception of characterisation, is that the narrators are, in his terms, involved in this active process of characterisation on both intradiegetic and extradiegetic levels.<sup>21</sup> Intradiegetic narration, although vital to any process of characterisation, is still subsumed by the act of showing although this is complicated where the act of showing may be connected to recollected events on the part of character. Whilst this is true in most narrative fiction film, there are aspects of cinema where it may be perceived that an extradiegetic narrator is leading the showing. This extradiegetic narrator may, for the audience, be the director and/or writer and/or any potential number of people involved in the filmmaking process.

In literary analysis, it is more obviously the case that as an audience we are being told and not shown events. However, Genette's analysis of the perceived use of mimesis is complicated even more by the structure of film language. This seems contradictory in the case of Baxter who, like Gimpel, is narrating and framing his own story. The question needs to be asked as to whether narration in cinema is only from intradiegetic sources or whether there is any aspect that is perceivably extradiegetic. Baxter's initial instance of narration is seemingly extradiegetic but as has been noted is both extradiegetic and autodiegetic, the function that this serves for the audience needs to be debated further, but as Stam et.al. comment:

'The question of **EXTRADIEGETIC NARRATION** in film is a considerably more ambiguous area of enquiry than that of character-narration.

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<sup>21</sup> Op.Cit. - Bordwell - Narration in the Fiction Film - 1993 - pp.1-26

Extradiegetic narration in films can be defined as the primary narrational or discursive activity flowing from the medium of cinema itself ... extradiegetic narration is the primary agency responsible for relating events, it is always exterior and logically prior to the to the fictional world itself, which it encloses.<sup>22</sup>

However, this implies that any instance of extradiegetic narration will come before the instance of showing which may be true of extradiegetic narration (as in the case of *Zelig*) but cannot be the case the case with extradiegetic autodiegetic narration. This has a direct impact on the reception and ultimately the judgement of character on the part of the audience. Chatman indicates that that where there is a perceived element of diegetic presentation the assumption on the part of the audience may be that there is a teller.<sup>23</sup> Where there is the illusion of mimesis the concern is not for the teller. Despite this potential illusion of 'reality', any film is of the order of the diegetic and it is this narrative space that the schlemiel inhabits. Film is of concern where it may be perceived that it is imitative of real people who are in turn schlemiels rather than occasionally bearing the characteristics of the schlemiel. It is also important (in the same respect as with literary schlemiels) where it can be perceived that events are being presented in an unmediated way and this in turn affects the process of characterisation.

It is this distinction between showing and telling that is directly responsible for the positioning of character as being of one type or another. Even when characters narrate on an intradiegetic level the audience is hearing the act of speech rather than the literary counterpart where 'he/she said' would perform a similar narrative function. A clear distinction must be made

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Stam, Sandy Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis - New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics (1992) - London, Routledge - 1992 - p.103 - (Their emphasis). Where Stam et.al. use the term 'character-narration' I prefer to make the distinction between instances of intra, hetro, homo or autodiegetic narration and the subsequent effect on both character and characterisation. A more detailed account of Narratology and cinema can be found on pages 69-122. See also Edward Branigan - Narrative Comprehension and Film (1992) - London, Routledge - 1992 and David Bordwell - Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema (1989) - Harvard, Harvard University Press - 1994.

<sup>23</sup> Seymour Chatman - Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film (1978) - London, Cornell University Press - 1980 - pp.146-147



between a voice-over where the act of hearing in terms of intradiegetic 'speech' is connected directly to the act of showing. It may be the expectation and perception of the audience that the element of showing that exists with either extradiegetic or intradiegetic voice-over narration is on the behest of this character narrator, but this is not the case. Where we are being shown the character on the screen, even to the backdrop of character narration, this act of showing is extradiegetic. The character has the ability to recollect and recount these past events on an intradiegetic level but not to alter the temporal dimension of literature, which must exist on an extradiegetic level. On the whole, where characters speak they are also being shown speaking. The Apartment shifts from the external narrational instance to internal visible speech. This direct address and its effect on the audience locates character in setting and provides initial information about character; Baxter's narrational instances work to set the scene on one immediate level to progress the narrative relating to 'the apartment' and to add a psychological, emotional and 'real' side to the character. This has a singular impact on the reliability of narrators; their ability to comment outside the frame of the diegetic world provides them with a credibility which then impacts on their behaviour at an intradiegetic level. While it may appear that Baxter is addressing the audience, this would determine the need for an implied audience along the lines of a Narratological literary counterpoint. This transcendental implied reader or audience of the text does not exist, Baxter is merely talking aloud but it is the relationship of this recounting of events that adds a psychological dimension that otherwise could only be shown through expression on an extradiegetic level. As Chatman comments of this aspect of psychological depth:

'The medium may specialise in certain narrative effects and not others. For instance, the cinema can easily - and does routinely - present characters without expressing the contents of their minds ... verbal narratives may elect not to present some visual aspects.'<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Op.Cit. - Chatman - 1980 - p.30

However, the element of showing can only ever imply psychological depth and as such can never express the internal workings of a character's mind. It is also true to say that a visual narrative may also select not to show certain narrative aspects; to believe the world of the lens encapsulates everything is to accept the mimetic fallacy and believe the action of the camera is unmediated. This aspect of visual expression is a vital aspect of adding a psychological dimension to character and often may come through aspects of montage with the use of, what might be termed, the 'Kuleshov effect'.<sup>25</sup> However, this is not narration, it is an aspect of focalisation and as such the rigid fixture of meaning cannot be imposed upon this showing as it can be with the telling. This narrating instance changes location within the diegetic framework of the film with the example of Forrest Gump but the effect is still the same in terms of Gump being both an extradiegetic autodiegetic narrator, moving for the majority of the film to being an intradiegetic narrator but at the metadiegetic level. The effect of this on the audience is still the same and in terms of the effect of the character on the audience there is little to link religious or cultural origins to either in these formal terms; they both relate their experiences in the same way. It is this direct, open and honest address that confirms the status of the schlemiel immediately.

This rule of narration is different in a film such as Zelig, which purports to be documentary. In this instance, it appears that the narrator is extradiegetic and this narrator stands outside the diegetic framework of the story. The distinction here, which differs from other instances of extradiegetic autodiegetic narration such as those in The Apartment and Forrest Gump, is that of temporal location of both that extradiegetic narration and the showing of events. In Forrest

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<sup>25</sup> The term 'Kuleshov effect' comes from the experiments with raw stock of the Russian filmmaker Lev Kuleshov (1899-1970). Rather than merely relying on the expressive capabilities of the individual actor he juxtaposed images with the actor to form extended montage sequences. His work impacted films of many, including Eisenstein who saw, in many cases, no need for an actor and relied on images for an overall emotional effect. For more detailed information see David A. Cook - A History of Narrative Film (2nd edition) (1981) - New York, W.W. Norton and Company - 1990 - pp.144-149. Although there have been challenges to this approach, for detail of this see V.F. Perkins - Film as Film (1979) - London, Penguin - 1979.

Gump, this relates to the scenes where it may be perceived that his intradiegetic narration whilst seated on the park bench shifts to extradiegetic narration as the visual images change spatial and temporal location and ultimately return to intradiegetic narration in this new and past setting. This is problematised further by this particular film operating on two narrative levels, the first or primary diegetic level being the story of him sat on the park bench, which is the level from which all subsequent tellings and showings emanate. At the metadiegetic level the sequential structure is chronological and follows a logical order until it joins with the sequence where Gump leaves the park bench to join Jenny and their son thus reaching the point of the present in story-time and the shift in temporal location ceases.<sup>26</sup> The recalled events (childhood, Vietnam, etc.) operate as embedded narratives at the metadiegetic level which deviate from the present of the primary diegetic level, but not from the chronological order of the text. At this embedded, metadiegetic level the recalled events follow the sequence of Gump's life to date. (This is what Rimmon-Kenan refers to as natural chronology.<sup>27</sup>) This is distinct from The Apartment where the narrative operates chronologically, introduced and framed by Baxter's narration, and does not deviate from this pattern. In this case the act of showing is extradiegetic at all points and all narration, apart from the initial sequence, is intradiegetic.

In terms of a hierarchy of authority the non-named extradiegetic narrator who does not feature in the diegetic framework is prioritised in the case of Zelig and the same applies to an extradiegetic autodiegetic narrator such as Baxter. The fact that he can stand outside the story and recount events (to whoever is irrelevant) prioritises them in terms of their authority. Thus the degrees of reliability and the degrees of importance that are placed on the character narrators in relation to the effect <sup>they have</sup> on characterisation on the part of the audience. In terms of the schlemiel-keit trait of being involved in their own misfortune (as the defining trait

<sup>26</sup> Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan - Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics (1983) - London, Routledge - 1993 - pp.91-92. Rimmon-Kenan makes the distinction between the levels of diegetic narration here, but it must be noted that extradiegetic narration always stands outside the framework of the diegetic levels.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. - p.16

between the schlemiel and the schlimazel) it would immediately seem to follow that Baxter's initial narration would implicate him in this act. There is a degree of hopelessness in what he says; yet, it is the intradiegetic narration of Doctor Dreyfuss that confers more of a schlemiel-keit status on Baxter himself. Baxter's status is confirmed not because of the reliability of his own extradiegetic and intradiegetic narration, but the reliability that can be found in the intradiegetic narration of Dreyfuss. This reliability is essentially due to his professional standing and unbiased perception of Baxter's character, not his overt Jewishness that he then transposes on to Baxter. Although this is problematic as he does not have a full understanding of Baxter's behaviour within the apartment next door. The schlemiel that Baxter represents is a series of traits which critical rhetoric (of the kind used here) determines as schlemiel-keit. In the case of Forrest Gump, there is a potential aspect of unreliability as the schlemiel-keit tendencies of Gump himself are based around a biological condition. Even with this in mind the factor, which links Gump to Baxter and both of these characters to Gimpel and Meany is their moral status. The source of morality for all comes through a variety of sources but both the desire and ability to lie is absent. It is the audience who will balance this with the character's 'foolish' tendencies.

The problem remains that whilst schlemiel may not have the inclination or ability to lie, their 'foolishness' or alternative logic is such that they may fail to operate in the same way as the rest of the characters, or as an audience may expect from its own experience. This problem, which is attached to chronology, causality, and reliability, is further conflated with the case of Forrest Gump. The telling shifts from the primary diegetic level (the bench) to the retelling, which is unseen, and intradiegetic at the level located in the past. This is located in the past in story-time but in the present in text-time. However, at the metadiegetic level these recalled events are intercut with scenes that Gump could not have been aware of, for example, Jenny's childhood, her drug abuse, and his mother's reaction to his arrival home. This is where the notion that it is the telling that Gump initiates and directs which positions these images and those they come from his own memory and perspective collapses. Or rather, they could be seen

to be unreliable as it may be accepted that he is supposing or imagining what has happened and perhaps making his own connections. Yet, it is not in his character to assume anything bad of Jenny or to expect that his arrival will bring any extreme joy. He also lacks the social awareness to recount these events with any accuracy. More significantly, the kind of unusual logic that prompts him to run around America is not the same logic that would fill in the gaps and make the logical connections that run throughout the film. Whilst this may throw doubt on other recollected events the validity of these connected events is supported for his audience on the bench and the cinema audience by the production of evidence from Gump's case, later at his wedding by the arrival of Lieutenant Dan and by his son's journey to school which echoes his own. This raises the question of where and who produces the showing of non-instigated events (Jenny, his mother, etc.) that complete the logical and causal order of the film. What this ultimately leads back to is that whilst the metadiegesis may consist of events from the past being recollected by Gump, this is connected to the telling at the primary diegetic level. With this being recounted to his audience on the bench, the showing is not necessarily related to this instance of telling, they are only related by overt visual links (similar characters, settings, etc.) for the cinema audience. These events then exist as hypodiegetic or inserted narratives with an:

·Explicative Function ... answering some such questions as 'What were the events leading to the present situation?' In this case it is the story narrated and not the act of narration itself that is of primary importance. <sup>28</sup>

Examining these events as being at the hypodiegetic level demonstrates that it is not Gump who is directing the showing. What this does highlight is that the nature of <sup>are</sup> schlemiels such that their own lack of self-worth negates the glorifying of their own achievements. Gump is not even aware of his own achievements, despite their effect in shaping American society but the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. - p.92

same could be said of Baxter in the willing and devoted service he pays to Miss Kubelik with no ulterior motive.

In the case of Zelig the non-named narrator who uses a voice-over is reliable in terms the associations that are to be had with the use of a 'documentary' format. In addition to this, other instances of intradiegetic narration come from 'archive' footage and witnesses and <sup>are</sup> therefore 'primary historical information' and also from the musings of contemporary experts (Saul Bellow and Susan Sontag) and in these terms there is a sense of reliability attached to the information. The audience is informed that Leonard Zelig is of Jewish origin and whilst there may be immediate connections to be made about his medical condition and his Jewishness, there is nothing more to lead him to be considered a schlemiel in Jewish or Yiddish terms. This is distinct from a text such as Take the Money and Run, where a similar 'documentary' format is adopted yet the audience is informed, 'Everyone thought he was such a schlemiel and it turned out he's a criminal! You have never met anything like this in all your life, such a nothing.'<sup>29</sup> In this instance, the status of schlemiel is not given by a faceless but authoritative entity or by a 'professional' and therefore reliability in these terms is tested. There is seemingly more reliability when the term is used in The Princess and the Pirate where a non-Jew utilises the concept in respect of himself and his own situation. The case of Take the Money and Run shows the term 'schlemiel' being used by a Jewish character about another Jewish character and the fact remains that a schlemiel might remain aware of some of his/her own schlemiel-keit characteristics but actually to name <sup>him or herself</sup> schlemiel negates the fact that they are one.

On an intradiegetic level it would seem to follow that in film Narratology the main element to prioritise is the speech act, although it is not the speech act alone that functions at this level.

The other factors that Metz isolates feature as well; showing is evident, often in terms of

<sup>29</sup> From Take the Money and Run, dir: Woody Allen, USA, 1969. Cited in Tim Carroll - Woody and His Women (1993) - London, Little, Brown and Company - 1993 - p.146. Carroll reports that this line was improvised by Louise Lasser, a Jewish-American and Allen's second wife.

flashbacks and is often tied to instances of intradiegetic character narration. This element of showing is distinct from the extradiegetic instance where the camera is showing an event. The role of the camera in showing cannot act as a narrator, yet it can act to focalise and in this sense is partly responsible for the continuation of the narrative sequence.

Noise, including sound effects, exists in distinction to music as a factor, which can affect spatio-temporal location, but in the majority of narrative films, it exists as part of the overall narrative feature of setting.<sup>30</sup> To return to Toolan's claim that setting can act like a character, or at least can be characterised, the noises that are associated with this setting are crucial as the location for the character. A soundtrack, which includes music, such as the 'trad-jazz' backdrop of *Zelig* or the 'rock' backdrop of *Forrest Gump*, is a factor, which locates the characters in a particular spatio-temporal setting along with visual aspects such as costume and make-up. This is not the function of noise which can also serve a spatial function and often an emotive one but not temporal (for example, the noise of explosions as Gump rescues his comrades from the burning jungle). This setting is instrumental to the character of Gump who exists in opposition to the variety of moral and social values that surround him and by this dialectic between society and the individual; Gump's character stands out. As has already been indicated it is the absence of noise that is central to Baxter's situation in the office, and later it is the sound of the television alongside visual expression that emphasises his isolation and frustration in his apartment. What is of importance is that these features exist on an intradiegetic level, although they are certainly not aspects of narration, but they may aid diegetic progression.<sup>31</sup> This is an aspect, which ties

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<sup>30</sup> For a detailed account of the function of sound in film see Bordwell and Thompson - *Op.Cit.* - 1993 - Chapter Eight, pp. 292-332 and John Harrington - *The Rhetoric of Film* (1973) - New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. - 1973 - Chapter Three, pp.36-50 and Louis Gianetti - *Understanding Movies* (5th edition) (1972) - New Jersey, Prentice Hall - 1990 - pp.180-193

<sup>31</sup> Bordwell and Thompson - *Op.Cit.* - 1993 - p.307 - refer to the two levels of sound as diegetic and nondiegetic where I prefer the terms intradiegetic and extradiegetic. To term the sounds, be they noise, dialogue or music as nondiegetic implies they are not part of the diegetic plane where if in fact they may stand outside the fabula but are still of the order of the diegetic not mimetic, with even simple sounds being subject to editing.

cinema to the illusion of mimesis, although these noises or sounds may be added later in the editing room this technical process is not an essential part of the activity of diegetic interpretation on the part of the audience. As with all texts there has to be a willing suspension of disbelief, but this is not necessarily a conscious one and is more likely that because cinema has become such a dominant cultural medium its codes and conventions are accepted without question. This is what Bordwell and Thompson refer to as *Fidelity: in our sense, fidelity refers to the extent to which the sound is faithful to the source as we conceive it.*<sup>32</sup> The very creation of cinema is not then connected with the origin of the text but with the reception of it, the interpretation the audience may place upon that text is vital to consider. Either way film is still operating under an illusion of mimesis, with sounds that may not even refer to the sources in which they originate. Bordwell and Thompson still link sound and music as being the same when they function in different ways, connected to the diegetic level at which they operate; when even music operates at different levels. John Harrington comments:

Music has two forms: local and background. As with dialogue and narration, local and background music can be distinguished by their relationship to both scene and spectator. Local music originates in the scene itself and can be heard by the characters in the film as well as by the audience ... Background music functions much like narration. It 'tells' us how to respond to a film's visuals.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. - p.306. Although the phrase as it has been conceived it implies a certain amount of flux in the process of interpretation.

<sup>33</sup> Op.Cit. - Harrington - 1973 - p.38. See also Giannetti - Op.Cit. - 1990 - pp.193-200. Giannetti draws out the ability of music to produce emotional responses to particular characters and to pre-empt characters or events, specifically on p.196. See also Carroll - Op.Cit. - 1988 - 'A Contribution to the Theory of Movie Music' - pp.213-225. Carroll also connects music to narration but later debates the 'modifying' effect it may have on the perception of the visual image. Although this is potentially the case it is ultimately unquantifiable; why does anyone 'like' a piece of music? Attempts that have been made to quantify it in emotional terms tend to lead to an over simplification of both the reasons and the effects.



However, music cannot tell in the same way that dialogue can, what it does do is provide a subtle backdrop to visual events and dialogue and it is this subtlety that may position an audience in a way that dialogue cannot.

The music possesses certain expressive qualities which are introduced to modify or to characterise onscreen persons and objects, actions and events, scenes and sequences ... Music, for example, is a highly expressive symbol system. This is not to say that all music is expressive or that it should be expressive, but only that much music is expressive.<sup>34</sup>

Beyond the properties of showing and telling that exist in the cinematic product the most vital in terms of limiting perception of character is music, but as indicated above this is the incidental music, or film score, background or extradiegetic music. Theorists have treated this presence of music as an aspect of narration, but it cannot tell, merely aid focalisation in relation to that which is being shown and told by affecting mood. This is the aspect of film, which acts as a backdrop and for some filmmakers, such as Ingmar Bergman, should not be included as it clearly breaks with mimetic presentation of both characters and events. In specific respect of the schlemiel, it is important to recognise the type of music that is associated with the character in conjunction with the potential effect it may have on the audience. In terms of linking the character to its Jewish origins it would seem to follow that music or modal structures that are common to perhaps Hassidic music should be used. However, this is evidently not the case. In terms of both The Apartment and Forrest Gump, the appearance of the character on the screen is accompanied by music that invokes a sense of pity and melancholy, which contrasts with the comedic properties of the character on screen and the situations in which the character is located. This is in direct contrast to other characters that may be equally comic but do not demand an undercurrent of tragedy as the schlemiel does. For example, the Marx Brothers were undoubtedly Jewish and were also undoubtedly foolish in much of their behaviour,

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.- Carroll - p.219

however their flagrant and deliberate disregard for societal norms indicates that they were not schlemiel-keit and the choice of music when representing them on screen is fundamentally different. In Take the Money and Run, Allen is seen preparing for a romantic engagement and subsequently forgets his trousers. This revelation is set to the backdrop of melancholic, almost pitiful music that lends a sense of tragedy to an otherwise comic event. To add 'up-beat', 'light-hearted' music to the scene would reduce this character to the level of a shmuck rather than the ineffectual but resilient and ultimately triumphant schlemiel, indicating the potentially tragicomic aspects of the character. The fact remains that the consideration of these elements in Structuralist terms does not answer the question as to what the schlemiel is and what constitutes their traits and attributes. In fact, the proliferation of signifiers only leads to confusion. The subconscious analysis of character by an audience and the potential points of inferred information that an audience has to decode are of ongoing debate.

Whilst other signifying practices may position character it is the two-fold process of who is in the camera's lens and who is positioning that camera that becomes vital to any process of analysis. It is important to return to the concept of focalisation, as this is the main function of the camera. It is important to note that the camera can only show and can never tell; its function must be as a focaliser with characters and settings as the focalised on a primary level:

Narrative information in film will often be channeled through a particular character or group of characters, restricting our knowledge of the fictional world to their perceptions, knowledge or subjectivity. In an older terminology this would be called point-of-view. By recasting point-of-view in terms of focalisation, Genette restricts the term to the diegetic level of the text, to the level of characters and actions: it returns to the question of 'who sees'.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Robert Stam, Sandy Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis - New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics (1992) - London, Routledge - 1992 - p.89

If the camera cannot position the audience by telling, and character narrators more often than not act as intradiegetic narrators then all that can be left for the camera is to focalise on setting and/or character as the focalised within a particular piece of *mis-en-scene*. It may be characters that see at an embedded level but at a primary level, it is the audience, although it does not feature fully in a Narratological equation.<sup>36</sup> Genette's position is one that does differentiate between diegetic levels, both at the diegetic level and at an external level.<sup>37</sup> However, Chatman suggests that point-of-view sits better than focalisation, although his justification is limited.<sup>38</sup> This is a position which Genette says he will re-christen the first type (in general represented by the classical narrative) as nonfocalised narrative, or narrative with zero focalisation', although the same concern arises with this terminology as with the case of literature.<sup>39</sup> It is the aspect of *zero-focalisation* (or *non-focalisation*) that is challengeable within both literature and film as it still considers 'who sees' within the narrative framework. The effect of camera as focaliser that exists within the narrative structure but external to the diegetic framework also potentially positions the audience as focaliser. It is then worthy of further debate after a consideration of focalisation at the diegetic level. Stam et.al. break down the levels of internal focalisation into a three-part structure:

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<sup>36</sup> This is of course taking in to account that an audience are not purely passive. By the very action of sitting in front of the screen they are involved in a process of interaction with the text, albeit to varying degrees.

<sup>37</sup> Gerard Genette - *Narrative Discourse* (1980) - London, Cornell University Press - 1980. For the complete section on 'Focalisations' see pp.180-211

<sup>38</sup> Seymour Chatman - *Coming to Terms : The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (1990) - New York, Cornell University Press - 1990 - p.143 - See also Chapter 9, pp.139-160. Chatman uses the term *Implied Author* in this later work almost as if he is talking about a knowable entity and still refers to a transcendental *Implied Reader*; his ability and authority to do this is questionable. Genette had indicated the problematic nature of considering the concept of point-of-view, see Genette - *Op.Cit.* - p.187. Chatman's further concept of *slant* (for narrator) and *filter* (for characters) has some validity in terms of literature (although remains reductive) but fails to adequately take into account the majority of narrative cinema with the dominant action of showing and his analysis is still tied to the notion of implied author and implied reader.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* - p.187

FIXED - limited to a single character: VARIABLE - which occurs when the focalisation shifts within a scene or a film from one character or another: or MULTIPLE - in which one event is viewed from several different perspectives.<sup>40</sup>

Although it must be noted that these categories are essentially those posited by Genette, it is arguably the case that the majority of films, which contain schlemiel-keit characters, tend towards the *Variable*.<sup>41</sup> The nature of an audience's ability to categorise a character as a schlemiel is dependent upon an interaction between characters at this internal level. It is the opinion of other characters that count, but without the confusion of *Multiple* focalisation or the limitations of *Fixed* focalisation. Although *Multiple* focalisation may occur when the schlemiel figure is not present, as with the scene where Miss Kubelik's brother-in-law is told of her location (in The Apartment), but here a sense of balance is not required with the main protagonist's 'real' behaviour already being known to the audience. The element of confusion created by *Multiple* focalisation aids the development of the character of Kubelik's brother-in-law in this situation.

This perspective in itself is limited and implies that there is only one type of focalisation that can be achieved in cinema. With this problem in mind, (as indicated by Stam, et.al. above) the suggestion is that there should be a breakdown of focalisation into distinct sections at both extradiegetic and intradiegetic levels.<sup>42</sup> Baxter functions as an extradiegetic autodiegetic narrator at the start of The Apartment, however the element of showing does not come via this extradiegetic narrating instance, as in the case of Forrest Gump. It is problematic to discuss the action of the camera as showing the thoughts of characters, rather the two work alongside each other. It is more accurate to say that the camera shows and focalises independently of the

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<sup>40</sup> Op.Cit. - Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis - 1992 - p.90

<sup>41</sup> Op.Cit. - Genette - p.189-190

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. - Genette - p.89

characters, they are observable in almost every scene and therefore the act of showing exists parallel to the narrating instance. Both the intradiegetic and extradiegetic levels with the element of showing existing alongside the primary or metadiegetic levels are always extradiegetic in the fact that they remain unmediated by a knowable and quantifiable entity, (be that a member of the production team or a single 'author').

The function of the camera must therefore be one of focalisation at the extradiegetic level with the characters acting as focalised and focalisers at an intradiegetic level, both Baxter and Gump act as focalisers for characters and events at the embedded level. Therefore, the most useful starting point is with Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's three-part breakdown of focalisation into the *Perceptual* facet, the *Psychological* facet and the *Ideological* facet. These cover the essential aspects of focalisation by and through character, but in application to film, they are bound by the change in medium to operate differently to their application to literary texts.<sup>43</sup> These three distinctions indicate alternative focalisations rather than just accepting the obvious image on the screen as being obvious and neutral. Chatman's claim that aspects such as the ideological facet are implicit is to fail to take into account the interaction between different levels of narration and the element of pseudo-mimetic visual presentation as well as the other channels of communication that exist in cinema. He ultimately places that emphasis on the action of the camera alone ignoring the function and role of characters. This is a position that in itself is limited and also limits the amount of analysis that can be undertaken from this premise, even in terms of discussing the visual image alone.<sup>44</sup>

The *perceptual* facet in cinema is still dependent on the spatial and temporal perception of events with the camera potentially positioning the audience with the character/s wherever they

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<sup>43</sup> Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan - Narrative Fiction ; Contemporary Poetics (1983) - London, Routledge - 1993 - pp.77-85. See also Toolan - Op.Cit. - 1988 - pp.75-76

<sup>44</sup> Op.Cit. - Chatman - 1990 - p.154

go but, as distinct from literature, the camera does not stay with the character/s as narrator/s. The camera shows the character talking as in Forrest Gump where the shift is perceptually from intradiegetic to extradiegetic and back to intradiegetic in both spatial and temporal terms. To position Gump in the scene the camera cannot stay with his thoughts unless it maintains the voice-over from the present. The obvious exception to this example is a film such as Zelig, which maintains the extradiegetic narrator and focaliser to refract the intradiegetic character focaliser and focalised and this extradiegetic voice preempts the showing. However, this narration speculates as to the thoughts of Zelig, but can never accurately comment on them; the extradiegetic narration stays in the present while the intradiegetic narration stays in the (constructed) past. The location of the intradiegetic character narration in these terms may be secondary even though it is temporally located in the past. The audiences' perception of the validity and reliability of the opinions of these extradiegetic narrational instances are changed by the documentary format. (Although this is problematised even further with it being a fake documentary.) The characters act as the focalised in terms of the narrator also being focaliser whilst existing as focalisers for the actions of Zelig. This predominantly being the character of Eudora Fletcher who is viewed in both the narrated past and in the present where the character acts as an intradiegetic narrator recounting the events of her earlier self. It follows that the major distinction between literature and film in these terms is that whereas literary texts always focalise through character (albeit often an unnamed extradiegetic narrator-character) film cannot always do this. The act of extradiegetic narration is replaced by the dominant element of showing, which, in the first instance focalises through the camera for the audience with characters as focalised. This raises the problem of whether the camera can be seen as focaliser when it cannot narrate; the camera is involved in selective showing, but referring to the camera is not to imbue it with any ability to make decisions or to suggest that there is a character behind the lens directing it. The audience is left to choose from what is on offer in the frame of the screen and the precise details of this cannot be precisely fixed at all points. The process of focalisation in these terms is much harder to quantify both in theoretical and in interpretative

terms. This is particularly problematised when considering the potential number and variety of people in the audience, all of whom are liable to react in different ways.

In Forrest Gump the shift in spatio-temporal location is led by Gump himself by the use of a voice-over and it is this interaction between external focalisation and internal focalised that directs perception on the part of the audience; Gump is at once focaliser and focalised for his own character and in these terms he positions himself. Where the camera focalises there is no spoken language to rigidly fix who the focalised is and therefore the only recourse left open to the audience is to see the character who is prioritised not just as focalised but a subsequent intradiegetic focaliser for the other characters. In the case of The Apartment, it is the long shots of Miss Kubelik as focalised which leaves Baxter as focaliser, revealing one particular set of the character's attitudes by locating Miss Kubelik as the object of affection. Similarly in Forrest Gump, the prioritisation of Lieutenant Dan through the camera in certain scenes means he exists as both focalised and focaliser for Gump himself, revealing some of the potentially negative aspects of Gump's schlemiel-keit character and also Dan's own feelings (which perhaps indicates a psychological dimension). The interaction between Gump as extradiegetic character narrator and both intradiegetic focaliser and focalised allows the causal progression in the present to unfold from recollections of the past, some of which he could not have been aware. It is external focalisation in the first instance which leads to characters acting as focalisers; as has been stated, the inconsistent use of voice-over in film dictates that this must be the case.

As in the case of literature, without the presence of the characters as focalisers to direct action through, these characters would exist as actants with their only function being to link the events together. It is Francois Jost's concept of Ocularization that is vital to any differentiation between focalisation as it stands in literature in Rimmon-Kenan's terms and how it operates in literature, as Jost comments:

To distinguish the relationship between how the camera shows the hero and how the hero is supposed to be seen, I propose to speak of 'ocularization'. In effect, this term is valuable in evoking the ocular and the vision of who considers the field of action taken by the camera when he sees things from the position of the character this is 'internal ocularization': when the opposite occurs whereby he sees things from the position of some other person, I have provisionally used the term 'external ocularization'.<sup>45</sup>

Stam, et.al. identify the fact that the use of the term is useful to differentiate between what is in the frame of the camera's lens and what the character sees at an intradiegetic or metadiegetic level: what Jost terms Internal Ocularization.<sup>46</sup> The use of this would differentiate between those scenes where Gump would not have had access to information or would not have seen or been present at events yet, these are still being shown; Jost refers to this as External Ocularization. A scene such as Gump looking at the stars whilst in Vietnam demonstrates a move from Internal to External Ocularization. This perspective does little to progress the notion of camera as focaliser but it does, in certain instances, prioritise the characters from whose perspective and viewpoint the audience see.<sup>47</sup> It does support the notion that the telling that Gump initiates is not tied to the showing and that this visual element exists in distinction and on two levels alongside the levels of focalisation and narration. However, all this perceptual information does not negate any psychological depth that can be ascribed; this level of

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<sup>45</sup> Francois Jost - 'Narration(s): Endeca Et Au-Dela', *Communications*, 38,1983, pp.192-212 - p. 196 (my translation). There are problems in terms of Jost's phrasing, particularly in the way that he refers to the notion of 'hero' and the way he anthropomorphises the camera and refers to it as 'he'. Whilst this is a point of concern the notion of schlemiel as potential hero is something that will be analysed in more detail later. The 'humanising' of the camera is something that has been challenged in this study, Jost's use of this does not essentially cause problems as it is connected with a specific framed viewpoint of an audience, it is still the audience who interpret, but only from the information they have received.

<sup>46</sup> For a summary of Jost's argument and the application of the notion of Ocularization see Op.Cit. - Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis - 1992 - p.93

<sup>47</sup> This is a perceptual element to the interpretation of cinema on the part of the audience. It is obviously not through the eyes of a particular character but in fact this use of camera determines that the action is directed from the perspective of that character. This problematises the question of who creates both character and the overall cinematic product. If it is the character in instances such as this then it is difficult to locate the director or actor in this process, it certainly may aid the sense of realism when the audience is located with the thoughts of particular characters but this is only at an intradiegetic level and the film will always move back to the extradiegetic in terms of the showing but not the telling.



focalisation is predominantly about prioritisation of discourse through the perspective of the camera. The audience is positioned with certain characters at certain points both revealing the schlemiel-keit nature of certain characters, whilst at other times examining the effects of their behaviour and more importantly the attitude that other characters have towards them, be they overtly or covertly Jewish or Gentile.

An important area of focalisation, which exists in distinction to literature, occurs where Rimmon-Kenan differentiates between *cognitive* and *emotive* aspects of the *psychological* facet of focalisation. In respect of literary narratives it is the case that these two elements deal with the focaliser's mind and emotions, however, this raises problems accepting the camera as the external focaliser. The beliefs, memories and understanding of characters that are represented by the *cognitive* aspect are not knowable via an omniscient extradiegetic character narration (in terms of classical narrative fiction films) and so must come not from the focaliser (camera in film at the extradiegetic level) but via implied emotion from the expression of the character. This moves into the area of the *emotive* and becomes internal and consequentially blurs the distinction between the two. Stam, et.al. highlight the Genettian aspect of External focalisation in relation to this aspect, but are correct to conclude that any character based information tends to come from an internal source.<sup>48</sup> However accurate this may be the effect of focalisation through montage (and techniques related to the Kuleshov effect) and the location of elements within a particular piece of mis-en-scene cannot be ignored. For example, the juxtaposition of the image of Baxter against the large, faceless and seemingly new office and against the physically imposing figure of Sheldrake confers a sense of displacement and nervousness on his character. The location of Gump in the Vietnamese jungle, the sequence of the rain stopping and the shot of stars above juxtaposed against Jenny in the final stage of her illness brings hope to an otherwise bleak situation. However, this sequence is also backed up by a voice-over, which maintains its spatio-temporal dimension in the present of the story while the image moves

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. - p.90

to the past of the event. The Gump of the present is aware of the significance of the event, and this is demonstrated through both the telling of the extradiegetic narrator, in this case Gump himself. This also appears in the montage sequence, from the perspective of camera, as focaliser, or External Ocularizer, which implies joy for the Gump in the Vietnam War, hope for the Gump and Jenny of the present and ultimately the relationship between the two. What the camera can do as focaliser is show the main characters and their emotions. These emotions can be implied or extended through montage but without the element of reliable narration, implication is all that can be achieved. It is impossible to conclude about the effects on an audience as this would result in generalisation dependent on context of viewing and the socio-cultural background of the individual audience member. If the focalisers are character-narrators, they can never have a strong element of omniscience, Baxter's voice-over cannot explain how the events will unfold later in the film, but elements such as the expression in his voice might suggest something about his mind-set in the present. Because this psychological and emotive facet is always implied, this level of focalisation is always without. It is only at the level of internal ocularisation that certain information can be given, for example, the view Baxter has of Miss Kubelik lying in bed where the audience is positioned alongside him and he is not in the frame of the camera's lens. However it must be noted that this scene, amongst many others, is coupled with a fitting piece of, what might be described as, 'romantic' music, which itself exists at an extradiegetic level.<sup>49</sup> *Zelig* provides a different example where the extradiegetic narrator remains unnamed and does not feature in the fabula. Both Baxter and Gump as extradiegetic character narrators, have their authority to accurately report affected by their status as schlemiels, even if this is not immediately the case with the character of Baxter. Even at an intradiegetic level, they are not fully aware of the ramifications of their own actions or other events. Baxter thinks that Sheldrake will release his hold over Miss Kubelik and Gump thinks

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<sup>49</sup> Music is important in that it can act like a narrator but is certainly not narration in the classical sense, because any result is only implied definite statements are not being made. The use of sound is usually extradiegetic but not exclusively. The scene which features Miss Kubelik and Sheldrake at the New Year's Eve party features music which obviously exists at an intradiegetic level, the effect of which is to locate this music with setting more fully than with characters.

that Jenny will stay, but as focalised from the camera and other characters as the focalisers then the audience can see the potential foolishness of their actions. Their status as schlemiels means that the audience may be aware of the fact that the result expected by the character will not materialise but their reliability is not questioned in terms of the **characters own belief** in what they are saying. This notion does have implications in terms of the causal relationships within the fabula with the characters being unable to function as actants if all their expectations are unfulfilled.

It is attempting to isolate the *ideological* facet of focalisation that is most problematic. In terms of maintaining authority over the story in the case of literature, this would be an **unnamed** extradiegetic narrator, but, as has already been stated, this figure does not exist in the majority of narrative cinema. In these terms, Zelig would appear to share the same ground with literature, but this text is the exception to the rule. If the camera is the extradiegetic focaliser (but cannot narrate) then problems are raised in terms of the hierarchy of discourse. Where instances of extradiegetic narration do occur then prioritisation can be given to the discourse of a particular character; for example, the repeated use of this form of narration via Gump. This aspect also raises the importance of the introduction to The Apartment; this use of extradiegetic narration raises the ideological profile of Baxter as focalised, but the nature of the camera as focaliser is still one of an un-ideological position in terms of narration. The only way that the camera can have any effect in terms of the ideological function is by the positioning of the shot via the mis-en-scene or by the intercutting of images within a piece of montage. Whilst this may result in the camera having an ideological function in respect of the narrative construction of the text, it is the **perceived** aspect of this ideological status **on the part of the audience** that must now come into question. As with a non-judgmental extradiegetic literary narrator it may be perceived that ideological focalisation will come from intradiegetic narration (Donald Barthelme's The King being perhaps the most extreme literary example), although the instances of voice-over extradiegetic character narration negates this to an extent, as with the examples of

Baxter and Gump. The focalisation from the camera on schlemiel characters, or their function being as focaliser and focalised at the same time (with narration and/or shift in temporal location) does not prioritise their discourse as the norm for the text, not in the way that Rimmon-Kenan dictates for literature. It does, however, prioritise their behaviour as central and their ideological position (albeit an subconscious one) as that against which all subsequent positions will be measured. As with literary examples the responsibility for the direction of the focalisation on the part of the camera may be attributed to an extra-textual entity akin to the novelistic author and it is this that must become of concern in respect of these aspects of focalisation. As with Barthes, notion of the death of author in literature, the same could be said of film. Whilst this remains seemingly accurate and laudable in theoretical terms those invisible characters who are **inferred** by words, title sequences, reputation, critical rhetoric or as actors are an implicit part of the film-making process and cannot be ignored.

The many inconsistencies in Narratological analysis of texts indicate that rather than finding a rigid and scientific model from which to analyse character this very problem has largely been ignored. It is often adequate and accurate to analyse a text in terms of image or linguistic construction but any consideration of character ultimately returns to the ontological. This is certainly true in respect of the reception of a character on the part of the audience/reader and, perhaps more importantly from the essentially indefinable perspective of the audience/reader; to define leads to generalisations unacceptable to any considered and Structuralist theoretical perspectives. What this ontological perspective ultimately leads back to is what David Bordwell terms personification in terms of film:

We project humanlike properties onto so many domains of activity that we ought not to be surprised that they also feature in that esoteric realm known

as film criticism. The mimetic hypothesis reappears: the notion of the person is basic to our making sense of the external world.<sup>50</sup>

There are more implications to this than Bordwell suggests above; in fact, the notion of the person is essential to the internal workings of 'fictional' texts in the broadest sense. Whilst it is theoretically acceptable to indicate the diegetic level that film operates on any analysis must ultimately return to the fact that the act of watching and interpreting a text occurs in real time in, what might dangerously be termed, an external 'reality'.<sup>51</sup> Although there is an apparent amount of spatio-temporal narrative compression in cinema, despite the obvious examples that work in real time, the physical act of watching a film takes into account these narrative conventions and interprets accordingly. Film then inhabits an external reality as well as a diegetic one and it is within this extradiegetic position that meaning is found or rather meaning is created and imposed through the act of interpretation. Much of this rhetoric stems from the role the media plays in promotion, taking into account the large economic demands placed on film, regardless of the place or time of production (much more so than in the case of literature). In the specific case of the schlemiel as fool and the problematic nature of cultural and religious location it would seem that the role of the actor is vital in giving the character three dimensions; in this case the ability to think, an attribute that the audience is aware of and yet does not have access to. Similarly, the director may be perceived to be the figure that positions everything within the diegetic frame, including character. The same conflation that may exist between author and extradiegetic narrator in literary texts is unlikely to exist in respect of director and extradiegetic narrator.<sup>52</sup> Due to the general lack of this kind of telling any conflation is likely to

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<sup>50</sup> David Bordwell - Making Meaning : Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema (1989) - Harvard, Harvard University Press - 1991 - p.151

<sup>51</sup> It must be noted that the text-time for film and literature are quite distinct whilst story-time remains the same. The text-time for literature is dependant upon the reader's own abilities whereas the text-time in cinema is dictated purely by the length of the film. This has potential implications in terms of a creative authoritative presence existing outside the text, the individual/s who determine this length in a more obvious way. Closure exists in exactly the same way but is arguably the case that it is reached more abruptly.

<sup>52</sup> For a more detailed breakdown of the development and arguments surrounding Auteur theory see John Caughie (ed.) - Theories of Authorship (1981) - London, Routledge - 1993 - pp.7-9 and pp.9-17, Pam

be between director and camera taking the act of showing as the primary diegetic level in cinema. It is this that perhaps accounts for much of the critical rhetoric, which supports the belief that the camera is telling rather than showing, because there is considered to be an individual behind that camera, in ultimate control and with ultimate authority. Whilst these figures may exist, quantifying them in Narratological terms is almost impossible.

There is an argument to suggest that the emphasis placed on spoken language in Narratological study is of paramount concern in relation to an actor's ability to interpret a particular character role. This could be of particular concern to the inflection of Yiddish words and this is certainly the case in The Apartment with the character of Dr. Dreyfuss.<sup>53</sup> However, Forrest Gump's Southern drawl, C.C. Baxter's intermittent stutter and the familiar Zelig/Allen nasal whine are all distinct and each one deviates from 'standard' pronunciation, thus strengthening the notion that the character of the schlemiel is unique in some respect and certainly breaks with an accepted norm. This highlights a potential correlation between non-Jewish schlemiel-keit characters and directly ascribable Jewish schlemiels and the similarities between the inflections in language used in everyday speech. However, any speculation attempting to raise the profile of an actor shows nothing about the specifics of character, but would seemingly give some credence to the notion of the actor as Auteur.<sup>54</sup> However, the two can never accurately be separated and quantified and as such, the role of the actor is as the most visible member of the production team and potentially the figure who is viewed as giving the character three dimensions; which returns to Bordwell's notion of personification. It is at the

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Cook - 'Authorship and Cinema' in Pam Cook (ed.) - The Cinema Book (1985) - London, BFI Publishing - 1990 - pp.114-207 and Helen Stoddart 'Auteurism and Film Authorship' in Joanne Hollows and Mark Jancovich (eds.) - Approaches to Popular Film (1995) - Manchester, Manchester University Press - 1995 - pp.37-58.

<sup>53</sup> An example of the complexity of seeing a language such as Yiddish in a written form and the subsequent problems of expression can be seen in Leo Rosten - Joys of Yiddish (1968) - London, Penguin - 1971 - pp.xiv-xv, where he fully details the relationship between Yiddish and English.

<sup>54</sup> See Op.Cit. - Giannetti - 1990 - p.203 for details of this perspective.

level of the human that the Structuralist argument collapses fundamentally and an alternative approach needs to be considered.

There is an apparent distinction between the literary and filmic and the concept of the characters coming into 'being'. This concept, derived from the work of Martin Heidegger, is the ultimate conception of audience interaction with text, not in terms of understanding but in the specific notion of the functionality and need for characters.<sup>55</sup> Thomas Docherty identifies the problematic nature of experiencing the text in relation to the characters that appear in the text:

'Humans, then 'ek-sist' as Heidegger has it, in the world, which is to say that they are at once present in it and absent to it, transcending their position in it. Analogously, we may say the characters of fiction 'ek-sist' in their world: they are present in it, as characters, and also absent from it as (illusory) people whose existence transcends any localized position in the text.<sup>56</sup>

However there is a contradiction in Docherty's argument in the correlations between what he correctly terms the ontological perspective connected to Heidegger's position on Being and an earlier consideration of a Structuralist position dictated by Culler.<sup>57</sup> This statement is echoed in Toolan's summary of the Narratological/Structuralist debate around character that formed part of the opening debate in this study surrounding a formal consideration of character:

'It is a paradox ... that the one dimension that attracts so many readers and listeners to novels and short stories in the first place - a revelatory portraiture of character and personal motive, the refreshingly distinct view of the world

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<sup>55</sup> Martin Heidegger - Being and Time - (1962) (trans. John McQuarrie and Edward Robinson) - Oxford, Blackwell - 1995. For introductory information on the concept of being see pp. 1-15 and 15-27.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Docherty - Reading Absent Character : Towards a Theory of Characterisation in Fiction (1983) - Oxford, Clarendon Press - 1983 - pp.220-22

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. - p.220.

of different individuals - is they are apparently least amenable to systematic analysis.<sup>58</sup>

It would be possible to apply this to viewers and films as well, considering the special place that the iconography of the star and even the presence of the unknown actor hold in this drawing the reader to the text. The emphasis must then be on the multiplicity of factors which allow the reader to gain information about the narrative; characters then exist within the narrative as the beings being brought into Being by the attention of other beings, but this suggests a limited existence and the very nature of Being denies this. The function of the text is then essentially, how it serves the beings viewing it and the only empathy that exists can be with other like beings within the narrative. The shared experience which relates to events is then experienced both second hand for the audience via character and also first hand for the reader/audience who experience the text. However, as Docherty has stated, this essentially rounded character is one that is viewed within the text, but exists beyond it as well. This is not in a psychological fashion in the minds of the reader/audience but in the fact that they are beings and the very nature of Being is based around the nature of existence, or as Heidegger has it, being-in-the-world. However, Docherty's argument stems from Heidegger's concept of the Dasein, or at the most basic level the notion of 'being-there'. In this sense, the very essence of existence is connected with the location of the 'ordinary' individual within the world as a human being and the individual's recognition of this status.<sup>59</sup> However, the notion of Dasein is not merely located with the acceptance of the notion of generalised humanity but accepts the differences between cultural groups in relation to their social construction:

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<sup>58</sup> Michael J. Toolan - Narrative : A Critical Linguistic Introduction (1988) - London, Routledge - 1988 - p.90

<sup>59</sup> For a synopsis and analysis of Heidegger's argument regarding Being see Stephen Mulhall - Heidegger and Being and Time (1996) - London, Routledge - 1996 - 'The question of Being', pp.1-8 and for Dasein see 'The priority of Dasein', pp.26-33



Rather, it is a question of a conjunction of appearances with respect to their sometime existence (Dasein), their presence. The appearances, however, change, occur at different moments with different durations, and hence differ from each other (heterogeneous) with respect to their existence (Dasein). Because it is now a matter of the determination of the constancy of the object, consequently upon its stand in the unity of its connection with the rest, and thus upon the determination of its existence (Dasein) in relation to the existence (Dasein) of the others, it is a matter of a conjunction of what is heterogeneous, a unified standing together in different time relationships.<sup>60</sup>

This leads to problems in the reception of characters in terms of their reception across a range of cultures and in different time periods, and would suggest that the experiences of Gimpel, Fidelman, Baxter or Gump would not be understood by people in any other country than America, or even outside specific cultural and geographic locations in America. What is perhaps most noteworthy is that the characters are identified and classified after the event, when there is a veil of coherence. Increasingly there are attempts made to classify and categorise the moment as it is being lived, clearly an impossible task. The result is (postmodern) confusion. It is perhaps not <sup>that</sup> there is a total lack of unity; the reality is that there never has been any. The potential for different interpretations still exists to a large degree. Yet it is still essential to have some form of specific location in terms of the nature of fiction (stories have to have settings, as Narratological analysis shows) but this setting is not essential to the understanding of the character. The above quotation from Heidegger clearly identifies that the nature of existence (Dasein) is connected with a sense of constancy and therefore patterns of similarity and ultimately recognisability. In respect of the nature of character, these constants can never be in specific settings but in general behavioral terms. Narratological analysis has demonstrated that characters do function in relation to settings but these settings remained broadly similar in terms of the specific character types; Gimpel and Meany are ostracised by the rest of society and

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<sup>60</sup> Martin Heidegger - What is a Thing? (trans. W.B. Barton Jr. & Vera Deutsch) (1967) - Indiana, Gateway Editions Ltd. - 1967 - pp.225-226. (The text of this book first appeared as a lecture delivered at the University of Freiburg in 1935.)

Baxter and the young Gump are pitted against a largely uncaring world. The Jewish Shtetl of Frampol is certainly a long way from the Protestant New England as is the New York urbanity from the deep south rurality, but the characters are still recognisable and still function in similar ways. Docherty identifies this interaction of character and non-specific setting in terms of situation:

[There] is a space or 'position' in which the interactions between character and environment create both character and environment in a series of existential 'moments' or situations ... The revelation of character, then, is contemporaneous with the formation of character in the portrayal of experience undergone and located in the character. The character is posited in existence in a series, which at the same time refuses to fix that character at any one moment of existence. Character therefore does not embody experience at all, but rather experience produces character-in-situation, so to speak.<sup>61</sup>

However, this inverts the relationship that an application of Heidegger to fictional texts would immediately suggest. It is the case that Heidegger is identifying the notion of Dasein with the recognition of similarity in the behaviour of different characters, but perhaps not different character types. Where cultural location, geographical location and even language may change, ultimately the behavioral specificities of the schlemiel or the schlemiel-keit character remains the same and it is this behavioral facet of the character which is recognised and understood by an audience. The character behaves as a person would and this type of behaviour is more akin to day-to-day existence as people react to situations. However, this is further problematised by the fact that the specifics of the behavioral patterns of schlemiel-mean that they to some degree place themselves in these awkward situations, or even create those situations themselves. The very nature of the mass reception of schlemiel-keit character is therefore connected with the

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<sup>61</sup> Op.Cit. - Docherty - 1983 - pp.221-222. The word situation sums up the difference between this type of approach, which sees event and character as fundamentally connected with the reaction of the character elevating them from the position of actant, and the Narratological approach of seeing character, event and setting working in relation to each other but ultimately distinct in terms of analysis.

loss of any specific origins, be they Jewish or otherwise. The characters and who they are becomes of paramount importance, not where they come from in the broadest sense.

In relation to the fictional world, this notion of the Dasein can be seen as problematic if the very notion of the Being is examined in more detail in relation to the concept of the essent.<sup>62</sup> The very notion of the essent is such that the process of being is based around an observable and physical object. This physicality of the essent is what leads to Heidegger's concern with non-being, as the perpetual possibility for the being once they are brought into Being. The character, (literary or filmic) is essentially constructed as a person and not as printed words or images on celluloid) by the audience and in this way they do not have a physical being. In this sense, the 'fictional' character must essentially be nothing although Heidegger himself notes:

'It is perfectly true that we cannot talk about nothing, as though it were a thing like the rain outside or a mountain, or any object whatsoever. In principle, nothingness remains inaccessible to science. The man who wishes truly to speak about nothing must of necessity become unscientific.'<sup>63</sup>

It is therefore the psychological and ontological nature of character that remains inaccessible to scientific analysis because characters do not 'exist' in a conventional (real or worldly) sense. Narratology then cannot find a logical and quantifiable presence which is at once in Being as a being but does not exist as an essent - a thing there which can be analysed. However, there are

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<sup>62</sup> The concept of essent can be defined as things which exist, things that have a physical presence and are identifiable as such and in serving such a function.

<sup>63</sup> Martin Heidegger - *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1959) (trans. Ralph Manheim) - New Haven, Yale University Press - 1987 - p.25. This text is taken from a lecture first delivered by Heidegger at the University of Freiburg in 1935. Where Heidegger is concerned with justifying his philosophical approach in terms of it becoming 'unscientific' later theorists rejoice and utilise this facet. In many ways the notion of the rejection of Enlightenment rationale underpins a great deal of Heidegger's work, particularly his rejection of Kant. Rather than this creating a dichotomy between the theory and practice (as many may perceive) it becomes part of the 'playfulness' of the theories surrounding Poststructural thinking and more pertinently to this analysis, the Postmodern debate. This will be examined in more detail in Chapter Six.

useful elements to Narratological analysis, primarily in the fact that it does identify certain functions of characters within texts and in relation to other characters. What is also useful is considering the fact that the schlemiel fails to fit any of the dicta supplied by the major Narratological and Structuralist theorists. It seems not that it is purely their theory which falls down at all points but rather that the schlemiel as a character type denies the simple and rigid structures that this type of theory enforces. Scientific approaches to literature (exemplified in their ultimate form by structuralism) are based around a logical pattern of behaviour by characters in their function as actants; once the character fails to adhere to this pattern of behaviour then the theory begins to collapse.

Whilst there is, paradoxically, a certain logic to what Heidegger is suggesting it is a strange statement to make in relation to his considered and perceived position as a philosopher and exponent of high modernity.<sup>64</sup> This dichotomy between the philosopher that Heidegger is and the philosophical approach that metaphysics is needs to be examined in more detail. It is only in the contemporary period that a philosophical system, which suggests that an unscientific approach is justifiable and that something can both exist and not exist, would be accepted.<sup>65</sup> It must therefore be the purpose of section three to consider not only the inner workings of the character to an individual within an audience but rather the role of characters such as schlemiels in relation to the historical period in which they emerge and which they can also be seen to represent. The schlemiel can be seen to emerge from a historical period that is pre-

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<sup>64</sup> It is important to make clear the distinction between the period loosely entitled Modernity in relation to the artistic movement of Modernism. Whilst the modern period can mean a variety of things to a variety of different people, it is used here to identify the period which encompasses the ideas of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment through to the contemporary period which can be seen to be developing into a period of Postmodernity. Whilst these concepts are difficult to define they will be qualified in more detail in relation to Chapter Six.

<sup>65</sup> In this sense theories attached to narrative, particularly Narratology, develop out of attitudes to science associated with the period of Enlightenment and subsequently Modernity. In fact the very origins of this approach are connected with the 'rediscovery' of the 'ancients', including Aristotle. This comes at the time of the Renaissance and the very etymology of the term (re-birth) exemplifies the increasing concern with the ability of 'man' to quantify and explain all existence, even that of literature. The concern with the theories of Postmodernity is that these pre-conceived and embedded notions are perhaps untenable.

Renaissance and pre-Enlightenment when religion in relation to 'folklore' also existed in a metaphysical sense.<sup>66</sup> It must be considered that the whole period of Modernity was an imposition upon the role of the character. Rather than the character merely developing more fully in the contemporary period, it can be seen to have been suppressed throughout the period of Modernity and therefore there is resurgence in the Postmodern. The essential nature of the schlemiel as existing in a more fully rounded form in Jewish society is vital to consider in relation to the literal and physical oppression of certain cultural and religious groups throughout the period of Modernity. It is also important to note that if Heidegger is seen to have a transitional function in the theories of Modernity to Postmodernity then his Nazism will exist in contrast to this aspect of a philosophical approach for the contemporary.<sup>67</sup> In this sense, the schlemiel is not then becoming stronger but rather people are more willing to read about the schlemiel and, more pertinently, are more able to be empathetic with the character.

Schlemiels do not represent the *Urbmensch* in that they are not conscious of their efforts to succeed, but succeed they do. In fact, they are not trying to better anyone else; they succeed not through a forced superiority but rather through an overt and suitably imperfect humanity. Rather than becoming the *Urbmensch*, the <sup>schlemiel</sup> becomes a mensch, just as Dr. Dreyfuss urges Baxter. It is largely the Empiricist approach <sup>of</sup> twentieth century Anglo-American theory that determines that there has to be some basic 'proof' for the claims of philosophy, literature and theory. Even if there is a denial in the literary or film theorist's status as an Empiricist then the text still serves as a point of stability, and yet the character of the schlemiel is unstable, in every sense of the term. This raises the question that if the schlemiel denies empirical certainty in behaviour can a logical system of 'non-behaviour' ever exist in relation to this character? The

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<sup>66</sup> Suggesting that religion and metaphysics are one in the same is highly problematic, but in terms of certain existential concerns that are the focus of the schlemiel there are parallels to be drawn out of the two, which exist prior to the period of Modernity and then again in the period loosely 'defined' as Postmodernity.

<sup>67</sup> To suggest that Heidegger was an architect of Postmodernity depends on which view of the emergence of Postmodernism is to be taken. Rather than seeing the periods of Modernity and Postmodernity as distinct with a clear break between them it will be argued that in fact there is a long transition between the two periods; a transition which can be seen to be still under way.

very fact that the actions of the schlemiel can be considered 'non-behaviour' stems from the fact that the illogical and unaccepted form of both literary and filmic presentation is comedy and the analysis of comedy has been denied since Aristotle's prioritisation of tragedy in the Poetics. What has been highlighted is that rigidity and certainty cannot exist and yet the schlemiel still functions and still has a function in contemporary society. This is the only recourse left open to analysis.

The Schlemiel and Anomie: The Fool in Society

Section Three:

**Stumbling Over the Truth**

The Schlemiel and Anomie: The Fool in Society

**Chapter Four:**

**The Schlemiel as Philosopher**



Throughout section two, the main concern has been to analyse the schlemiel and schlemiel-keit characters in terms of prior forms of literary and filmic character analysis. This process has demonstrated both the peculiarities and specifics of this type of character and the failings of this type of neo-scientific theory when applied to the schlemiel. The concern of further analysis must be to consider how the character functions beyond the narrow remit of Narratological and Structuralist analysis. There are factors involved in both the construction and reception of an essentially comic and 'illogical' character which serve to divorce the schlemiel from prior theoretical considerations and necessitate a move to a new form of analysis. It is undoubtedly the case that the character still serves a function, and whilst theoretical consideration has shown that this is not an analysable position within the text, it still remains clear (through the use of Narratology) that characters function in relation to other textual factors. It must be remembered that this still does not provide an explanatory framework for the character in itself. However to say that the character is not analysable does not mean that they have no function; it merely highlights that their function will exist beyond the narrow remit that Structuralists posit, and ultimately they exist in an ontological sense. They function outside the text as well as in relation to the other narrative elements within it. It must also be noted that the distinctions between literature and film in terms of character analysis are not as wide as some theorists have indicated. In fact, once the necessary changes in medium have been considered the behaviour of the character remains consistent despite the medium, and whilst considering formal differences is useful in some types of analysis it yields little in the respect of the workings of specific characters, particularly with reference to the audience as actively participating in the construction of meaning.<sup>1</sup> The differences are fundamental but they lie clearly within narrative expression and,

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<sup>1</sup> For a framework of general analysis of specific case studies of adaptation see Brian McFarlane - Literature into Film (1996) - Oxford, Oxford University Press - 1996, Morris Beja - Film and Literature (1979) - New York, Ohio State University Press - 1979, Robert Gidding, Keith Selby and Chris Wensley - Screening the Novel (1990) - London, Macmillan Press Ltd. - 1990. These are texts which are broadly concerned with the development of theories of adaptation, not concerned with the specifics of any character type or with characterisation alone. For a more theoretically considered breakdown of adaptation (not just in terms of characterisation) see George Bluestone - Novels Into Film (1957) - California, University of California Press - 1957 and Keith Cohen - Film and Fiction : The Dynamics of Exchange (1979) - New Haven, Yale University Press - 1979. See also Seymour Chatman - 'What Novels Can Do That Films Can't

most importantly for the purposes of this study in audience reception. With this notion of the reading and viewing public in mind, the functional aspects of the character become of prime importance. Schlemiels operate not just in respect of their features as textual entities but as ontological entities, existing beyond the boundaries of the text and moving into the social. From this position the schlemiel is only a textual character and a distinction can be made between the word schlemiel when used as a term of 'abuse' and when used in reference to a specific textual character type. Schlemiels, as rounded and specific character types, can only exist as textual entities, never as real people. This claim will be examined in relation to the absence of a proven truth for Western society and the security and truth that a schlemiel alone is privy to; a position which is clearly impossible and therefore cannot exist outside fictions. Whilst it is undoubtedly the case that the character of the schlemiel is rooted in real life alongside other 'hard luck loser' types this has developed in to fictions to an extent where it is no longer possible to have real schlemiels in existence. The character is now too embedded in fictions and the traits they could only possibly be part of a fictional character. No character is without some location within a socio-philosophical framework. Indeed, no character is without an ideological worldview and no character fails to be subjugated under an ideologically dominant set of assumptions. If it is taken that schlemiels are textual entities alone, then it is important to examine them as functioning for the societies that produce them as well as detailing wider concerns about the cultural location of those specific societies within broader national frameworks. It has already been highlighted that the schlemiel is a character whose life and ultimate contentment is rooted in an unshakeable faith and belief. This cannot be said to be universally a religious one and therefore the schlemiel can be seen to break out from the religious to the metaphysical. When religions as metanarratives start to become untenable then the response is not to abandon faith (after all this is what schlemiel-keit characters embody), but to find the root of faith in something else. This notion of the metaphysical has to be considered against a dominant tradition of thought, which prioritises rationalism and empiricism above all else.

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(and Vice Versa) in W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.) - *On Narrative* (1981) - Chicago, Chicago University Press - 1981, - pp.117-136. Whilst this list is not meant to be definitive these texts represent a range of the types of analysis of adaptation from literature to film that have been considered.

The function that the schlemiel has is likely to be of a wider societal nature. This in itself necessitates a wider reading of schlemiels in terms of their socio-cultural location, how their being is constructed and also, in a sense, their history.<sup>2</sup> A clear distinction can be made between different approaches of examining the importance of a historical development of the character, whether Hegel's account of a progression and development accurately describes the history of the character or whether Foucault's notion of epistemes is more applicable to where the character can be seen in the contemporary.<sup>3</sup> Whilst this complex debate is in some ways a distraction from the main argument, it is important to consider it in relation to the arguments presented by the notion of Modernity in relation to Postmodernity. If history is in effect cyclical (as highlighted by Foucault's development from Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals<sup>4</sup>), then it is possible to see the schlemiel returning in both abundance and importance to a position that has largely been absent from both academic and social consideration for the last three hundred years. Rather than characters developing progressively there are distinct and identifiable epistemological breaks. This is why the character can be seen to be more dominant in particular periods than in others, rather

<sup>2</sup> This is not to suggest that a historicist reading of the character would reveal much more than has been covered in prior analysis of the schlemiel. It will be more useful to adopt an implicitly New Historicist approach in considering history from below, taking on board the history of those groups previously excluded from analysis. Chapter One covers the history of the schlemiel in a traditional sense and this is in accordance with the majority of prior readings of the character. This chapter, along with chapter seven, attempts to present an alternative history of the character in relation to their philosophical location.

<sup>3</sup> For the development of the notion of Epistemes see Michel Foucault - The Archaeology of Knowledge (1972) - London, Routledge - 1994 - Part IV, 'Archaeological Description', pp.135-195. For a detailed discussion of how this perspective operates see Richard Harland - Superstructuralism (1987) - London, Routledge - 1994 - pp.105-106 and pp.114-117. However, there are problems with what Harland notes as the Postmodern/Structuralist epistime. Rather, a distinction can be made between Foucault's Structuralist epistime and a new Postmodern epistime that comes post Superstructuralism. Although of interest, this is perhaps a side issue to the main debate.

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche - On the Genealogy of Morals (1887) (edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson, translated by Carol Diethelme) - Cambridge, Cambridge University Press - 1994. For a detailed analysis of this text see Bernard Magnus, Stanley Stewart and Jean Pierre Milcur - Nietzsche's Case (1993) - New York, Routledge - 1993, Chapter 5, 'Reading Ascetic Reading: *Toward the Genealogy of Morals* and the Path Back to the World', pp.186-233. It is important to note that it is here that Nietzsche develops the notion of the *Übermensch*, or Overman (Superman) which is a figure transcending the limits of society and philosophical thought and whilst Nietzsche rejects prior philosophical thought and faith he embraces a peculiar form of metaphysics specific to his own philosophical thought. For a consideration of his rejection of faith see, Friedrich Nietzsche - Twilight of the Idols and the Anti-Christ (both 1888) (translated by R.J. Hollingdale) - Penguin, London - 1990 - see pp.130-133 for his attack on the church and particularly theology.

than developing from relative obscurity. The character remains largely the same throughout these periods; it is the society in which they are found that changes and it is a change that requires analysis. It would, however, be impossible to fully detail all schlemiels in all societies, so it is vital to examine the philosophical positions throughout the period of modernity prior to the Holocaust and the move to America. This can be located at the beginning of a new episteme, in the current period of Postmodernity.

The one (further) element that Narratological analysis has shown above all else is that the schlemiel does not, and indeed cannot, fit into a pattern of structured analysis. If the notion of character is problematic to structuralism then the schlemiel character presents a dual problem. A potential reason for this problematic relationship between the theory and the practice is that the schlemiel is essentially a 'comic' character and the theory utilised in previous chapters ultimately develops from Aristotle's Poetics.<sup>5</sup> This treatise essentially focuses on tragedy as the dominant mode of artistic expression and subsumes any comic elements rendering them as secondary to the main thematic functions of the text. It is from this basis that an appreciation of the schlemiel has to deal with the notion of the comic in relation to the socio-economic development and production of the texts in question. As outlined previously, the theoretical and philosophical concerns of 'the Age of Reason' have been towards the 'serious' nature of existence. Therein lies part of the problem that 'seriousness' has often been equated with tragedy as being a more valid mode of expression for the human condition.<sup>6</sup> However, these have been the attitudes of the dominant groups within society and perhaps not the concern of those excluded (for example, the masses in

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<sup>5</sup> It is to be noted that when using the term 'comic' here, it encompasses notions of tragi-comedy, black comedy, absurdity, farce, etc. The issues of what 'type' of comic character the schlemiel is will be developed later in relation to more specific arguments about the function of the character and their socio-historic location.

<sup>6</sup> Attempting to give a concise starting point for the Enlightenment is as impossible as giving a precise and concise overview of all the ideas that are held within the Enlightenment. Perhaps the best guide to the theories of the Enlightenment can be found in James Schmidt (editor) - What is Enlightenment? : Eighteenth Century Answers and Twentieth Century Questions (1996) - California, University of California Press - 1996. Part One provides a selection of useful articles from primary theorists of the Enlightenment, particularly Immanuel Kant - An answer to the Question : What is Enlightenment? (1784). However, for a brief introductory explanation of what constitutes the Enlightenment in very broad terms, see Paul Edwards

relation to those in overall hegemonic control). What must be noted beyond merely the function of the schlemiel in society is whether the comic on one hand is the most 'appropriate' mode of expression for Jewish society through the ages as well as for Western society in the contemporary period. Even if comedy is not seen as the most appropriate mode of expression, at least it may be considered to be the only applicable one. In addition to this aspect of the debate it will become clear whether comedy is a form which does not fit structured analysis as neatly or wholly as other forms of literary and filmic expression may, on the face of it, appear to. Despite many attempts to theorise comedy<sup>7</sup>, a complete and totalising theory remains largely elusive. Whilst chapter five will not attempt to provide an answer to this elusive problem, it will consider the schlemiel as a comic character and the social importance and impact of the comic. However, this consideration of the comic must follow an analysis of the relationship between the philosophical and the socio-political society the schlemiel is located in.

What is clear is that the latter half of the twentieth century has seen a shift in both its socio-cultural constitution and in the variety and tone of forms of critical analysis. Forms of investigation which have developed throughout the period of modernity attempt to totalise and explain the human condition as universal; this is part of the problem. The use of Heidegger as a bridging point in the last chapter has demonstrated the move to a less rigidly 'scientific' approach, or rather, a move away from the logical and rational approaches posited by the philosophers of the enlightenment in keeping with a more metaphysical tradition. This would immediately seem to fit characters who, as identified in chapter one, can be seen to be working by their own peculiar logic and not reacting rationally to even the most common-place situation or dilemma. It must be noted that in working by their own specific system schlemiels ultimately find a resolution to all situations even if this does not always result in happiness in the end. It is by this highly individualistic and

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(editor in chief) - The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy : Volume One (1967) - New York, Macmillan inc. - 1967 - pp.519- 525.

<sup>7</sup> See John Morreall (editor) - The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor (1987) - New York, State University of New York Press - 1987, for a breakdown of the varieties of comic theory that have been posited with little conclusive evidence or a single unified perspective.

'ill-logical' behaviour that schlemiels find themselves able to cope with even the most bizarre of situations. For example, Forrest Gump one minute in the heat of the Vietnam War and the next a table-tennis champion visiting 'red' China, or Fidelman stuck in the middle of a canal having stolen his own painting rather than the old master. With the 'absurdity' of these events in mind it is worth highlighting Richard Harland's notion that:

For ... Heidegger, received social signs run so deep that we can break free from them only by going through the experience of the Absurd - only by confronting an utterly blank world denuded of all ordinary socially created intelligibility, only by discovering an utterly bare self denuded of all ordinary socially created personality.<sup>8</sup>

It is this very notion of the absurd that schlemiels embody. They in one sense take the journey through the absurd for us and in another show us the way through should we ever have to follow them; and increasingly it seems that we will have to. This being said, it must be remembered that the schlemiel does not fit the patterns of received social signs in the way that philosophical and psychoanalytical theory suggests, and this psychological development is something that needs to be investigated further. When Harland analyses Heidegger in respect of the absurd he comments on the difficulty of breaking with the socially constructed personality. Although it can be argued that the nature of the social construction of the schlemiel is such that they have the ability to accept the world as absurd, never as rational in the first place. They are firmly located within society as fools from the very beginning. He suggests that this is an *extraordinary and desperate kind of experience*, where it may be unexpected to suggest it is desperate to hold on to enlightenment notions of rationality.<sup>9</sup> What must also be considered is how the subjectivity of the schlemiel is constructed. Whilst Freud may have isolated something genetic, which affects this

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<sup>8</sup> Op.Cit. - Harland - 1994 - p.67. Harland traces the origins of what he terms 'Superstructural' thought in terms of ideas which overturn prior totalising theories. Whilst he never posits the notion of Postmodernism by name, his distinction between the development of different strands of philosophical thought feed into the debate surrounding Postmodernism.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. - p.67. Harland goes on to suggest that Superstructural thinkers do not allow such a 'get out clause', but instead this is a function that is taken up by the fool for the rest of society. In this sense they can

construction, the character serves a function for society; the schlemiel is recognisable by people from a variety of socio-cultural groups. Therefore, the character can be seen to have been constructed wholly from societal forces and yet operating in opposition to societal norms at all points. Adopting a psychoanalytic approach may suggest more about a society or societies that produce this character than the character themselves.

The question needs to be raised that if the human condition in the late twentieth century is becoming increasingly more absurd then perhaps the schlemiel increasingly becomes a figure to aspire to rather than a figure who is the object of ridicule. They can negotiate the treacherous seas of twentieth century life quite unlike any other figure.<sup>10</sup> This does not explain the fact that although the contemporary period shows a resurgence of this type of character they have always existed and more often than not have existed more clearly, definably, and strongly within Jewish society. This seemingly points to a convergence between elements of the Jewish condition throughout the ages and the Western human condition today. This in itself would suggest a fundamental shift in attitude and ultimately a point of shared experience for the disparate Gentile communities of the 'enlightened' West with the previously rejected groups who also share the same geographical locations but inhabit a different cultural space. In Foucault's terms, these are epistemological shifts between periods in society with the Postmodern episteme resembling the Middle Ages.<sup>11</sup> Whilst there are obviously clear points of each socio-cultural group, which are specific to those groups themselves, the nature of the human experience in the late twentieth

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be seen to be sent as scouts through the absurd, guiding the way for the rest of society. See pp.68-69 for this analysis.

<sup>10</sup> The term 'absurd' is in itself problematic and pinning it down can be difficult. Rather than traditional notions of absurdity it is used here to denote a return to an acceptance of the human condition as it was pre-enlightenment, when science as a progressive and positive feature of society has gone and also where religion is not the dominant and ordering feature of society that it was.

<sup>11</sup> A number of writers have commented on the similar structure of society in the middle ages and contemporary society. For example see Umberto Eco - Faith in Fakes : Travels in Hyperreality (1986) - London, Minerva - (1995) - Part Two, 'The Return of the Middle Ages', pp.59-96 and Umberto Eco - Apocalypse Postponed (edited by Robert Lumley) (1994) - London, Minerva - 1994 - Chapter Six, 'The Future of Literacy', pp.89-102. Although much of the recent writing on this subject focuses on notions of technological change, the features which are of most importance are undoubtedly the nature of a social consciousness which has changed.

century is such that it can be suggested that there are now many more similarities than differences. It is important to note the nature of the mass media in the role of breaking down specific cultural groupings and disseminating meaning (which was once purposefully specific) to other countries and other cultures. The role of Yiddish is a prime example of this in action; The Education of H\*Y\*M\*A\*N\*K\*A\*P\*L\*A\*N demonstrates a schlemiel-keit character whose ultimate desire is to be like everyone else, to fit in to the mass. However, despite his best efforts, it is his dialect on the one hand and being a schlemiel on the other that keeps Kaplan distinct from the majority of other Americans. He believes he is achieving his goal and remains happy in this role. To Mr. Parkhill and the rest of the group he is unique. Whilst it is the uncertainty of achieving success in the class or in being a good teacher, which undermines the rest of the characters it is Kaplan and Kaplan alone whose faith is unshakeable. Therefore order, reason and structure within his life remains full of certainty and with this comes his ultimate happiness. It is texts such as this that allow the Yiddish language to become part of other languages, particularly with mass mediums such as film and television, as outlined in Section one.

It is the uncertainty in all aspects of contemporary life that is embodied by the theories surrounding Postmodernity, although the debate that surrounds this form of philosophical thought is lengthy and in some respects irresolvable. Many theorists suggest that the constituent elements of Postmodernism represent a complete break with the cultural practices that embodied the earlier period of modernity.<sup>12</sup> This form of analysis is largely irrelevant and in many ways is a pedantic exercise trying temporarily to locate something that defies this kind of precise isolation of meaning. However, in isolating features of Postmodernity, what becomes immediately apparent is that certain elements that were pushed to the sidelines are now being seen more and more as the norm. The debate surrounding the notions of value in respect of the literary and visual arts embody this feeling; where popular cultural texts are now seen to be acceptable, not just for

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<sup>12</sup> Most notably Frederic Jameson - Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logics of Late Capitalism (1991) - London, Verso - 1993. This is a text which examines cultural texts as breaking with the political and aesthetic features of modernity and modernism. He sees these as historically located periods alongside capitalism, with this political and ideological forces still continuing but adapting itself to fit the experience of the late twentieth century, see Chapter One, 'Culture', pp.1-54, for details of this argument.



academic analysis, but also in terms of being able to admit to a linking for them in public. Rather than this being a new trend in society, it is a feature of pre-enlightenment society, which has re-emerged. Rather than high-modernity representing the highest values of a society it can be seen that modernity was in effect creating value systems which on the whole excluded a large proportion of the world's population, becoming a system of exclusion rather than inclusion. However, it would be problematic to claim that this is true of all theorists.<sup>13</sup> For those groups excluded by the socio-political agenda of the philosophies of the enlightenment and modernity, these issues of what general guidelines constitute good or bad, have never been an issue. The specific case of Jewish Shtetl culture is something that is of paramount importance to the notions of how modernity can act in terms of oppression to specific cultural groupings in different historical periods. Those societies, which have been subject to exclusion throughout history, can be tied to a period both pre-renaissance and (more importantly) pre-enlightenment. The notion of the 'Holy Fool', or 'Wise Fool' as a socially active figure is a feature of a variety of medieval societies, but only continues in certain excluded societies and social sub-groups throughout the period of modernity.<sup>14</sup> Shtetls are the most obvious location of a group who are at once separated by both the attitudes and physical actions of others and the growth of an exclusive but essential language in Yiddish. This notion is dependent on the idea of the small enclosed village which at once is separated from and also rejected by other communities and which actively discourages any outside interference, often with good reason. This isolated but stable existence is not just tied to philosophical and political thinking but also to economics and the practicalities of communicating

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<sup>13</sup> For some though it was a deliberate attempt to exclude, most notably in England with Matthew Arnold - 'Culture and Anarchy' (1869) in *Selected Essays* (1964) - Oxford, Oxford University Press - 1964 - pp.233-319. See p.231 for the specific reference to cultural specificity in relation to an aesthetic ideal.

<sup>14</sup> The terms 'Holy Fool' and 'Wise Fool' are almost interchangeable at this stage in the argument. The term 'Holy Fool' implies that there is some divine intervention, which in itself is misleading. As has been posited here, it is not essential for the schlemiel to be rooted in a religious faith, but rather in a more non-specific source of structured belief. Ultimately the notion of the schlemiel covers both of these types, but they are more likely to be wise fools. They do not have to have some kind of holy dimension to their character, but the fact remains that they often do, particularly in the case of Owen Meany.

See Enid Welsford - *The Fool : His Social and Literary History* (1935) - London, Faber and Faber - 1974 for details of the Fool beyond Jewish societies. Welsford makes the important distinction between the existence of the fool in reality throughout the middle ages (Part Two, pp.55-196) and the move from reality into the existence of the fool in texts throughout the Elizabethan period (Part Three, pp.197-274).

across what were then often great distances. It is in the contemporary that these distances have been broken down, not on the whole with altruistic motives in mind but rather potentially to expand the marketplace. A global village is also a global marketplace, but also has profound implications in terms of traditional social and cultural distinctions. This at once begins a process of breaking down social barriers (to an extent) but may also result in a process of homogeneity, which begins to erode the strong notions of cultural identity that flourished as a matter of course in smaller communities. This is exemplified to an extent by a relatively contemporary Jewish joke:

On a bus in Tel Aviv, a mother was talking animatedly, in Yiddish, to her little boy - who kept answering her in Hebrew. And each time the mother said, 'No, no, talk Yiddish!'

An impatient Israeli, overhearing this, exclaimed, 'Lady, why do you insist the boy talk Yiddish instead of Hebrew?'

Replied the mother, 'I don't want him to forget he is a Jew.'<sup>15</sup>

The notion of what constitutes Jewish identity is no longer just connected with the state of Israel but something, which connects more immediately with a more recent past. This can also be seen in relation to a much broader concern with a potential loss of specific cultural identity. This loss of identity is as much concerned with a process of assimilation, particularly in the case of America. However, with the advent of a global community, this loss of once strong identity becomes a concern for all societies. The role of Yiddish should not be underestimated. It has already been argued that it functions in relation to other communities on the one hand due to exclusion and, on the other to maintain a distinct sense of cultural identity. However, Jacques Derrida argues of Yiddish:

Even though it maims, mutilates, truncates (*verstummelt*) the mother tongue, it still signals back to the language to which it owes the originary

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<sup>15</sup> This joke is cited in Leo Rosten - *The Joys of Yiddish* (1968) - London, Penguin - 1971 - p.xxi..

force of reason (*Urkraft der Vernunft*) as originary force of the spirit (*Urkraft der Geistes*). It is through the mediation of this language, German, that man (and here, in exemplary manner, the German Jew) has been able to spiritualize his thoughts and ennoble his religious habits. He must not deny the people that gave him such a rebirth [renaissance] (*Weidergeburt*) his inner loyalty.<sup>16</sup>

The very tone that Derrida adopts towards Yiddish is negative and could be taken as being anti-Semitic. He sees it as a dialect rather than a distinct language in itself. Whilst it is undoubtedly a derivative in part from German, its complex nature means that it also stems from a number of other sources (as outlined in Section one).<sup>17</sup> The very fact that it uses the Hebrew alphabet in its written form identifies it as a specific language of Jewish society. Where it is suggested here that these links to a European past are important it is not to suggest that the Jews of America or the rest of the world should be in any way indebted to Germany. Rather, that Europe as a whole is a more immediate and identifiable home from which the Jews were forcibly ejected with no real desire to go in many cases: a homeland found and then stolen. It is Hyman Kaplan, in his role as a schlemiel, who maintains a link to his past through his dialect, at an unconscious level to himself and at a conscious and overt level to everyone else. However, at a conscious level to himself he successfully bridges the gap between the two, or even three, cultures, Jewish, American and European. The only point that matters to him is his security in this connection to a new homeland and the idea propagated by American government that it is a place of freedom and opportunity. It must also be noted that Yiddish has become part of other languages in turn. Perhaps Derrida would then argue that other languages owe something to the Jewish culture that originated this language. Whatever stance is taken on Yiddish itself, it is important to note that as its terms

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<sup>16</sup> Jaques Derrida - 'Interpretations at War :Kant, the Jew, the German,' (translated by Moshe Ron), *New Literary History* - Vol. 22, No. 1, Winter 1991, pp.39-96 - pp.73-74. (His emphasis).

<sup>17</sup> This can also be supported with Rosten's citation of Maurice Samuel, 'to call Yiddish an offshoot of Middle High German with an admixture of Hebrew and Slavic [is entirely misleading] ... the tone and spirit of [Yiddish] are as remote from German as the poetry of Burns is from the prose of Milton.' *Op.Cit.* - Rosten - 1970 - p.451 (all annotations sic Rosten).

disseminate throughout the rest of society it loses its function in being specific to a broadly Jewish community. With it goes the recognisable link to a European past.<sup>18</sup>

The notion of structure and order for enlightenment Europe was no longer to be found in religion but can be identified by notions of logic, rationality, and science. Immediately a problem exists for schlemiels, who in no way can embrace these 'lofty' ideals, at least not in the way that they emerged from the teachings of a few 'intellectuals' and philosophers. A paradox then exists between the rejection of Jewish society throughout the period and the fact that it is the object of the belief that changes; the notion of belief and therefore structure and order does not alter. There is a fundamental distinction to be made between the teachings of Judaism and Christianity and the 'teachings' of Enlightenment philosophy. Jean-Francois Lyotard, amongst other writers, sees World War Two as a defining and pivotal moment in Western philosophical and social thought. With this in mind, events such as the Dresden bombing and Hiroshima, alongside the Holocaust can be seen as finally fracturing the relationship between a past belief in science as a progressive force and the future which seemingly held nothing but dystopia rather than the promised utopia.<sup>19</sup> Other writers, such as Zygmunt Bauman, also see the events of the nineteen-forties as important, but in terms of the Holocaust and its impact not just on Jewish thought but as a feature of the potential horror that man was capable of perpetuating.<sup>20</sup> Bauman also identifies the Holocaust as the ultimate expression of the theories of modernity. If this is indeed the case,

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<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to note that Abraham Hochwald - The HarperCollins Book of Jewish Humour (1994) (translated by Anne Moellers) - London, HarperCollins - 1996, devotes a chapter to 'The Assimilation', pp.19-23, and 'the jokes [that] were told about the efforts of those Jews who used any and every means to ingratiate themselves with their non-Jewish neighbours.' (p.93). This suggests that there is a strong element of Jewish culture which denies uniformity and compliance in the terms of the oppressors. This opposes Derrida's position of 'being grateful' to what he sees as the 'host' country with all the connotations of that term.

<sup>19</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard - The Postmodern Condition (1979) (translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi) - Manchester, Manchester University Press - 1994. For details of this specific aspect of the argument see Part Seven, 'The Pragmatics of Scientific Knowledge', pp. 23-27.

<sup>20</sup> See Zygmunt Bauman - Modernity and Ambivalence (1991) - Cambridge, Polity Press - 1991 and Modernity and the Holocaust (1989) - Cambridge, Polity Press - 1993. Bauman touches on aspects of this theoretical perspective in many of his other works, (see bibliography for complete details of his other works), all of which pick up on the strands of thought which feed into the debates surrounding modernity and Postmodernity.

then to exemplify fully both what contemporary thinking rallies against and why Jewish society was largely ostracised during the period of modernity, it becomes necessary to investigate the specific claims for truth during this period. Ultimately, it becomes a truth, which allows and indeed supports the claims and actions that led to genocide. These are issues that will be more fully developed in chapter five as a precursor to the concept of Postmodernity and its relationship to the schlemiel as a comic character.

To suggest that these eventualities were the aims of the originators of the enlightenment project is perhaps too harsh on these philosophers. What does develop from this period, however, is the notion of the subject/object divide, emerging from Rene Descartes claims to truth.<sup>21</sup> These notions are echoed and adapted in the work of Immanuel Kant and later proponents of the division between subject and object. These ideas form part of the basis for modernity's conception of the self and the *a priori*.<sup>22</sup> It is this claim to objectivity that can be seen in part to the subjugation of one group of people over another; the division becomes justifiable in the ability of one individual to objectify the behaviour and character of other groups and then to classify them as inferior. Division is often made in terms of race, colour and gender as the most easily definable and quantifiable categories, although as categories of division they are as ultimately flawed and unjustifiable as each other. This highly systematised approach to objective truth found its way into

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<sup>21</sup> The phrase *Cogitio Ergo Sum* stems from Descartes' search for empirical truths, 'while I decided thus to think that everything was false, it followed necessarily that I who thought this must be something; and observing that this truth: **I think therefore I am**, was so certain and so evident that all the most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics were not capable of shaking it, I judged that I could accept it without scruples as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking.' Rene Descartes - Discourse on the Method and the Meditations (1633) (translated by F.E. Sutcliffe) - London, Penguin - 1968 - p.53-54 (his emphasis). It is interesting to note that whilst Descartes rejects the metaphysical, a great deal of his own philosophical investigation was based around questions of God and that which defies the physical. For a detailed discussion of this issue see Marthinus Versfeld - An Essay on the Metaphysics of Descartes (1940) - New York, Kennikat Press, inc. - 1969 and Tom Sorell - Descartes (1987) - Oxford, Oxford University Press - 1987 - pp.1-5. In both Discourse on the Method and Meditations Descartes breaks with the truly metaphysical in his analysis of the certainty of the presence of God. Faith collapses in his insistence of a rationalist location and justification through proof derived at via (what he considered to be) the advanced thought processes of the rational individual.

<sup>22</sup> This can be seen in most pronounced detail in Kant's reflections on what constitutes art and what constitutes value judgements. See Immanuel Kant - Critique of Judgement (1790) (translated by Werner S. Pluhar) (1987) - Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company - 1987.

the scientific and medical communities, epitomised by the 'clockwork universe' prescribed by the 'hero' of the enlightenment, Isaac Newton. Where science and logic fell short of complete explanations, it was left to the future to complete the picture and with that notion comes the idea of a positive progression towards a utopian state. The only recourse left is towards nihilism (a criticism that is levelled at a number of theorists of Postmodernity) or towards a faith and belief that 'things will be all right' perhaps most strongly embodied in the Old Testament with God's promised land:

Modernity's forward-looking thrust relates strongly to belief in progress and the power of human reason to produce freedom ... Modernity questions all conventional ways of doing things, substituting authorities of its own, based in science, economic growth, democracy or law. And it unsettles the self; if identity is given in traditional society, in modernity it is constructed. Modernity started out to conquer the world in the name of reason; certainty and social order would be founded on new basis.<sup>23</sup>

What these ideas can then be seen to represent is a new body of totalising thought which replaces religion as the structuring force within Gentile society. However, it must be noted that they all have the same ultimate goal of paradise and utopia. This is without the judgement indicated by either the Christian concept of judgement day or by the book of Revelations or a Judaistic God who punishes by fire or flood (or salt).<sup>24</sup> The identity constructed through modernity is not a conscious one but rather can only be seen via hindsight after the event. New metanarratives emerged, and ultimately it is the schlemiel that embodies the notion of a world explained. They have no doubt as to the outcome and as to what their behaviour should be, because the rules are laid down for their whole existence. Indeed, this is exactly how a totalising metanarrative

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<sup>23</sup> David Lyon - Postmodernity (1994) - Buckingham, Open University Press - 1995 - pp. 19-21

<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to draw attention to the fact that this is the issue that the holocaust survivor and moral philosopher, Professor Levy, raises in relation to the story of Abraham and a 'vengeful' God in Crimes and Misdemeanours, dir: Woody Allen, USA, 1989.

operates. Nietzsche's famous notion of God being dead relates precisely to the notion that he is no longer needed, at least by a society who had found a new order with the idea of the *a priori*, or the assumption of the given and unified self, who is able to both experience and reason. This is an individual who now had claims to truth and could justify this through their objective viewpoint and through (what they saw as) empirical thought.<sup>25</sup>

The Jewish condition, which has been one of isolation, oppression, and rejection throughout Europe, has also remained strong in terms of the retention of a strong notion of identity in these terms. The new factor in the equation comes with pogroms throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The move to America in the early part of this century can be seen to have shaken the foundations of the Jewish community. However, it is the Holocaust that is at once responsible for a shift in Jewish consciousness and also highlights the suffering of a group of people for the rest of the world who were also broken after years of conflict. The Holocaust is significant in other ways, firstly as the ultimate expression of modernity and also in terms of how Jewish humour, in part embodied by the schlemiel, remains intact. The Holocaust as a physical action and a historical fact, and as the final and defining feature of modernity develops out of a long period of ideas that need to be examined in relation to how these deeply entrenched ideas have changed in the contemporary period.

The advent of modernity and the widespread acceptance of Enlightenment premises constitutes a massive challenge to the notion of covenantal assumptions concerning God's sovereignty over history, the meaning of theodicy, and the nature of the divine-human relationship. ... The issues of modernity for Judaism are complex and intertwined, encompassing the relationship between tradition and personal freedom, revelation and reason.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the concept of the '*a priori*' see Howard Caygill - A Kant Dictionary (1995) - Oxford, Blackwell - 1996 - pp.35-37

<sup>26</sup> Alan L. Berger - Crisis and Covenant : The Holocaust in Jewish American Fiction (1985) - New York, University of new York Press - (1985) - pp.6-7

This is not exclusively the case for Jewish society, but Jewish identity stems ultimately from a socio-religious and historical basis in biblical texts and it is these ideas that are ultimately challenged by notions of Enlightenment. Perhaps more importantly, the prioritisation of 'man' over God allows for the development of ideas, which reject Judeo-Christianic morality, which would be particularly focused against a group whose categorisation is both cultural and religious. Whilst prior analysis has shown that there is a gulf between the religious and cultural aspects of Jewish consciousness, this is more concerned with contemporary conceptions of what constitutes Jewishness, both pre-enlightenment and post-Holocaust.

Certain features that need greater exemplification before their full implications can be derived and before their full impact on Jewish society can be seen can typify the emergent period of Modernity. As Kertzner notes:

One of the most distinctive features of Judaism is its great unity of rites and ceremonies - rituals that cover every aspect of life ... while a few [rituals] are the accumulation of recent centuries, most of them have very ancient origins.<sup>27</sup>

This is not to suggest that certain sects within other religions do not have the same frequency of rituals but that Judaism is replete with these aspects. These naturally permeate Jewish cultural life, but in the same way that an Agnostic or Atheist will still exchange gifts at Christmas, a Jew may still structure life around religious festivals whilst not necessarily believing in God. There are

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<sup>27</sup> Rabbi Morris N. Kertzner - What is a Jew? (4th edition) (1953) - New York, Collier Books - 1978 - p.71. Also see Chapter IV, 'Religious Law and Ritual', pp.69-104 and pp.122-123 and Nicholas de Lange - Judaism (1986) - Oxford, Oxford University Press - 1988 - Chapter 3, 'The Tradition of Worship', pp.36-52 for more detailed information about the specifics of Jewish ritual. Also see C.M. Pilkington - Judaism (1975) - London, Hodder Headline Ltd. - 1996 - Chapter 3, 'The Chain of Tradition - The Talmud', pp.29-45 and Isidore Epstein - Judaism (1959) - London, Penguin - 1968 - Chapter 3, 'The Torah', pp.19-22, Chapter 16, 'Talmudic Judaism (iii): Religious Observances', pp.160-179 and Chapter 19, 'Jewish Mysticism: The Kabbalah', pp.223-251 for a detailed breakdown of the constituent elements of ritual in relation to various aspects of Jewish religious and mystical ritual, both ancient and modern.



certain elements of ritual structured around the Talmud, Torah, and Kabbala, which permeate Jewish life. These have as much of a connection to the historical basis of a group of people as to any religious origin. The Passover, for example, is to note and remember the features of escape from slavery and oppression as much as to recognise God's part in the process. This pattern of ritual also occurs in physical objects such as the talit (prayer shawl), the tefilin (phylacteries) and the mezuzah (parchment box fitted to the doorway) amongst others. These of course give a visual indication of being Jewish and symbols that are not uniquely used in worship, such as the mezuzah, give an immediate indication of a specific culture and, with it, unity. In fact, it may be argued that these highly ritualistic elements of Jewish life allow a point of connection for Jewish communities throughout the world where in individual countries any connection and stability in terms of nationalistic concerns would have been unallowable. For the majority of European Jews (even those who came to settle in America) these can be seen to give a sense of nation and therefore a point of connection with other people around the globe.<sup>28</sup> However, whilst medieval Europe can be identified by the role of the Catholic Church in the state and in the consciousness of the majority of lives the latter part of this period and into the Renaissance saw crisis for Catholicism with the reformation and the spread of new puritan religions. The role of Martin Luther should not be underestimated, not just in an ecumenical sense, but also in social terms. He was opposed not just to religious practice within the church itself but he also strongly opposed the institution of the church in both a political and social sense. The Jewish character, in the mind of the medieval Christian, was often fixed by notions of blame in relation to the crucifixion and, as if this were not negative enough, this new Puritanism reacted against the ritualised features of a religion that was often seen in relation to those same aspects in the Catholic church. This was compounded by the origin of Jewish society in Eastern countries; Jewish groups were seen as both physically and religiously different, bringing with them items of an Eastern past. However, the

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<sup>28</sup> The case of the growing popularity of the 'Jews for Jesus' group in America is an interesting example in relation to the point of the religious and cultural divide. The group is effectively a Christian one, but rather than merely convert to a particular Christian sect the group celebrates festivals of both religions. The argument follows that whilst their religious belief is connected with the Christian festivals their cultural connection to Judaism is so strong that it would be impossible to reject this part of their lives.

point of crisis in Catholicism is a fundamental point of change for socio-religious life in this period. Jewish religious life does change in relation to notions of enlightenment, but to what extent and in what ways is a point that needs to be developed. The important distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish societies remains, in that faith begins to collapse in Gentile societies at least for the intelligentsia. Although religion remains for the masses, what does begin to change is those who begin to use religion as an ideological tool. However, a faith largely remains in Jewish societies, albeit in a slightly altered form, as Isidore Epstein notes of Jewish societies:

All modern movements in Judaism stem directly or indirectly from the Enlightenment - the movement which characterized the general atmosphere of the eighteenth century and represents the efforts of Western mankind to apply the rule of reason to all phases of human life.<sup>29</sup>

However, there is a sense of tradition, which remains in Jewish thought, a link to a biblical past. Where modern Jewish movements stem from the Enlightenment, it does not mean that they automatically have to agree with enlightenment principles. Rather they can be seen to react against it and the strong element of metaphysical philosophy in a variety of forms of Jewish thought supports this claim. Gentile societies can be epitomised by a gradual shift in leadership from the church to politicians and philosophers and this is when the ideas propounded by the enlightenment project can be seen to have had a fundamental impact on the lives of the population at large. As Epstein goes on to indicate, in Jewish societies the social and cultural leaders remained within the church. Whilst enlightenment philosophy certainly had an impact on this aspect of leadership, it maintained a link to the past combining aspects of enlightenment philosophy with the spiritual aspects of religious faith for some thinkers; this is of course in specific reference to Jewish societies.

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<sup>29</sup> For further information on this see Op.Cit. - Epstein - Chapter Twenty-One, 'Modern Movements in Judaism', pp.287-318.

Derrida's analysis of the Jewish-German thinkers, Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig (in a progression of neo-Kantian thought) identifies Kant himself alongside a deep tradition of Judaic religious thought (but divorced from a culturally Jewish link).<sup>30</sup> This is something of a redundant argument in that whilst it clearly shows that on one level religious thought is a pervasive force; on another, it is a strong subconscious element of even Kant's character and subsequent philosophy. However, Kant means more to a rationality that denies the element of improvable faith that is inherent within any processes of religious belief. The desire for proof (as essential to the 'Age of Reason') both denies religion and alternative philosophical discourses. To locate Kant in a process of Teutonic identity is only one perspective. Kant can be seen as highly representative of a body of thought, which, for various reasons, has permeated through the rest of society and has been disseminated throughout the psyche of the Western world. Whilst Kant reacted against early empiricist thought in his philosophy, he clearly appropriates and then collapses the Cartesian dualism of rationality and empiricism.<sup>31</sup> In this action, he locates a transcendent human animal, which objectifies and categorises in relation to experience. This is a spatio-temporally located experience, which reveals its character through shared experiences and understanding. For Kant there still remains a moral imperative, but in distinction from strictly metaphysical thought this is not a position arrived at through an abstract notion of God. In developing on from Plato there is an element of absolute truth which is a determinable position that can be arrived at through the quest for truth, but also in relation to the categorical imperative, or an individually specific and subjective moral structure which in turn emerges from a universal structure of moral imperatives.<sup>32</sup> This has echoes of Aristotle's Poetics and its claims for characters adopting the moral high ground

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<sup>30</sup> Op.Cit. - Derrida - 1991. See pp.40-41 for Derrida's location of Cohen and Rosenzweig in a Kantian tradition and pp.46-47 and 48-49 for an analysis of Kant and the German character. It must be noted that it is mainly irrelevant about how far Kant the individual should be located within the argument, but rather how the ideas that Kant presents permeate and disseminate throughout society. The importance of this aspect of Derrida's argument is in itself arguably negligible in relation to this.

<sup>31</sup> For a more specific analysis of this see David Hawkes - Ideology (1996) - London, Routledge - 1996 - pp.62-67. It is interesting to note that Hawkes positions Kant's philosophy in a development of the concept of ideology; this is something that will be returned to later in a consideration of Marx's concept of alienation and subsequent Marxist approaches.

within literary texts. However, the implications for interpretation remain the same, as outlined in Section two, that there can be no universality of moral structure in a rationalist sense. Kant rejected the notion of people as objective things, although the link he found between the strongly rationalist (the 'I' philosophers in Harland's terms) and the empirical ultimately allows this position to evolve. For the schlemiel the imperative can be seen to be external at all points, from a basis in an unquantifiable faith, not internally considered and externally practised as Kant would have preferred.<sup>33</sup> In this way, the schlemiel embodies the ultimate in Kantian free-will (by acting on their own interpretation of an exterior system of morality) and also contradicts this action by basing it fundamentally on concepts of a 'metaphysical' faith. However, in considering the character of the schlemiel there can be no universality as there would be for Kant. Foundational truth in this regard requires a universal human character that the schlemiel indicates there is not. Even schlemiel-keit characters are not universal in all regards - each one is unique. Schlemiels derive their moral structures from a wide range of sources that unifies them in terms of derivation and perhaps in application of ideas, but the diversity of the source of these ideas dictates that the outcome does not always have to be the same. For example, Gimpel from a traditional Judaistic faith mediated by his Rabbi, Kaplan from the 'American system', Fidelman from a perverse sense of Aesthetics, Baxter from traditional notions of chivalry, Gump from his mother and Zelig from anyone that he comes in close contact with. They come from a variety of socio-religious backgrounds. The specifics of their behaviour are different but they are still identifiable as schlemiel-keit characters based on criteria of metaphysical belief and anti-rationalist thinking and

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<sup>32</sup> For a more detailed account of the notion of the '*categorical imperative*' see Op.Cit. - Caygill - 1996 - pp.99-102.

<sup>33</sup> It must be noted that where Kant is a major figure in ushering in an 'age of reason' neither he nor other great philosophers of the enlightenment completely divorce themselves from metaphysical concerns. Immanuel Kant - *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) (translated by F. Max Muller) London, Macmillan and Co. Ltd. - 1927. Chapter III, 'The Ideal of Pure Reason', pp.459-564, concerns itself with the impossibility of finding proof of God's existence due to being unable to arrive at a conclusion derived from a priori investigation. He also interestingly refers to a divine entity as a necessary being. 'The absolutely necessary must be accepted as outside the world, because it is only meant to serve as a principle of the greatest possible unity of phenomena, of which it is the highest course, and that it can never be reached in the world, because the second rule bids you always to consider all empirical causes of that unity as derived.' (p.497, his emphasis). This embodies both Kant's embracement of all ideas rational and his rejection of an approach which is based purely on empirical evidence.

also anti-empiricist thinking. However, the irony remains that their beliefs are born out in empirical and subjective justification of their actions, as in the case of Owen Meany with the denouement revealing him to be right in his devotion to his belief. It is significant to note that this 'ludicrous' faith is proven to be true for everyone else; Meany already knew he was right.

For Jewish society, ritualised aspects of life were not just to be found in a relatively early period, they maintained their cultural importance through the period of modernity quantified in terms of enlightenment reason and enlightenment rationality. As Alan Berger indicates in relation to a diverse body of Jewish societies in relation to Gentile societies:

Non-Jews, for their part, continued to perceive Jews as outsiders, non-Europeans, whose cultural and religious practices rendered them unassimilable and untrustworthy. Even assimilationist Jews were viewed with suspicion. The poet Heinrich Heine, himself a convert to Christianity, accurately predicted that after his death neither a mass nor kaddish would be said.<sup>34</sup>

It is this that goes some way in explaining why there is still reluctance for even the most atheistic of Jews to totally relinquish the rites that accompany Jewish life.<sup>35</sup> To have this bond, albeit in the face of abject hatred, is something that is missing from the rest of Western religious and/or cultural life. There are elements of the life of any schlemiel, be they Jewish or not, which echo this strong element of ritual. Schlemiels, in their role as society's fools, <sup>are</sup> as the perpetual outsiders, the 'others' who <sup>are</sup> lacking in certain aspects which allow them to assimilate fully in to their own society, in a way that is exemplified by Peter Shlemiel's lack of a shadow clearly showing his

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<sup>34</sup> Op.Cit. - Berger - 1985 - p.8. The majority of Berger's later argument focuses on aspects of how belief is regained in relation to the Holocaust. Whilst this is an important argument it is interesting to consider those who lose and regain faith against characters, like the schlemiel, who never lose faith (despite the form it may appear in) but are considered fools in the process.

<sup>35</sup> Although in all societies there are figures who move back to religion towards the end of their life, the prime example in a non-Jewish philosophical tradition is Bertrand Russell who converted to Catholicism. The reasons for this desire to accept religious faith can only be speculative but perhaps indicates something about the deep seated nature of fear of God in the psyche. Whether this is a throw back to a pre-Enlightenment tradition of strong religious belief or whether it is due to the use of religion as an ideological tool is unclear and any conclusions can never be definitive.

difference to the rest of society both physically and emotionally. Gimpel remains true to the teachings and order of the Talmud and to the instruction of his marriage vows, Meany practices the basketball game which will lead to completion of his destiny, Baxter structures his life around the workings of the office and Gump follows rules to the letter whether in the army or tending his mother's garden after her death. Whilst many schlemiels do not always recognise their fundamental difference and uniqueness these features become obvious to the rest of society. Whether society reacts either negatively or positively is largely unimportant (particularly at this stage in the argument) to schlemiels: they carry on regardless, following a set of guidelines and a structured existence, which is their own. This is even true of Baxter whose initial drive is determined by his desire to be accepted. It is the act of becoming a mensch that allows him to cast aside this need to be accepted on anyone's terms but his own.

This is Bauman's point of concern in relation to the notion of ambivalence throughout the period of modernity. The assertion that is of most importance is that identity created through the nation state is of vital importance to the argument; assimilation into this national cultural 'norm' becomes then the object and logical conclusion of how to construct identity.<sup>36</sup> However, this is a false construct around a false notion, that national boundaries actually mean anything, either in geographical terms or in cultural terms. However, he articulates the idea that Attempted assimilation meant full integration, was a wholly false one. This is carried over onto individuals once they have attempted the process of assimilation:

'Cast among the conflicting territorial and cultural claims the Jews were denied the chance of successful assimilation before they - whether by design or default - surrendered to its terms. As the most perceptive among them, like Gustav Mahler, were soon to discover, they were 'thrice homeless: as a Bohemian among Austrians; as an Austrian among Germans; and as a Jew: everywhere. National claims were incompatible, and no one epitomized that

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<sup>36</sup> See Op.Cit.- Bauman - 1991- See Chapter 4, 'A Case Study in the Sociology of Assimilation I: Trapped in Ambivalence', pp.102-159 and specifically 'The Modernising Logic of Jewish Assimilation', pp,110-116

incompatibility than the Jews, these ubiquitously supra-national, universal strangers.<sup>37</sup>

What must follow from this aspect of the argument in chapter five, is to what extent this condition of being strangers can apply to the rest of Western humanity in the contemporary period and whether it is due to the loss of national boundaries or cultural distinctions. In the same way that the Saxons were strangers after the Norman conquest and the masses were strangers to the intelligentsia in the period of late modernity; it must be asked as to how far contemporary 'man' is a stranger to the world at large. The schlemiel still stands as an outsider, but in that role stands outside problematic areas such as this. They are strangers within their own society, but blissfully unaware of how far excluded they are; for example, Baxter never realises that his 'comrades' are laughing behind his back. This being said, it must be noted that the schlemiel, however foolish, is not always an idiot. Whilst they may be unaware of the true extent of their exclusion, this is not to say that they are completely unaware of an external world, or indeed completely ignorant of the attitudes of others to them; Forrest Gump is completely aware that he is viewed as stupid and is heard to ask Jenny not to call him such. It then becomes important to differentiate between those structures which are unrecognisable in their hegemonic control, such as religion with its spiritual allusions and the state with its grounding in the material. The schlemiel is the fool who may on one level be seen to ignore the distinction between the two and on another may be seen to recognise the futility of attempting direct action. To use the example of The Apartment, Baxter may not recognise that he is the subject of mockery but he does see the impossibility of really damaging Sheldrake, as representative of the business and the system. His only recourse is to move back to his own moral system, by leaving the business and thus finding contentment he did not have when he was on the 'top floor'. Whatever the position taken on the schlemiel, it is the character that manages to avoid being interpellated into a system of belief that they consciously do not want to inhabit. They revert to a system of values that is theirs and theirs

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. - p.195. See Chapter 5, 'A Case Study in the Sociology of Assimilation II: The Revenge of Ambivalence', pp.160-196 for further details.

alone, they do not feel the pressure of conformity that others feel. Section three must examine this shift in control from the dominance of the church to the dominance of the state in relation to the metaphysical elements of philosophical and theoretical thinking that the schlemiel embodies.



The Schlemiel and Anomie - The Fool in Society

**Chapter Five:**

**The Schlemiel as Stability**

**(Or How to Move from Modernity to Postmodernity Without Noticing)**

Whilst chapter four has detailed the philosophical structures within which the schlemiel operates and which came to dominate thought for the whole period of modernity, it is now important to acknowledge the move from abstract philosophy (in the metaphysical and mystical elements associated with religion) to ideology. It is important to consider how ideology relates to specific minority groups within society as well as the rest of society as a whole. This claim will be examined in addition to the notion that the metaphysical is an undercurrent through the period of enlightenment and modernity and is the philosophical strand from which Postmodernity emerges and becomes the dominant. Although religion itself can be seen to go through a series of striking changes, to suggest that it completely collapsed through this period is in itself a highly contentious notion. Whilst for some (mainly an elite intelligentsia) the new discourses may have replaced religion, for the majority a structured existence came from a new and covert source; for the masses religion still existed as a point of connection with each other and with stability. It is at the very point that the philosophical concerns of modernity become wholly divorced from any truly metaphysical thought and become politicised and materialist that problems begin to arise. Any group, which then maintains a basis in metaphysical approaches, is subject to exclusion, and rationalist philosophy can be used to justify violence and oppression both as a thing in itself and due to the nature of what it is propounding.<sup>1</sup> This facet of the problematic relationship between politics and philosophy can be examined more exclusively by addressing Marx's conception of alienation, particularly in respect of Jewish society.<sup>2</sup> When Marx wrote of religion in the nineteenth century it clearly still existed, but rather than the medieval situation of the church being the state, the state now controlled and used the church. Throughout the enlightenment, the church still existed. Rationalist and empiricist approaches never removed it for the masses; rather

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that where the Nazis used seemingly 'metaphysical' mythology as a tool of propaganda to 'attract' the population, this was a position arrived at through a rational and logical process. They used the metaphysical aspects of Germanic culture to appeal to the masses instead of basing their public image around religion, but the process of genocide were linked to rationalist and empiricist 'justification'.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx - 'On the Jewish Question' (1843) in *Early Writings* (1975) London, Penguin - 1984 - pp.211-241

those in control of the church as an ideological institution and as an ideological tool changed and this change must be the most vital focus of subsequent discussion:

Once Jew and Christian recognize their respective religions as nothing more than different stages in the development of the human spirit, as snake-skins cast off by history, and man as the snake which wore them, they will no longer be in religious opposition, but in a purely critical and scientific, a human relationship. Science will then be their unity.<sup>3</sup>

Marx, in this instance, fails to differentiate between the religious and the cultural and highlights the aspect of modernity which is to become subject to the most criticism; science both as a discipline and as a rationalist way of thinking. To shake off Judaism is to also cast aside a historically located and deeply entrenched system of belief on any post-enlightenment side of the religious divide. It is important to emphasise the difference between a religious Judaism and a cultural Jewishness specific to those disparate groups from Europe and into America in relation to the claims that Marx makes for Jewish identity. Marx sees no problem in this as his philosophy is one of rationalism and materialism (ultimately rejecting Hegel's recognition of religion) and is largely impossible and untenable for those whose way of life is entrenched in a spiritual metaphysics rather than a scientific rationality. Marx also fails to differentiate between religion for the masses and the use of religion as a tool of government for the minority who hold power in this instance.<sup>4</sup> This notion of religion forming an ideological tool to be used to control can be applied as much to isolated Jewish communities as much as it can be to the broad Christian churches throughout the rest of Europe. Nevertheless, this happens in a different form, as the role of the Rabbi in *'Crampel the Fool'*<sup>5</sup> demonstrates. Marx's conclusions about the nature of rejecting religion fail to take into

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. - p.213. It is ironic and paradoxical that Marx is propagating a pseudo-scientific approach whilst in many ways it is this very methodology and philosophical 'logic' that contributed in part to the legitimisation of the Holocaust.

<sup>4</sup> Istvan Meszaros - Marx's Theory of Alienation (1970) - London, Merlin Press - 1970. See Chapter II, Part 2, 'The Jewish Question and the Problem of German Emancipation', for a more detailed examination of this argument.

account a cultural basis of Jewishness and a distinction between Judaism as a religion and culturally being Jewish. This is an issue that Freud develops in his study of a historically rooted anti-Semitism and a physical difference, which allows the oppressor to identify difference:

The deeper motives for hatred of the Jews are rooted in the remotest past ages; they operate from the unconscious of the peoples, and I am prepared to find that at first they will not seem credible ... among the customs by which the Jews made themselves separate, that of circumcision has made a disagreeable, uncanny impression, which is to be explained, no doubt, by recalling the dreaded castration ... <sup>5</sup>

This is in itself a problematic notion as Freud is attempting to isolate psychological factors to what is seemingly more related to religious and perceived ideological difference and power relations. He is commenting on the effect of modernity but in his distinction between the mind and body he can be firmly located within a discourse attached to rationality, empiricism, materialism and therefore to modernity. It is interesting to note that in this climate of both ideological and physical repression Jewish humour (with the schlemiel being an important constituent element of that humour) still remained strong.<sup>6</sup> The following joke pits two schlemiel-keit characters against a backdrop of late Middle Ages persecution, at the point of absolute Christian religious fervour with the Spanish Inquisition:

To save their lives they both decided to undergo baptism. They walked to the cathedral and asked for an audience with the bishop. As he was not

<sup>5</sup> Sigmund Freud - The Pelican Freud Library 13. : The Origins of Religion ; Totem and Taboo, Moses and Monotheism and Other Works (translated by James Strachey) (1907-1938) - London, Penguin - 1985 - p.336. For more detail of Freud's consideration of Anti-Semitism see Sigmund Freud - Civilisation and Its Discontents (translated by Joan Riviere) (1930) London, The Hogarth Press - 1982 - pp.51-52. It is in this work that Freud further identifies the contradiction between the positive contributions made by Jewish communities but which still respond by anti-Semitic acts.

<sup>6</sup> This is an issue that Freud once again addresses. See Sigmund Freud - The Pelican Freud Library 6. : Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious (translated by James Strachey) (1905) - London, Penguin - 1983. See pp.84-87 for details of Jewish jokes. This is an issue that will be developed in Chapter Eight.

immediately available, they decided to wait. One hour went by, then another, and soon it was sunset. At this, one of them said, 'If it takes much longer we'll miss the Mincha!' <sup>7</sup>

In this sense, it can be seen that whilst the Jews of this period may accept the Christian faith to avoid persecution they still maintained a link to both a Jewish religion and a Jewish culture via the synagogue. If the two men noted above were classified as schlemiels, they would have no problem doing both anyway. For the schlemiel, the notion of a unique and exclusive faith dictated wholly by someone else is a non-sequitur. This also relates to Bauman's notion of being caught between 'a rock and a hard place' in respect of attempting to assimilate.<sup>8</sup> The ambivalence that stems from the philosophies of enlightenment, and subsequently modernity, dictate that any 'other' will be treated as such, despite all attempts to conform to the illusion of what the rest of the population were like. The joke highlighted above shows the problem of being caught not essentially between two religions but between two ideologies. The former, based around the Christian faith, is the stronger, not in terms of belief but in terms of socio-cultural hegemonic dominance and can exert a direct influence over disparate groups in a physical and violent sense through its alliance with the state. Schlemiełdo do not recognise their own position within this because ultimately they are fools, but the very thing that makes them wise fools is that they do not recognise this as a problem and therefore do not have to deal with it as an issue. However, this then raises questions about the notion of religion as an ideological tool or at least the transference of religion as an ideological tool of repression across religions. Religion itself can be

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<sup>7</sup> This joke, related by Israel Zangwill, is cited in Abraham Hochwald - The HarperCollins Book of Jewish Humour (1994) (translated by Anne Moellers) - London, HarperCollins - 1996 - p.9. Hochwald footnotes the information that the Mincha is a late afternoon service which is of importance to the religiously devout, ultimately the irony within the joke lies in the contradiction of faiths and the real desire to convert seemingly being a social rather than religious one. It is also interesting to note Henry D. Spalding - Encyclopaedia of Jewish Humour (1969) - New York, Jonathan David Publishers - 1969, where the introductory page of this book contains the subheading to Chapter 6, 'Atheists, Agnostics and Converts', 'or - How to put your shoes on backwards and walk into yourself,' further indication of the problematic nature of breaking with Judaism for any Jew.

<sup>8</sup> See Zygmunt Bauman - Modernity and Ambivalence (1991) - Cambridge, Polity Press - 1991 - Chapter 4, 'A Case Study in the Sociology of Assimilation I: Trapped in Ambivalence', pp.102-159 and Chapter 5, 'A Case Study in the Sociology of Assimilation II: The Revenge of Ambivalence', pp.160-196 for his detailed account of the process of assimilation and identity.

seen as riding in tandem with the philosophy of the period and often compromising with that philosophy. It is Louis Althusser, in developing on from the central ideas of Marx, who notes that:

In the pre-capitalist historical period which I have examined extremely broadly, it is absolutely clear that there was one dominant Ideological State Apparatus, the Church, which concentrated within it not only religious functions, but also educational ones, and a large proportion of all the functions of communications and 'culture'. It is no accident that all ideological struggle, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, starting with the first shocks of the Reformation, was concentrated in an anti-clerical and anti-religious struggle; rather this is a function precisely of the dominant position of the religious ideological state apparatus.<sup>9</sup>

However, this is an ideological apparatus, which becomes part of a broader state apparatus, supported by repressive state institutions. However, whilst religion can be seen to be repressive through a process of division and fear, this aspect does not directly influence a character such as the schlemiel. He holds a specific and highly individualistic perspective on what constitutes religion and the state and react accordingly. It is important to raise the issue that Althusser is referring to with the specific structure of the Christian church. The structure of Jewish religion and society is different, indeed largely rejected from societies, as Bauman's investigation shows, the dominant ideology imposed on Jewish and other minority groups was a contradictory one.<sup>10</sup> To assimilate was essential, but true assimilation was always impossible. The dominant

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<sup>9</sup> Louis Althusser - 'Ideological State Apparatuses' (1969)- 'Lenin and Philosophy' and Other Essays (1969) (translated by B. Brewster - London, New Left Books - 1971- pp.143-144 - (his emphasis). The notion of pre-capitalist ties in with the emergence of modernity as an all pervasive socio-political discourse. Althusser develops his argument to isolate education as one of the most important Ideological State Apparatuses in its 'invisible' dissemination of ideology. This has particular importance in the cases of both Hyman Kaplan and Forrest Gump, both of whom strongly desire to meet the expectations of society with an education but neither can be educated; in Althussurian terms neither of them becomes receptors to the strongest of ideological state institutions.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter Seven, footnote 6, for details of this argument.

ideological structures within society dictated assimilation at one level but then rejected those who attempted to assimilate on another level. Baptism becomes not just a conversion to the Christianity of the majority but rather a symbol of the acceptance of the dominant ideology and an entry into its system of power structures, to be able to function at a social level within its boundaries. This perhaps suggests why the schlemiel, as an archetype of Jewish society (in this particular instance), manages to stand outside of all rigidly structured ideologically positioning 'faiths'. This contradictory nature of the schlemiel-keit character in respect of ideological state control can be seen with Forrest Gump's involvement both actively in the Vietnam War and also in the peace movement, and in Owen Meany's enthusiasm to join the U.S. army whilst helping others 'dodge the draft'. These schlemiels do not recognise the difference between the two acts that society and the state dictate that they should do; again, in Marxist terms, the hegemonic structures of the dominant ideology. In the specific case of religion itself, Zelig transforms himself not just physically but also emotionally and spiritually and Gimpel accepts the blatantly flawed or even immoral ideas of his Rabbi, but concludes with his own view on how God will react to his behaviour. Owen Meany provides the most useful example of how a schlemiel-keit character can behave in respect of religion, by moving between Christian denominations despite the conflict between those types of faith in his enclosed New England world, an action that is deemed reprehensible. It is interesting to note that Meany never finds the answer to his quest in these religious groups but rather ultimately, it is his own relationship with God that matters to him. This aspect of the schlemiel's character applies just as well to other ideological state institutions such as the city or business, particularly in the case of Baxter. This even applies to the American way of life, a paradoxical and elusive notion, but one which characters such as Hyman Kaplan, Owen Meany, and Forrest Gump have a clear link to, but only in their own terms.

Enlightenment thought however, breaks with the notion of religion and centring faith on an unquantifiable and absent entity, although paradoxically it does not break with the notion of faith completely. At the very core of new ideas are aspects of the metanarrative that totalises in the same way as religion, but these ideas were accessible to only the elite. On a practical level, this is

because of the lack of widespread education and literacy and also due to a large amount of disinterest from both the intelligentsia and the masses in an earlier period. However, what this does serve to do is to create distinctions and divisions within society as these ideas develop, between those who saw themselves open to these new philosophies and those who rejected them, again between the intelligentsia and the masses. Schlemiels remain permanently outside these ideas although not unreceptive to them. Their faith ultimately stems not from someone else's conception of rationality but rather from their own. It is precisely the point that their own construction of what should constitute an object of faith is an objective idea, and it is an idea that goes beyond notions of reason or rationality. This in effect means that schlemiels stand beyond even other Jewish figures whose faith was being tested not only by aspects of physical oppression but also ideological repression in the form of philosophical enquiry that told them that their faith (alongside the faith of others) was flawed. The schlemiel then embodies an abstract faith which is his/her own and which is of his/her own construction. This is not just a religious faith, but a faith nonetheless which isolates him/her not just from society in its broadest terms but also from within his/her own community. The philosophies of enlightenment, then, also become theories of exclusion for those who were unwilling or unable to adopt this new discourse. The discourse of enlightenment and modernity being one that automatically rejects others, that being the very nature of metanarrative. The difference between schlemiel-keit characters and the rest of society is that schlemiels do not let such weighty problems bother them. This in itself implies that schlemiels will not worry. This is clearly not the case, although they ultimately conclude with a sense of completeness or fulfilment, this element of closure being vital to the narrative construction of schlemiel-keit texts. The important factor in this analysis is that despite the fact that they are considered to be fools their decision to stick to their faith is always vindicated; Meany saves the children, Gump has the family he has always wanted and Fidelman both 'gets the girl' and saves his painting. For schlemiels there is no need to be concerned with the grand narratives of modernity, they stick to '*petite*' narratives philosophically akin to the medieval period. This is ultimately what is returned to through the theories surrounding the concept of Postmodernity. This being epitomised by Lyotard's notion of incredulity 'towards



metanarratives,' the only recourse left open is to move back to the smaller and more localised narratives of the past.<sup>11</sup> It must be reiterated that the differentiating factor between the schlemiel and the rest of society is that the 'wise fool' has never been wholly concerned with the grand narratives of modernity. This is an issue that needs to be developed in more detail. The notion of inclusion and exclusion can be taken further with the incorporation of ideas of the comic. Whilst this is specifically the domain of further analysis it is important briefly to consider here how humour functions in relation to oppression. It is evident that most societies use a closely related national group as the object of the joke. However, within Jewish society there are 'sub-groups' or individual character types who are created especially for this purpose, the schlemiel being perhaps the prime example of this. This is exemplified further by the creation of a town of schlemiels in the village of Chelem. 'Chelem would enjoy no special name or fame, and surely no place in this lexicon, were it not that in Jewish folklore it has become the archetypal home of simpletons, an incubator of amiable fools.'<sup>12</sup> The very fact that they are fools is of the greatest importance to the prominence of this example in Jewish culture. This is a purely fictional construct with no basis in fact beyond the name of the village (several real Chelems exist in Europe).<sup>13</sup> Those who are the subject of mass oppression have neither the ability nor the arrogance to use another culture as the root of their humour in respect of this case.<sup>14</sup> That is not to say that the oppressors escaped satirical jibes, but rather that the innocent were never singled out in quite the same way as in other cultures.<sup>15</sup> At this stage in the argument, the important facet of this is that it highlights that there

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<sup>11</sup> Jean Francois Lyotard - The Postmodern Condition (1979) (translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi) - Manchester, Manchester University Press - 1994 - p.xxiv

<sup>12</sup> Leo Rosten - The Joys of Yiddish (1968) - London, Penguin - 1971 - p.85

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. - pp.85-86, contains references to the actual Chelems and detailed information on the fictional ones.

<sup>14</sup> This is an issue developed in Op.Cit. - Freud - 1983- pp.157-161. He comments, They [his referenced stories] are stories created by Jews and directed against Jewish characteristics ... I do not know whether there are many other instances of a people making fun to such a degree of its own character.' (p.157) Whilst this seemingly supports the assertions made in respect of the schlemiel in society, it is an issue that will be more fully addressed in chapter eight on the social impact of the comic.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed examination of anti-Nazi humour and Jewish humour during the period of the Third Reich see Richard Grunberger - A Social History of the Third Reich (1971) - London, Penguin - 1986 - Chapter 22, 'Humour', pp.419-430. The very fact that humour remained in the bleakest period of Jewish

was a strong element of oppression to respond to. The important factor as to why a response is framed in this way will be analysed in more detail.

If modernity is then seen to be a process of exclusion from the discourses of those who exert an ideological control then it follows that Postmodernity (whether seen as a deliberate reaction to or a development of modernity) can be epitomised by an inclusion of those once rejected. This results in a proliferation of once alternative discourses, which are now theoretically and philosophically allowed to flourish. (In practical, day-to-day terms the reality of this may be very different). This is the ultimate freedom, a critically allowable one, from the constraints of the metanarrative that is in effect the purpose behind the attack on 'the Age of Reason'. Many contemporary groups see this collapse of stability and certainty as a nihilistic one, focusing on the futility of existence with an absence of structures to base life around. It is useful in respect of this point to detail Adorno and Horkheimer's position on enlightenment, in relation to how it develops into Postmodernity:

... the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant. The program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy.<sup>16</sup>

It is Docherty who rightly highlights the impact of this argument, with it being written towards the end of the Third Reich.<sup>17</sup> It is this facet of the construct of their argument that is so important;

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history indicates something about the resilience of the body of people and also the need for and importance of humour in the face of repression.

<sup>16</sup> Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer - Dialectic of Enlightenment (1994) (translated by John Cumming) - London, Verso - 1992 - p.3

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Docherty - 'Postmodernism: An Introduction' (1993) in Thomas Docherty (editor) - Postmodernism: A Reader (1993) - Hertfordshire, Harvester Wheatsheaf - 1993 - p.5. See also pp.9-13 for a development and further discussion of this issue by Docherty.

they could see the ultimate expression of a philosophical discourse applied (and distorted) in political terms.<sup>18</sup>

It [the enlightenment] can no longer assume the capacity for self-legitimation without assuming an exclusivity; and henceforth its claims upon universality are sullied by its inherent tendency to fall into rationalism. It produces an administered society, not a rational society: reason is replaced by efficiency

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Despite this flawed rationality and the horror that was perpetrated in its name, the impact of modernity can be seen to be still having a strong effect. There is still a deep desire and need to determine what constitutes truth and order beyond an 'intellectually redundant' religion, a desperate need to find certainties that constantly elude. These are certainties that elude everyone, everyone but the schlemiel, that is. They may be considered intellectually as fools, but in reality, they are still those who maintain a strong system of belief in their own terms. However, the discourse of the Enlightenment has not always been ignored by those merely unwilling or unable to accept it and is not merely isolated to the period of Postmodernity. The rationality posited from the Enlightenment through the period of modernity is a strand of empiricist philosophy that exists in clear distinction to a metaphysical philosophical viewpoint and especially a metaphysical worldview. To appreciate fully how the schlemiel has been active but subjugated during the period of modernity and finds not only a resurgence in the contemporary period but a wider appeal and non-specific socio-cultural location in the period of Postmodernity, it is important to re-emphasise how the Postmodern develops. This is not only in reaction to a rationalist and exclusive discourse but out of a separate and distinct philosophical strand of thought in metaphysics. Metaphysical thought from its very origins is concerned with a spiritual aspect of

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<sup>18</sup> This is a key point developed in great detail by Zygmunt Bauman - Modernity and the Holocaust (1989) - Cambridge, Polity Press - 1993

<sup>19</sup> Op.Cit. - Docherty - 1993 - pp.13-14

human life, which is distinctly scientific, and pseudo-scientific approaches fail to incorporate into their particular approach.<sup>20</sup>

Of all the philosophical traditions, the Metaphysical tradition has always been the most spiritually oriented. For the concept of God or Spirit is precisely the concept of a mind outside of any individual subjective mind.<sup>21</sup>

Whilst it would be incorrect to suggest that this philosophical approach is always **exactly** the same as any culture or group with a socio-religious base it can be suggested that there are a great many points of connection in the approaches they take. It is also interesting to note that the major philosophers of metaphysical thought are Jewish, from Maimonides to Spinoza to Hegel, moving through to figures like Buber and Levinas in the later period.<sup>22</sup> It is Epstein who notes the lack of development of specific Jewish philosophy in the middle period from the Middle Ages to the contemporary to the present:

The reason for the arrest in the development of Jewish philosophy was principally the bitter experiences of the Jews in Spain during the fifteenth century ... the devotees of philosophy were the first to yield, many of them abandoning Judaism. With philosophy thus discredited, the intellectual energies of the Jews turned more and more to the cultivation of their home-grown traditions centred on the Talmud and allied studies.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Even figures such as Nietzsche who attempts to reject the metaphysical alongside the rationalist and empirical, but still bases a great deal of his nationalistic thought around the romantic and mystical.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Harland - Superstructuralism (1987) - London, Routledge - 1994 - pp.74-75

<sup>22</sup> See Nicholas de Lange - Judaism (1986) - Oxford, Oxford University Press - 1988 - Chapter 8, 'The Theological Tradition', pp.106-124. Many other writers, including Epstein, separate out philosophy and religion whilst de Lange sees the two as inseparable, although his suggestion that Jewish philosophy moves away from the metaphysical to the historical is rather limited in its perspective.

<sup>23</sup> Isidore Epstein - Judaism (1959) - London, Penguin - 1968 - p. 222

Despite the fact that this is all pre-enlightenment, the fact remains that Jewish societies were forced further and further towards traditional aspects of faith, a trend which influences philosophical thought to this day. This has been through the metaphysical thinking of many philosophers, which has been handed down through the ages, disseminating these ideas throughout the rest of society and developing them in relation to their own societies.

Harland provides a framework of analysis, which provides a point of distinction between the different strands of philosophy and how they feed in to the Postmodern debate<sup>24</sup> What becomes important is an investigation of how these alternative philosophical strands can be seen to relate to the schlemiel and how these strands then feeds into the period of Postmodernity. A great deal of this stems from the creation of the subject/object divide as proposed by the philosophers of the enlightenment. Their philosophy is one of objective things, which are observable and definable and most importantly can be interpreted by the subjective mind, whilst the basis of metaphysical thought is the notion of objective ideas. Harland develops this notion in the following terms:

The opposition to subjective ideas as a base for knowledge appears in Spinoza as an explicit opposition to Descartes, and in Hegel as an explicit opposition to Kant. Spinoza rejects the famous Cartesian notion of subjectivity, that spiralling inwardness which hives ideas off into the exclusive privacy of the cogito, away from the world.<sup>25</sup>

This can be seen to be akin to Heidegger's notion of *being in the world*, as a situation of the connectedness of all things, including a sense of shared ideas (as outlined in Section two) It is

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<sup>24</sup> Op.Cit. - Harland - 1994 - pp. 70-76. Although Harland moves his later argument to an examination of how these theoretical strands influence and affect linguistic analysis, this early part of the argument can be applied and developed into alternative areas. Harland himself never actually uses the term Postmodernism, instead favouring later-Post-structuralists, commenting that when faced with the (ill)logic of Postmodernity then 'we may well feel that the relative inconsistencies of the earlier Structuralists were preferable', unfortunately the possibility of going backwards is impossible. (p.185) To raise a character such as the schlemiel to the stature of a dominant cultural icon is to forever lose a sense of the ordered and rational.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. - p.72

this that epitomises the concept of shared ideas, not as subjective things, but as objective ideas.<sup>26</sup> As a shared cultural construct, the schlemiel is an objective idea rather than a subjective thing. In fact, if these notions are taken as read then it further goes to demonstrate that the schlemiel will break from the single isolated Jewish communities of Eastern Europe to become of wider cultural concern. This will not just be because of a geographical move to America but also because of the aforementioned philosophical and cultural factors involved.<sup>27</sup> The physical presence of the philosophy is one point where these ideas spread. Another is the ability of the philosophers to spread the ideas. The final and most vital point is the willingness or unwillingness of people to accept these ideas.

We can no longer regard it as the product of mere muddled dreaming and religious mystification. Metaphysical philosophy is undoubtedly paradoxical, undoubtedly beyond all ordinary common sense: but there is a very real logic to it none the less.<sup>28</sup>

This final sentence sounds like earlier descriptions of the schlemiel posited in this study a logic beyond common sense, or at least beyond the rational, this being what the schlemiel represents. This form of analytical investigation is indeed no longer merely connected with religion but with the desire to hold faith in something that cannot be explained rationally. Even when Harland suggests a logic to metaphysics he does not define whose logical structures he means. Schlemiels certainly have an individual and unique consideration of what constitutes a logical structure, but it is unlikely that they would be allowed to contribute to the great philosophical

<sup>26</sup> It must be noted that even Spinoza maintained a strong basis in rationalist thought despite an emphasis on metaphysics. See Stuart Hampshire - *Spinoza* (1951) - London, Penguin - 1992 - pp.151-154 for a discussion of Spinoza and Judaism.

<sup>27</sup> The impact of a geographical move and cultural change is undoubtedly important to the nature of the character (as outlined in Chapter One). However, whilst previous studies of the schlemiel have focused on this alone there is at least as much importance in the change in philosophical thinking which effects the nature of the character.

<sup>28</sup> Op.Cit. - Harland - 1994 - p.76

debates of the age, although by their very nature they are positioned to do so. Even if science as a discourse is proven to be inadequate, then the only recourse left is to move back to a position of pure faith or rather to see everything as negative and the ultimate end as one of nihilism and destruction. The logic that Harland identifies behind metaphysics is a logic that the rationalists and the empiricists would reject. As these strands feed into modernity as the dominant discourse running through the rest of Western society, then it is the logic of metaphysics, seen by enlightenment philosophers as an ill-logical view, which the schlemiel embodies throughout the whole of the period. It is the schlemiel who has never had the problem with these philosophical concepts. Schlemiels<sup>are</sup> undoubtedly paradoxical, undoubtedly beyond all ordinary common sense, but there is a real (ill) logic (by conventional standards) to them none the less. The faith that they embody is one of the impossibility of anything to explain the universe adequately. Instead, the schlemiel takes whatever explanation he/she deems important and is available as a fact. For them truth is not arrived at through rationality, as in the case of Cartesian logic. Their source of information does not matter, be it the Rabbi in the case of Gimpel or a seemingly abstract notion of ethical behaviour for Gump in Vietnam in saving his comrades that contradicts a nature of personal survival. It is this aspect of faith that is largely absent from contemporary society, through the 'Postmodern condition', which is (in Lyotard's terms) a questioning of absolutely everything. Whilst Harland is correct in his assertions that the constituent theories of Postmodernity develop from a metaphysical strand which stands in opposition to the theories of enlightenment, the Postmodern remains as a loosely affiliated range of discourses which collectively do not allow any kind of faith at all. Modernity at least allowed faith in the rational, the empirical, and the unified self and in science. Schlemiels embody this in their abstract logic and faith which may consign them to the level of a fool, but they remain as wise fools in their faith giving them structure in life. They become holy fools when an anterior metaphysical force grants them their contentment. Their faith is something that gives them stability where it could not otherwise exist; they maintain this stability in their lives despite theoretical and philosophical enquiry to the contrary. Their structure is one of a much older order of faith connected to

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absolute belief in the mystical and spiritual and whilst this remains they do not need to locate it with any particular source; it is beyond all common sense, but then again, so are they. This is another reason why the schlemiel appears with such resonance and frequency in Jewish culture. The Kabbalah and Talmud are undoubtedly highly mystical and spiritual texts that form a strong socio-cultural basis for Judaic groups.<sup>29</sup> These aspects of spirituality associated with mysticism are largely absent from a post-reformation western Christian society with its rejection of all but the bible and an associated puritan ethic.

Schlemiels embody much more than this. Rather than their belief existing via faith as a metaphysical concept, they find proof of whatever source their belief stems from. Schlemiels are

characters that can actually hear the voice of 'God', but as with anyone who makes claims to this they are destined to remain to be seen as foolish or, even worse, as insane (a point that will be developed later in this chapter). Their location of truth is beyond the comprehension of everyone else throughout society, but the question must be asked as to who is the loser in the end, those who appear stupid but are happy or those who are rational and logical but remain unstructured and unhappy. Whilst this and chapter four have so far located the development of thought into the Postmodern and have located Jewish society and the schlemiel within this progression, it is important to examine more fully what constitutes the Postmodern beyond its development from a metaphysical strand and into a social consideration of these theories. It is also important to begin to revisit the notion of the schlemiel as a comic character in relation to the contentious notion that comedy is the most pertinent mode of expression of the contemporary. If this is true then it highlights another point of convergence between Jewish-schlemiel characters throughout history, the Gentile wise-fool of the middle ages and the broadly schlemiel-keit characters of contemporary society; they are all humorous characters. This begs the question as to what it is about the contemporary for Gentile societies that is so similar to the Jewish condition throughout history

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<sup>29</sup> For further details on the Kabbalah and the Talmud respectively see Op.Cit. - Epstein - 1968 - pp.223-251 and pp.121-131, Rabbi Morris N. Kertzer - What is a Jew? (1953) - New York, Macmillain - 1978 - pp.128-130 and pp. 113-116 and also Nicholas de Lange - Judaism (1986) - Oxford, Oxford University Press - 1988 - pp.99-105 and 69-73. I have opted for the most commonplace spelling of Kabbalah but some critics prefer to opt for the spelling Cabala.



and into the contemporary. There is also an implicit suggestion in that statement which indicates that if the broader human condition converges with the Jewish condition then Jewish groups within Europe and America will be better adjusted at dealing with this condition. Perhaps this is due to the cultural appearance of the schlemiel, the character that through his/her foolishness embodies a sense of stability and order for that given society.

However, to say that the enlightenment project and modernity give stability and order (albeit a false one) and that Postmodernity is the result of this collapse of order, is in itself to prioritise the experience of WASP bourgeois males throughout the period. As has been established throughout this and the previous chapters this experience has been different from what theorists now see as a period of exclusion rather than inclusion; the example of Western Jewish communities can be cited as being the obvious focus. This begs the question of what happens to the schlemiel in this new period. Earlier chapters have demonstrated that the character becomes of more importance in this period rather than disappearing when the collapse of modernity as a legitimisation of totalising discourses becomes evident. What is significant is that whilst the schlemiel does not disappear as a traditional Jewish archetype, the location of the character within a specific culture is no longer as important an issue in the contemporary. This can be seen through the examples of A Prayer for Owen Meany, The King, The Apartment, and Forrest Gump. It is significant to note that it is difficult to pinpoint any of those characters as developing from any specifically Jewish origin.

The notion addressed above is an important concept in relation to the gender dimension of the schlemiel. It is safe to say that in traditional Jewish folklore and schlemiel literature there are no effectively female schlemiels. Whilst this can be isolated to the fact that the fictionalised role of the Jewish mother figure was one of dominance, it would be highly contentious and rather glib to suggest that the experience of women in any society is one of localised dominance, and therefore happiness and contentment.<sup>30</sup> The role of women is still often taken in relation to men, but they

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<sup>30</sup> This aspect of the Jewish female as mother and matriarch can be seen in a range of Jewish literature and film, for example, Joseph Heller - Good As Gold (1979) - London, Corgi - 1980, Philip Roth - Portnoy's

are still never referred to as schlemiels; no one would dare. It is important to note, however, that as the character enjoys a new found freedom (post-World War Two) there is evidence of female schlemiels appearing for what is arguably the first time: for example in the case of Annie Hall and even something as low-key and 'mainstream' a film as The Truth About Cats and Dogs.<sup>31</sup> Whilst this does relate to the totality of the argument presented here, to focus too deeply on aspects of gender would be to dilute the specific philosophical and theoretical concerns of the whole.

However, it is interesting and relevant to remember that groups that were once totally marginalized are now in some small way included, even to the extent of featuring a black schlemiel-keit character in Forrest Gump, with Bubba and his aspiration of becoming a shrimp fisherman. This is also true of many characters in the work of Kinky Friedman, where the schlemiel is allowed to enter the world of the 'hard-boiled detective' once accessible to only the most amoral and macho characters of WASP America.<sup>32</sup> What remains is the purpose the characters serve, and by appealing to a wider audience, they suggest something about that audience in turn; that there is a need for these characters within these groups.<sup>33</sup> This is not to suggest that the automatic reaction to oppression is to create a 'hard-luck loser' character to take the blame. Rather it becomes part of a comedy that acts as a form of safety valve, with a character who seemingly loses when faced with the terrible forces of oppression but ultimately remains content and happy with the way they conclude events, despite the pressures of the external world. Whilst initial Jewish reactions to oppression are lost in the mists of time, other

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Complaint (1969) - London, Penguin - 1986, Brighton Beach Memoirs, dir: Gene Saks, writ: Neil Simon, USA, 1986 and Oedipus Wrecks, dir: and writ: Woody Allen in New York Stories, dir: Martin Scorsese, Francis Coppola, Woody Allen, U.S.A., 1989.

<sup>31</sup> The Truth About Cats and Dogs, dir: Michael Lehmann, U.S.A., 1996. This film concerns itself with two women, the tall, blonde but 'dumb' Noelle and the short, dark and intelligent Abby. Their confused relationship with Brian centres on an initial misunderstanding about the identity of the 'radio voice'. In this case, both women act as schlemiels despite being physical and intellectual opposites. It is the initial confidence in making the 'right' decision that causes confusion, and despite this it ends with both characters maintaining some kind of contentment both through and despite their actions.

<sup>32</sup> For example in the case of Kinky Friedman - Elvis, Jesus and Coca-Cola (1993) in More Kinky Friedman (1993) - London, Faber and Faber - 1993 - pp.355-504

<sup>33</sup> Even if schlemiels <sup>are</sup> seen as a marketing tool within both film and literature, it is still the case that they are used because an audience will want to go and see them and seemingly will identify with them.

marginalized groups appear to follow a process of more forceful and direct action with a modicum of success prior to the advent of schlemiel-keit characters. For example, this can be seen with actions of both radical feminist groups and black power groups in America and indeed throughout the rest of the world. Much could also be said about this opposition to repression in relation to the continued fighting over the boundaries of the state of Israel. It is interesting to note that a schlemiel-keit character as seeming to embody failure would be totally unacceptable within these groups who are not aiming for compromise and success on a personal level but rather demanding self government on a strict agenda of general rules of their own. As a response to ideological oppression, (as outlined earlier in Marxist terms) these characters appear and reappear in relation to the element of oppression itself on one level, and on a higher level, to the limited freedom of expression allowable within the structures of the dominant groups within society. In these terms,

schlemiels can be seen as a reaction because they represent something on a higher spiritual plain to these once totally isolated groups, beyond the limits of the material facts of existence. There is undoubtedly a continuation of these radical groups within society and whilst they may act as a panacea, for some it must be remembered that the majority of the world's population maintain an existence divorced from the practice, and in many cases divorced from the often-radical philosophy, of these groups. Schlemiels act as a form of security in the sense that whilst it is deemed acceptable for some groups to utilise the character as one form of escape and as an embodiment of the insecurity of the Postmodern, others find comfort in fundamentalist nationalist politics or fundamentalist religious belief. This implies a return to a system of metanarratives often more heavily fortified and more pervasive than before. In this sense, it is possible to differentiate between the direct action groups who respond to, in Althusserian terms, Repressive State Apparatuses, and the mythic archetypes of fiction that can stand outside the more pervasive forces of the Ideological State Apparatuses. This is true of schlemiel-keit characters within the boundaries of the text and is another indicator of the schlemiel's status in the contemporary as being purely fictional, as a total escape from ideology is impossible. Marx holds the view that it is possible for art and literature to stand outside the frameworks of dominant ideology and merely

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show how ideology operates.<sup>34</sup> This is in itself a highly contentious notion and is one that has been challenged and rewritten from its very conception. However, it is Althusser's perspective that is most useful when he notes that texts must, by the very nature of ideology itself, form part of a broader dominant societal and ideological framework.<sup>35</sup> Whilst this may be true of those who are accepted within the dominant groups from the start, it does not apply in the same way to those who exist outside the dominant ideology and are not accepted within it; for example, in the case of Jewish groups throughout history. It is still safe to say that those texts produced by marginalized groups are still ideologically loaded (this is after all Althusser's concept of the trans-historical nature of ideology) but they are writing from an ideological position anterior to the dominant. It is Marxist theorists like Jameson and Lawrence Grossberg who comment of the contemporary that it is the function of Postmodern capitalist structures to incorporate the discourse of the restless minority to an extent where it fails to damage the dominant and still gives the illusion of acceptance and inclusion.<sup>36</sup> This then negates the possibility of any physical reaction being of any possible use.

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<sup>34</sup> Although this is something of a generalisation of an early Marxist perspective it identifies the perspective Marx adopts in 'Uneven Character of Historical Development and Questions of Art' (from *Grundrisse*, 1857-8) cited in Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne (editors) - *Marxist Literary Theory* (1996) - Oxford, Blackwell - 1996 - pp.32-33. This is an issue dealt with in particular detail by Friedrich Engels - 'On Realism' (Engels to Margaret Harkness in London, April 1888) - cited in *Ibid.* - pp.39-40, where he argues that 'Realism, to my mind, implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances ... The more the opinions of the author remain hidden, the better for the work of art. The realism I allude to may crop out even in spite of the author's opinions.' (pp.39-40). For a full discussion of early Marxist views on art and literature see Terry Eagleton - *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (1976) - London, Methuen and Co. Ltd. - 1976 - Chapter 3, 'The Writer and Commitment' - pp.37-58. See also Leonard Jackson - *The Dematerialisation of Karl Marx: Literature and Marxist Theory* (1994) - Essex, Longman - 1994 - Chapter Six, 'Economic Marxism and Critical Interpretation', pp.109-141 and particularly section 1.2. 'Art and the political unconscious', pp.116-118.

<sup>35</sup> Louis Althusser - 'A Letter on Art in Reply to Andre Daspre' (1966) in *Op.Cit.* - Althusser - 1971 - pp.221-227. Whilst Althusser may be the most prominent and useful theorist in this instance there are many others who develop on from the perspective that Marx and Engels take, particularly Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey - 'On Literature as an Ideological Form' (1974) and Terry Eagleton - 'Towards a Science of the Text' (1976) both cited in *Op.Cit.* - Eagleton and Milne - 1996 - pp.275-295 and pp.296-327. See also *Op.Cit.* - Leonard - 1994 - Chapter 8, 'Structural Marxism and Power Fantasy: Althusser and Foucault,' particularly part 1, 'The Lineage of Althusser', pp.174-193, for more details on Althusser's perspective.

<sup>36</sup> Lawrence Grossberg - 'The Politics of Youth Culture: Some Observations on Rock and Roll in American Culture' - *Social Text*, Winter 1983-1984, pp.106-118. Grossberg's focus here is on youth culture with his central idea being the impossibility of rebellion. He concentrates on the notion of the consumer society and the way that the visible symptoms of rebellion are now taken and become of economic value. Which is what he suggests is one of the reasons for their negligible value in attacking the hegemonic structures of the dominant groups.

It could possibly be argued that the exchange value that schlemiel-keit characters have has outstripped the use value that they may have had. However, they can still be seen to serve a non-culturally specific social function and whereas (for example) the director that Woody Allen is becomes the saleable commodity rather than the character he plays, Tom Hanks becomes the saleable commodity despite the character role he is playing. The characters that feature are certainly integral to their appeal but they are not essentially used as the primary marketing tool: this is usually the lead actor(s) and/or the director. The same can be said for an author of a literary work, where the audience may relate to characters and find some comfort in the idea of a shared style, themes and/or characters across a range of fictions even from one author. It is ultimately the name of the author that is used as a marketing tool. It is interesting to note that where texts look back to a pre-World War Two America the character is more often than not located back within Jewish society, as in the cases of *Zelig* and the *Brighton Beach Memoirs 'Trilogy'*. This in itself further emphasises the position of the contemporary broadly cultural and non-specific Jewish schlemiel-keit character within a post-war society where this new form of oppression in the form of uncertainty is more pervasive. They stand not outside ideology and capitalism, but they react within it, devouring the logics of what late capitalism is supposed to be, despite the fact that this 'looking back to the past' could be identified as the Postmodern 'symptom' of nostalgia. The notion of Postmodernity as late capitalism (as presented by Jameson and Jean Baudrillard) is one of stasis; nothing can react against capitalism and in a sense it is not even worth trying.<sup>37</sup>

Schlemiel figures do not attempt to stand outside these structures, which would indicate a deliberate intent and recognition of the effects of ideology that in itself would seemingly contradict their foolishness. However, the character can still be seen as a figure that appears in reaction to oppression, but it is the object of the oppression that changes. The remaining focus of this chapter

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For a discussion of the collapse of the notion of progress even into the aesthetic dimension of contemporary culture see Frederic Jameson - *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logics of Late Capitalism* (1991) - London, Verso - 1993 - Chapter 9, Film: Nostalgia for the Present', pp.279-296

<sup>37</sup> See Ibid. and Jean Baudrillard - *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976) (translated by Iain Hamilton Grant) - London, Sage - 1993 for details of this argument.

will be to further develop what this new form of oppression is and to consider the notion that Jewish groups were and perhaps still are the best equipped to cope with it; they have, after all, had their fair share of problems to deal with in the past.

This oppression is largely related to the aforementioned loss of stability and certainty in all aspects of life, this is perhaps more far reaching than at first realised. This is particularly true for those groups in Western society where stability was never questioned and was attached to a given set of values and beliefs. There are however two points of the loss of stability which need to be examined in turn; the first being a social and cultural stability and the second being an enlightenment view of the given and unified self which has come under attack from predominantly psychoanalytic critics in the latter half of the twentieth century. All the previous research on the nature of Jewish society has been one of isolation and deliberate rejection, as the problems associated with attempts at assimilation show. However, where Bauman talks of assimilation it is with specific reference to an earlier form of society, and the case of America highlights different if not totally dissimilar problems. As indicated in chapter one, the problems of assimilation in America were no less acute than anywhere else in the world. However rather than isolation, rejection and oppression were the primary factor in this new society and there was a strong element of an impetus to integrate in these terms. To take the Jewish case in isolation, it is a fact that many of the new immigrants did find success but the need to conform was so strong that there was a deliberate attempt (at least on the surface) to reject any prior cultural origins. The example of Jewish involvement in Hollywood and the New York literary scene can perhaps be taken as one of the prime examples to prove this.<sup>38</sup> However, this is one of the founding factors that a sense of unity within America has been built on - *one nation, under God*. However, this can be seen to be false as the social reality for America has been one of disparate groups none of which meet the

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<sup>38</sup> For details of Jewish involvement in Hollywood see Lester D. Friedman - The Jewish Image in American Film (1987) - New Jersey, Citadel Press - 1987 - particularly Chapter One, 'A Short History of the Jewish-American Cinema', pp.9-95. See also Neal Gabler - An Empire of their Own (1989) - New York, Anchor Books - 1989. For details of Jewish involvement in the literary scene see Leon Israel Yudkin - Jewish Writing and Identity in the Twentieth Century (1982) - London, Croom Helm - 1982 - (particularly) Chapter 7, 'From the Periphery to the Centre in America', pp.112-128

criteria laid down in the mythic construction of America and the concept of the 'American dream'. The notion of the 'melting pot' does not, as implied, instigate conformity; it merely serves to further highlight difference. However, this raises the question as to why difference should be a negative factor within any society. If the Postmodern is anything, it can surely be a newfound recognition and a celebration of those differences. This would immediately suggest that these disparate groups maintain a distinct identity centred on a recognisable tradition and ethnic origin. This is a factor lost to memory and the only option is to construct a new identity based around society as it is found. It is arguably the case that Postmodernity's reversal of the discourse of modernity to reinstate *'petit'* narratives allows individual distinctions in race and/or historical and ethnic origin to flourish; it is the fundamentalism of other political groups (often from within those self same ethnic societies) which cause further problems. For example, it has been much easier for a country such as England to exert a strong sense of cultural identity throughout modernity with colonialism and racial superiority created as a metanarrative, and also to exert the same control using the past as a point of shared unity and order, particularly with the relatively recent collapse of Empire. However, America is a country that has never fully evolved a sense of history in the same way and this is perhaps why Baudrillard highlights America as being the prime example of the hyperreal in this sense.<sup>39</sup> Within the framework of the hyperreal, it can be seen that identity is not actually constructed in reference to the past but rather in relation to the mythic, and all that which stems from the mythic becomes the truth.<sup>40</sup> This is of course problematic in that the mythic has no basis in fact and attempts to attach identity to such a source will always result in a confused sense of identity. The metanarratives that give certainty have gone, (one of those being history

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<sup>39</sup> Jean Baudrillard - *Simulations* (1983) (translated by Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman) - New York, Semiotext(e), Inc. - 1983 and Jean Baudrillard - *America* (1986) (translated by Chris Turner) - London, Verso - 1991. To fully detail and debate the notion of the hyperreal would involve an extended study in itself.. Whilst this is beyond the remit of what is required here it is important to note how the issues relating to the concept relate to society as a whole. However, as Baudrillard comments in *Simulations* '... we should turn our definitions of hyperrealism inside out: It is reality itself today that is hyperrealist.' (his emphasis, p.147) This loss of the distinction between fiction and what was once perceived to be fact is vital to the concept. For a concise discussion of the subject of hyperreality see Norman K. Denzin - *Images of Postmodern Society* (1991) - London, Sage - 1991 - particularly 'The Simulacrum, the Stages of History and the Image', pp.30-31. For a more detailed and expansive discussion of this see Nick Stevenson - *Understanding Media Cultures* (1995) - London, Sage - 1995 - Chapter 5, 'Baudrillard's Blizzards', pp.144-177.

and another being distinct cultural identity) especially when such certainties as the nation state begin to collapse.<sup>41</sup> This confusion of identity is one that was always there; modernity merely shrouded that fact.

This ultimately draws the argument back to the social function of the schlemiel as being a character that is ridiculed and in a sense rejected from even his/her own society. Yet, the schlemiel retains a sense of who they are, with no discernible problem. Their sense of selfhood is no different from that from the rest of society in that it is borne from the same sources. However, the schlemiel does not fully recognise why this should be a problem. The cases of Hyman Kaplan and Forrest Gump demonstrate this, from the period of mass immigration in the early part of this century and in relation to a character from a southern WASP background in the latter half of the twentieth century. These characters do not take issue with the concept of America as a unified whole in exactly the same way as Gimpel and Owen Meany have no problem with the concept of religion in light of historically entrenched challenges to this particular metanarrative. Faith remains as the overwhelming factor for the schlemiel and there is a conscious choice to accept this as a mode of living. However, this is still a choice within the boundaries of being a fool. What must be remembered is that this is a definition of a fool that is derived from the position of those who believe they are also correct. This is true both for those in the period of modernity who accept there is a fixed and rational truth, and those from the period of Postmodernity who are just as sure there is none. This would imply that there is an ironic side to the character of the schlemiel, but rather than the schlemiel being an expression of irony, it is the schlemiel who demonstrates that the nature of being and identity in periods of uncertainty and oppression is in itself ironic. As Walter Truett Anderson argues:

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<sup>40</sup> Op.Cit. - Baudrillard - 1983 - Part One, 'The Precession of the Simulacra', pp.1-75

<sup>41</sup> This is an issue developed in Mike Featherstone - Undoing Culture (1995) - London, Sage - 1995. See Chapter 7, 'Localism, Globalism and Cultural Identity', pp.102-125 for a consideration of the nation as a community and the changing nature of identity in relation to globalisation. This is a theme developed in great detail by Jonathan Friedman - Cultural Identity and Global Process (1994) - London, Sage - 1994.



This means an end to individualism as we have known it - the inner-directed, stay-the-course personality that, depending on who you're talking to, is either the great strength or the main problem of modern Western civilisation. But it is equally unpromising to the future prospects of the ideal that is so often prescribed as the antidote to individualism - the person deeply rooted in community. The Postmodern person is a **multi-community** person, and his or her life as a social being is based on adjusting to shifting contexts and true to being divergent - and occasionally conflicting - commitments. <sup>42</sup>

However, this does not automatically apply to the schlemiel in the same way that it does to 'real people', further underlining the fact that the schlemiel is ultimately a fictional construction in his/her contemporary form. They see themselves as fitting into a community, in the way that Gimpel and Baxter do, and they also see themselves as having a fixed and unified whole, as in the case of Meany and Gump. They become the object of derision because they fail to see the earth shattering importance of philosophical concepts, which dispute everything, they believe in, but at the same time to have a certainty and structure is an object to be admired. This is especially true when that structure and order never leads to the subjugation of any others, unlike the discourses of enlightenment and modernity. The eclecticism of contemporary cultures is only an issue for those who recognise it and define it as such. This is in a sense why Jewish groups are arguably those best positioned to take on board and accept Postmodernity. For them life has always been uncertain; whilst the notion of the nation state (and with it a cultural homeland) is being eroded, this was always the case for Jewish groups, particularly before the formation of the state of Israel. The nature of what it means to be Jewish has always been in conflict throughout history, whether in relation to oppression from outside or post enlightenment developments of new and often

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<sup>42</sup> Walter Truett Anderson - Introduction to Part Three, 'Self, Sex and Sanity' - in Op.Cit. - Anderson - 1996 - p.123-124.

The issue of irony in contemporary fiction is the same as that addressed by John Barth - 'The Literature of Exhaustion' (1967) in Malcolm Bradbury - The Novel Today (New Edition) (1977) - London, Fontana Press - 1990 - pp.71-85. It is here that Barth notes the way that all texts will be critically read as ironic despite the content or intent of the text itself. Barth indicates a longing to return to the certainties of past literary forms.

conflicting religious and social groups within Jewish society. This is also true of the disparate Jewish communities throughout the world. Although there are points of cultural connection (as indicated previously), there are also many differences; complete unity remains, as it has always been, an unsolvable problem.

The argument presented above certainly acts on a socio-cultural and political level, but the question still remains about the construction of the individual subject in relation to the social construction of the individual. It is said that the schlemiel is produced for a society and that the same society will then use that character. This is fine, but it is also important to address the nature of the schlemiel's psyche. They seemingly do not represent a divided self, but contemporary theorists would argue that this is in itself impossible. This further highlights the location of the schlemiel as a textual entity, as does following the Marxist line of capitalism shrouding the fact that people are not individuals, but that it is useful for capitalism to perpetuate the belief in bourgeois individualism. Whilst it is possible to trace a line of relevant criticism through Freud and Lacan in the social construction of the individual, this is largely redundant in respect of the schlemiel.<sup>43</sup> However, much could and has been made of psychoanalytic criticism in respect of Jewish cultures.<sup>44</sup> It is Deleuze and Guattari who present the most useful point of analysis with their consideration of late capitalism and the condition of the psyche under this subjugating

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<sup>43</sup> Freud addresses the Jewish question as an example in a variety of his works, but his most specific and concentrated analysis is in *Op.Cit.* - Freud - 1985, 'Moses and Monotheism : Three Essays (1939 [1934-38]), pp. 237-381. Freud traces the development of Jewish culture here from its origins with Moses to contemporary forms of Anti-Semitism, and examines potential reasons for this oppression. Whilst his conclusions demonstrate that there can be no conclusive evidence as to reasons for oppression, what is interesting in respect of psychoanalytic criticism is his concern with the physical and biological signifiers of difference rather than the symbolic differences in culture.

<sup>44</sup> Whilst Lacan does not deal directly with the Jewish question he is important in a development of theoretical ideas to the contemporary position that Deleuze and Guattari present. Concepts such as the mirror phase are important constituent elements of the theories of Postmodernity in their prioritisation of the surface over depth, and concepts such as the unstable nature of language are important in a Post-structuralist to Postmodernist phase. What is of most importance to the argument presented here is Lacan's move to the symbolic, developing from Freud's concentration on the biological. Jaques Lacan - *Ecrits : A Selection* (translated by Alan Sheridan) (1966) - London, Tavistock Publishing - 1977. See Chapter One, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of I', pp.1-7, Chapter Three, 'The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis', pp. 30-113 and for a consideration of the move from the literal to the symbolic see Chapter Eight, 'The signification of the phallus', pp.281-291. For a detailed analysis of the progression from Freud to Lacan see *Op.Cit.* - Harland - 1994 - Part One, Section 3, 'Lacan's Freud', pp.33-41.

force.<sup>45</sup> Theirs can be seen as the most nihilistic of views, their conclusion being one which suggests that the most applicable form of rebellion in the contemporary is schizophrenia. While this relates broadly to society, it can be applied to the character of the schlemiel in a textual sense. Their perspective draws on Freud (and particularly the Oedipus complex) as deriving from modernity and rather than it explaining the psyche it provides, a set of criteria which then create neurosis rather than solving them:

‘Oedipus restrained is the figure of the daddy-mommy-me triangle, the familial constellation in person ... The function of Oedipus as dogma, or as the ‘nuclear complex,’ is inseparable from a forcing by which the psychoanalyst as theoretician elevates himself to the conception of a generalized Oedipus.’<sup>46</sup>

This imposition and lack of success through psychoanalytic treatment can be seen in Portnoy's Complaint and Oedipus Wrecks. Whilst it is reasonable to use the concept in the construction of a fictional text, it does not make it any truer of the real human psyche. It does, however, demonstrate the pervasive nature of Freudian theories in society. What is important for a consideration of the schlemiel is the move from a concern for the biological ‘given self’ (in Freud) to the purely social construction of the individual (in Deleuze and Guattari). Whilst it is not the purpose of this study to detail the whole of Deleuze and Guattari's argument in its totality and complexity, it is useful to identify what they see as the only applicable reaction to an all-pervasive oppressive system in capitalism. The only reasonable reaction and escape is madness and schizophrenia, breaking out of the social and linguistic ties that bind everyone else together.<sup>47</sup> It

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<sup>45</sup> The two most important texts being Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari - A Thousand Plateaus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia (translated by Brian Massumi) (1988) - London, The Athlone Press Ltd. - 1992 and Anti-Oedipus : Capitalism and Schizophrenia (translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane) (1972) - London, The Athlone Press Ltd. - 1994

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. - 1994 - p.51

<sup>47</sup> This is a position argued initially by Foucault who comments that the state of madness was identified by the social forces of capitalism and filtered through the medical profession throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For further specifics of this argument see Michel Foucault - Madness and

has already been identified that for Jewish societies inescapable oppression has always been a factor and as time passes oppression moves to the realm of ideology and particularly capitalist ideology. This ideology does not choose groups to locate itself with. Rather, it applies to everyone and with it comes the character of the schlemiel standing in reaction to it.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the schizophrenic is the Desiring Machine, the person who embodies the Id. Those who are subject to societal constraints represent the Body Without Organs (BwO), the repressed who cannot break out of society.<sup>48</sup> The schlemiel is certainly not schizophrenic in the same way that Deleuze and Guattari are suggesting, but they certainly represent a figure beyond the conventional behavioural patterns of the rest of society. This then, becomes partly their defining characteristic and also their societal function. They represent the Desiring Machine for the rest of BwOs within society. Schlemiels inhabit a realm to which no one else has access, but rather than uncontrollable 'madness' with schizophrenia theirs is the more friendly face of madness, identifiable through their foolish behaviour. It is interesting to note that once the definitions of madness have been given (as Foucault identifies) then the schlemiel becomes viewed as more overtly 'different' from everyone else. This is true of the physical descriptions of Owen Meany and the deeper rooted and biological state of both Zelig and Forrest Gump's 'foolishness'.

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Civilisation : A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason (translated by Richard Howard) (1967) - London, Routledge - 1993. See Chapter III, 'The Insane', pp.65-84 for details of the categorisation of those deemed 'mad' and Chapter VI, 'Doctors and Patients', pp.159-198 for the role of the bourgeoisie in the perpetuation and development of the classification of the insane throughout the period of modernity. See also Klaus Doerner - Madmen and the Bourgeoisie (translated by Joachim Neugroschel and Jean Steinberg) (1969) - Oxford, Basil Blackwell - 1981 for a detailed historical consideration of the social impact of the notion of insanity.

<sup>48</sup> For details on the concept of the Desiring Machine, see Op.Cit. - Deleuze and Guattari - 1994 - Chapter One, Section one, 'Desiring-Production', pp.1-8

For details on the concept of the BwO see Ibid. - Chapter One, Section two, 'The Body Without Organs', pp.9-16

For a further consideration of the above two concepts and a development of some of the ideas held within Anti-Oedipus see Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari - 'Rhizome' (1983) in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari - On the Line (1983) - New York, Semiotext(e), Inc. - 1983 - pp.1-65. For a commentary on the work of Deleuze and Guattari see Steven Best and Douglas Kellner - Postmodern Theory (1991) - London, Macmillan - 1991 - Chapter 3, 'Deleuze and Guattari : Schizos, Nomads and Rhizoimes', pp.76-110. It must be noted that, as Best and Kellner indicate, Deleuze and Guattari focus on the potentially positive aspects of modernity and more specifically their critique is aimed at capitalism. This notion of capitalism has been identified in this study as a constituent element of the contemporary form of oppression.

To say that the schlemiels are not products of the society they have been raised in is to ignore the way that they derive information from external sources. However, the response the schlemiel gives is always his/her own interpretation, or rather a mis-interpretation, which leads to their reaction being a highly individualistic one. Rather than the schizophrenic, who has no conception of an external reality (an ideological reality), the schlemiel just cannot operate within it. These characters are after all foolish, but by holding the position of misunderstanding and misrecognition, they ironically become the most suitable character for the period. They are not so 'mad' as to warrant total exclusion but they are foolish enough not to notice the rigid oppression of society in quite the same way as everyone else. For many theorists it is hard to stomach a hero (or anti-hero) who is schizophrenic, but the 'watered down' version of this figure in the schlemiel is much easier to contend with. Like the schizophrenic, the schlemiel's 'foolishness' is an inescapable one. The schlemiel becomes at once both a positive and a negative character. They are positive because they survive oppression intact and as fictional entities can be seen to do that for the rest of society. They are negative because in existing at all they show the impossibility of actually breaking out of the framework of ideological repression. Whilst this locates the schlemiel within a contemporary cultural framework, it is somewhat beyond the remit of this study to suggest a solution to these problems - beyond becoming foolish of course.

The schlemiel represents something to different groups throughout history. If the period of Postmodernity is anything it is a point at which once forgotten and unallowable discourses now come to the point of prominence and cultural dominance. The schlemiel embodies something in these terms. Rather than merely being applicable to the plight of a specific Jewish community, the aspects of oppression that exist in both a spiritual and ideological form in the contemporary exist for Western communities as a whole. This oppression is no less acute for Jewish communities where the character was once most dominant, but in fact the thousands of years of exclusion and oppression at the hands of those who believed themselves to hold the 'truth' has acted as a form

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of preparation for a new ideological oppression and a philosophical uncertainty. It is important to point out that whilst the ideological and philosophical oppressions of the contemporary are indeed pervasive, they are certainly preferable to the violent physical oppression that took place in the nineteen thirties during the Third Reich. Schlemiels embody something else for society; they transcend all forms of doubt, whether it is to religion or to rationality. Their faith is the important factor and that faith is not tied to anything rigid. Rather, it is the absolute embodiment of metaphysical certainty, not based on any rationality or logical order that can be identified. Even noting the shift of power in society through religion as dominant to the state apparatus as dominant, the schlemiel has carried on regardless. It is their very foolishness in not accepting the latest notion of what constitutes the 'right way to think' that allows them to remain content with their situation. This very contentment makes them characters that <sup>are</sup> looked to for inspiration. Whilst they offer no long term solutions to all of society's ills, they proffer a short term answer, and in consideration of the problems of the contemporary this is something well worth holding on to. This is especially true when taking into account the fact that the schlemiel is a comic character again acting as a cushion to the desperate state of the late twentieth century. The schlemiel can be seen as a hero in the above terms. Further consideration must be given to ascertain exactly what type of hero fools can be, especially when they are clearly fools. However, there is much more of an importance to the structure and use of the comic as a mode of textual expression and in terms of its impact on society and this must be the focus of Chapter Six.

The Schlemiel and Anomie - The Fool in Society

**Chapter Six:**

**The Schlemiel as Culturally Dominant Comic Icon**

Throughout the previous two chapters, the main concern has been to locate schlemiels within a theoretical and philosophical framework, which identifies them firmly within the contemporary as a culturally dominant character. This is partly due to their cultural status and to their role as comic characters. It has already been asserted that the nature of the comic is elusive and problematic to define, but its nature as a socially viable form with a clear socially active function is nonetheless self evident; but this is an issue, which needs clear identification and analysis. In attempting to isolate the comic, it is firstly important to attempt to define comedy in relation to other forms of expression. It is clearly the case that people know what makes them laugh, this is not to say that this is necessarily comic, nor does it mean that it will be a shared laughter. In this sense it is possible to see laughter as the potential individual biological response to a given situation. The concept of humour and the comic can then be seen as residing in a much more internalised place, not directly within the text but within the psyche of the audience.<sup>1</sup> Whilst there is an element of social significance in shared laughter, this is still a biological action when faced with a broader, often group based response to a given comic situation. The comic, on the other hand, is that which does not have to result in laughter; a situation may be tragic and yet still initiate a response of laughter just as a comic situation may result in silence. This does not make the tragic event any the less tragic, nor does it make the comic event any the less comic, it just might not be 'funny ha-ha'.

However, tragedy and comedy have been seen as distinct forms of fictional expression. Although the distinctions between them often collapse under close scrutiny, they have been used for centuries and therefore require closer examination. It is, as always, Aristotle's definition of tragedy that has formed the basis for subsequent considerations: '[Tragedy] is an imitation not

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<sup>1</sup> This conception is drawing on issues of authorship addressed in earlier chapters. Once the notion of the author and intent has been removed then it becomes impossible to generalise about a text and say in what ways an audience will find it to be comic. This could potentially cause problems as the schlemiel has already been identified as a comic character. This is largely due to the irrationality of the character and the distinction that can be made between something which is comic and something which is funny to invoke laughter. The schlemiel has also been identified as comic with reference to the general public and critical recognition of the character as such.



only of a complete action, but also of incidents arousing pity and fear.<sup>2</sup> These emotions of pity and fear are always in response to qualities that the main protagonist may be perceived to have and which characterises them in terms of being 'admirable'. Schlemiels have admirable qualities for a particular audience at any given time; they are unaffected by the problems of society. They respond to socio-cultural pressures unlike anyone else and in a way which allows them to cope with these problems, but it has not been acceptable to view these as admirable in any sense; they are after all fools. The schlemiel transcends early expectations of what the outcome of a story will be. The tragedy inherent within the potentially successful character will always be seen as tragic, but the schlemiel is not expected to succeed from the outset. Schlemiels will always transcend their initially expected disastrous end, flouting rationalist expectations. They do not require our pity, nor do they deserve it, because, ultimately, despite the ending, they have had a hand in the process of their own deception. Aristotle's notion of seriousness is perhaps the most difficult to apply merely to the tragic.<sup>3</sup> Just because schlemiels are comic figures, it does not follow that they should be excluded from dealing with serious issues. This is perhaps where the notion of tragicomedy comes into play, to attempt not just to integrate humour with the tragic, but also to integrate ideas of humour with ideas of seriousness. Whilst a tragedy may lament the fall of a great individual, the common conception of comedy, which stems from this classical base, sees it as an opportunity to feel superior. This Superiority theory is something that needs to be examined in more detail in respect of the concept of the schlemiel and in relation to other theories of comedy. It seems impossible for individuals to see themselves as superior to a character whose faith and life remains solid, despite the oppression that exists for them. It is recognition with the character as the eternal 'other' that is the order of the contemporary. To isolate comedy to those events that merely have a happy ending is to place too much store in the binary poles of tragedy and comedy and

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<sup>2</sup> Aristotle - The Art of Poetry (translated by Ingram Bywater) (1920) - Oxford, Oxford University Press - 1920 -p.45

<sup>3</sup> See Ibid. - p.33-35 for more on Aristotle's definition of tragedy in relation to seriousness.

further renders the notion of tragicomedy as wholly ambiguous.<sup>4</sup> Rather than these concepts having a definite generic function it is important to note the problematic nature of using such concepts as if they were wholly accurate and definitive in themselves.

It is true to say that there has been a prioritisation of the form of tragedy in the Western academic world. This is largely due to the aforementioned adopted significance of Aristotle's Poetics (and his own development in turn from Plato) as the basis for Western critical thought. Aristotle's work does identify certain themes of comedy but these are subsumed under the major theme of the work, and this has had an effect on the rest of Western thought.<sup>5</sup> This is an issue that is developed by T.G.A. Nelson in relation to Eco's The Name of the Rose, where he identifies the plot as being about the need for some to suppress the 'lost' treatise on comedy because it identifies:

Laughter is desperately needed in a world dominated by the spirit of seriousness, by fanaticism, intolerance and fear ... These contrasting views can be found not only in the fictional world of The Name of the Rose but in the writings of philosophers, theologians, social reformers, and imaginative writers from classical times to the present.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Tragicomedy can be seen as the expression of an earlier period, in late modernity, and this is then represented in the works associated with modernism. This is an issue developed by John Orr - Tragicomedy and Contemporary Culture (1991) - London, Macmillan - 1991 - Chapter 1, 'Modernism and Tragicomedy', pp.1-9.

<sup>5</sup> For details of the references to the Poetics and the Nicomachean Ethics see John Morreall (editor) - The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor (1987) - New York, State University of New York Press - 1987 - Part 1, Chapter 2, 'Aristotle', pp.14-16.

<sup>6</sup> T.G.A. Nelson - Comedy (1990) - London, Penguin - 1990 - p.1. Whilst comedy has been considered secondary in importance to the tragic, it is still considered in relation to its classical origins. This can be seen in the distinction made between the 'Old Comedy' of Aristophanes and the 'New Comedy' of Menander. For a discussion of this see pp.19-21. For further consideration of the forms of classical dramatic comedy and the subsequent philosophical response to it see Chapter 2, 'Comedy and Related Forms', pp.19-40.

For details on the specific text in question see Umberto Eco - The Name of the Rose (translated by William Weaver) (1984), London, Book Club Associates - 1984 and Umberto Eco - Reflections on Name of the Rose (translated by William Weaver) (1984) - London, Secker and Warburg - 1985.

It can therefore be seen to exist, in these terms, for Jewish society throughout the period of modernity in response to the fanaticism and intolerance of Gentile societies, which in itself inevitably creates a sense of fear. However, this is not to suggest that Jewish society had one single type of humour and gentile society had another. To generalise is problematic and if the Postmodern is useful for anything it shows us the value of moving to petit narratives; the smaller and more specific these narratives are the better.<sup>7</sup> For the rest of the Western world in the contemporary <sup>period</sup>, this element of fear stems from the collapse of structures of order and stability, typifying the period of Postmodernity, as identified in chapters four and five. This is an issue developed by Peter Hertz-Ohms in his analysis of Serres and Deleuze's ideas on the comic:

Humor ... is a matter of sense rather than significance, a matter of 'superficial' effects, incorporeal events, or even phantasma. If comedy can degenerate into absurdity, humor finds its source in nonsense.<sup>8</sup>

This is not purely a position comedy in the contemporary <sup>period</sup>; humour has always been rooted in nonsense, or rather in opposition to the rational. Rather, the view that Hertz-Ohmes analyses could only be expressed in the contemporary period of Postmodernity, or perhaps it should be called the period of post-enlightenment.

A point can also be made about the importance placed on the classical philosophical perspective on comedy, which sees it in terms of 'laughing at' rather than 'laughing with'. This is the

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<sup>7</sup> The problem of generalising about types of Jewish humour is an issue developed in Stephen J. Whitfield, 'The Distinctiveness of American Jewish Humor', *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 16, Part 3, 1986, 245-260. See also Sara Blacher Cohen (editor) - *Jewish Wry: Essays on Jewish Humor* (1987) - Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press - 1987 - 'Introduction: The Varieties of Jewish Humor', pp.1-15.

The issue of Jewish humour existing in relation to the Jewish experience is argued to great effect in Israel Knox, 'The Traditional Roots of Jewish Humour', *Judaism*, Vol. 12, No. 3, Summer, 1963, 327-337. The idea of laughing in the face of adversity is an issue developed in Irving Howe, 'The Nature of Jewish Laughter', in Op.Cit. - Blacher Cohen - 1987 - pp.16-24.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Hertz-Ohmes, 'Serres and Deleuze: Hermes and Humor', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, Vol.14, No.2, 1987, 239-250, p.245

Superiority theory, which is anti-humanist and fits in with notions of religious, racial, and cultural superiority propounded throughout various societies. These are ideas that were based on earlier classical philosophical concepts.<sup>9</sup> It has already been noted that the schlemiel does not fit into a pattern of structured Narratological analysis, a form of enquiry that is based on Aristotle's aforementioned treatise. It should also be noted that in turn comedy itself is a form that follows the irrational, not the rational. Whilst in many cases it does show certain commonplace events, this is not to say that the comic should therefore be borne of rationality. In fact it is exactly the irrational that it both represents and utilises. This is a potential reason why it is so excluded from discourses, which are tied to enlightenment philosophy, and this carries on into the period of modernity, with its emphasis on the logical and the provable.

Whilst attempting to delve through the variety of forms would take a separate study in itself, it is important to note certain differences between broad kinds of comic expression. Morton Gurewitch identifies four areas, which in turn subsume others under its own broad headings:

Satire, which can range from demonic mockery to mild castigation; humor, which either copes with disaster or thrives on whimsy and joy; farce which is balmily innocuous at on extreme and madly outrageous at the other; and irony, which reveals a cluster of attitudes centring on the absurd.<sup>10</sup>

Whilst he is in a sense correct in differentiating between the different forms in which humour can appear, it must be noted that humour in itself is a blanket term and covers a variety of different

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<sup>9</sup> The issue of the location of theoretical conceptions of comedy with classical philosophy is something that is still a major part of theoretical considerations of comedy. This is also recognised by Op.Cit. Morreall - 1987 - introduction, pp.3-4. See also John Morreall, 'The Philosopher as Teacher: Humor and Philosophy', *Metaphilosophy*, Vol.15, Nos.3&4, July/October, 1984, 305-317. Where Morreall draws out the value of the comic in teaching philosophical as a valid position has often been commented on.

<sup>10</sup> Morton Gurewitch - *Comedy ; The Irrational Vision* (1975) - London, Cornell University Press - 1975- p.9. He develops his argument to identify that wit is the servant of 'all four masters'. Although this is true to varying degrees depending on the comic form, it would be expected that satire would be infinitely more witty than farce, although this is not to say that all farce is without wit. This further highlights the many problems of creating exclusive definitions.

areas of expression.<sup>11</sup> What is interesting to note is that the schlemiel embodies all the facets of the comic as identified. They certainly often behave in a farcical way, they cope with disaster, they can be used as a figure through which to channel satire, and whilst they are not ironic in their status as characters they can be used to emphasise the ironic nature of a given situation. For example in '*Gimpel the Fool*', it is ironic that the Rabbi should be involved in the conscious deception of Gimpel, whilst he himself is not an ironic figure in believing this advice. When the use and function of the character directly is one of irony, then they lose their foolishness and therefore their status as a schlemiel-keit character. Indeed, it is ironic in itself that the resultant form for characters that are deemed without question to be fools should be seen as one of cultural dominance in the late twentieth century and as being most applicable for this period. Schlemiel-keit characters can be seen as satirical in the way that they draw attention to the failings of any given society that they exist in. This can be seen in the nature of morality in '*Gimpel the Fool*' and *The Apartment* and an abstract system of American values with the example of the Vietnam War in *A Prayer for Owen Meany* and *Forrest Gump*. However, by its very nature, satire does not have to be the primary function of a text but it can be evident throughout any text. This is particularly true where a text will utilise and play with the inconsistencies in the societies that it uses as its setting.

Whilst features such as satire and irony can be clearly identified as elements of the comic it is important to identify what have been seen in the past as clearly different types of comedy: farce, tragi-comedy, black comedy and the absurd. This is dwelling on an area of definition that is in itself something of a false construct in that any given text may contain elements of all types of comedy. The reception of the text is also of vital importance when considering type. If an audience has a personal experience of, for example, being cuckolded (as in case of '*Gimpel the Fool*') then they are likely to not see it as a farce. However, the elements of comedy that are

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<sup>11</sup> The nature of definition is an issue developed in detail in Steve Neale & Frank Krutnik - *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (1990) - London, Routledge - 1995 - Section 1, Chapter 1, 'Definitions, genres, and forms', pp.10-25.

inherent within it are none-the-less evident, but it is likely to be seen in terms of black comedy. However, broad distinctions can be made between these types and effect on an audience can be identified when fixing it in terms of socio-cultural, temporal, and geographical location. Farce can be seen in terms of its cruelty, its crudity and at the foolishness that its characters clearly exhibit. Often the characters within farce may be luckless, but they do not have the positive conclusion to look forward to in all cases. They are not wise or holy fools, but abject and absolute fools. Therefore, whilst there may be elements of farce in schlemiel-keit texts, the use of Baxter's Apartment for clandestine meetings for example, this does not mean that schlemiel-keit texts can be automatically generically classified as farce. These elements of taboo can also be seen in the aforementioned black comedy. However, to truly deserve the title of black comedy a text would have to deal with these issues throughout its narrative structure.<sup>12</sup> The elements of Miss Kubelik's attempted suicide in The Apartment could be seen as black comedy, yet Baxter's dealings with Doctor Dreyfuss are much more in keeping with farce. However, it is the notion of the absurd, which is most applicable to schlemiel-keit texts, especially in its existential origins, focusing on the lack of purpose of structure in the world. However, it must be noted that the schlemiel is not an absurd figure; absurdity should not be equated with irrationality. Absurdity is for those who once accepted that logic and rationality were everything and for whom the realisation that this is not the case is too much to bear. The schlemiel, as embodying something much more metaphysical, is the character who can at once stand outside the problems caused by an absurdity of situation and can also transcend that absurd situation.<sup>13</sup> In this way they cannot be seen as truly tragicomic; whilst there are many events that can be seen as tragic in the schlemiels' life, it is in their reaction that they do not allow it to become wholly tragic. The result is always one of contentment and so the happy resolution is there, but the tragedy is not treated as such by the foolish character who is unable

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<sup>12</sup> For a consideration of black comedy in relation to Jewish Humour see Patricia Erens, 'You Could Die Laughing : Jewish Humor and Film', East-West Film Journal, Vol.2, Part 1, 1987, 50-62.

<sup>13</sup> An analysis of the issue of absurdity and the comic can be found in Op.Cit. - Neale and Krutnik - 1995 - Section 1, Chapter 4, 'Laughter, humor, and the comic', pp.62-82. In this they deal with an overview of the problematic relationship between laughter and comedy, and more specifically absurdity in the subsection, 'The ridiculous, the ludicrous, and the absurd', pp.64-71.

to recognise the impact of that event. This is, in itself, something of a generalisation and there are undoubtedly some tragic events within the narrative structure of schlemiel-keit texts (the number of deaths in Forrest Gump for example), but it is in the main protagonist's reaction that inference is taken. The character of the schlemiel may exist within tragicomic texts but they themselves are not tragicomic characters. It is their behaviour, which disallows its status as tragicomedy, whilst events happening to other characters might be deemed as such.

However many attempts are made at identifying exactly what it is that constitutes the comic, no definitive answer can ever be found. If it is taken that we are now in a period of time when all metanarratives are seen to be challenged, then to attempt to provide a totalising theory of comedy is just as redundant as any other kind of grand narrative. There are numerous theories of comedy, humour, and laughter, which run through theoretical consideration, from the 'Classical Age', the 'Age of Reason', and into the contemporary. What is interesting to note is that they attempt to rationalise what by its very nature cannot be rationalised.<sup>14</sup> The totalising theories that have been presented as the only perspective, Superiority, Incongruity and Relief theories, each have their own merits and yet cannot be seen as correct in their own right.<sup>15</sup> Rather, it is the case that these theories taken as a whole begin to point towards something of the function of comedy, humour, and (in a smaller way) laughter. The notion of Superiority theory is certainly one, which is anti-humanist, and, to summarise, focuses on humour as making someone the object and this is to subjugate him or her. This, in turn, perpetuates notions of superiority over a given group or society. This can perhaps be seen to most effect with Mexican

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<sup>14</sup> This is an issue addressed at length in Op.Cit. - Morreall - 1987. It is important to note that Morreall's later focus is on the relationship between laughter and comedy, and he professes to have a totalising theory which will explain all, Chapter 16, John Morreall, 'A New Theory of Laughter', pp.128-138. However, this is a contentious claim and the other articles contained in Section II, 'Contemporary Theories of Laughter and Humor', pp.127-186, demonstrate that challenges to this professed totalising theory do exist and go some way to collapsing its status as a totalising theory by their very existence.

<sup>15</sup> This is an issue noted by Carole Olsen - Circus of the Mind in Motion : Postmodernism and the Comic Vision (1990) - Detroit, Wayne State University Press - 1990 - Chapter 1, 'Microhumor: Explaining the Joke', pp.20-22. She develops these totalising theories of comedy in relation to the theories of Postmodernity.

and Hispanic groups being the object of derision for some American humour and any member of the Celtic fringe, particularly the Irish, being the recipient of mockery for certain types of English humour.<sup>16</sup> As has been identified, Eastern European Jewish communities located their fools in a culturally specific and internal form with the fictionalised version of the village of 'Chelem' (as the village of fools and as such a society in its own right) and this has become a notable and continuing feature of Jewish folklore.<sup>17</sup> The reasons why this should be the case can only remain speculative but can be related to the appearance of both female and black schlemiels as the only possible response to an all pervasive ideological discourse in the late twentieth century.<sup>18</sup> It is Gary Fine who comments of the function of humour that:

Humor more than most forms of psychic defence requires a relationship between a narrator and an audience to be effective for dealing with social and personal threats. This relationship should involve a set of shared understandings - the existence of a 'social world' or folk community - for it to produce a set of active humor traditions.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> This is a position supported by Joseph Brodtkin, Chapter 24, 'The Complicity of Humor: The Life and Death of Sambo', pp.250-263 - in *Ibid.* Whilst Brodtkin's analysis uses a different case study in terms of his cultural analysis, the theoretical consideration of the social function of comedy remains the same.

<sup>17</sup> See Chaim Bermant - What's the Joke?: A Study of Jewish Humour Through the Ages (1986) - London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson - 1986 - Chapter 7, 'The Wise Men of Chelem', pp.113-124 for a discussion of this issue. The analysis of jokes in terms of their specific linguistic qualities is beyond the scope and rationale of this study, but for further information on this subject see Susan Purdie - Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse (1993) - Hertfordshire, Harvester Wheatsheaf - 1993.

<sup>18</sup> Whilst it is beyond the boundaries of this work to delve too deeply into the complex specificity of the massive number of different forms of ethnic humour, this is a study which can be found in Christie Davis - Ethnic Humor Around the World (1990) - Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana State University Press - 1990. What is interesting about this work is the acknowledgement of the similarities between the various 'humours' of the world.

For a detailed analysis of comedy in early twentieth century American, particularly with reference to the cinema, see Henry Jenkins - What Made the Pistachio Nuts? (1992) - New York, Columbia University Press - 1992 - Chapter 2, 'Class, Comedy, and Cultural Change in Turn-of-the-Century America', pp.26-58. In this text Jenkins highlights other points at which difference between social groupings can be found, in the economic as well as cultural.

<sup>19</sup> Gary Alan Fines - 'Dying for a Laugh: Negotiating Risk and Creating Personas in the Humor of Mushroom Collectors', Western Folklore, Vol.47, Part 3, 1988, 177-194, p.177.



This indicates the importance of a sense of shared community in the construction of the comic character. Whilst societies remain small and isolated, in the period of modernity, then comic characters will only have to appeal to a small audience. As societies become more cosmopolitan in their mixing of race, not in the sense of homogeneity but purely in the sense of sharing the same geographical space, then the characters the mass media produces naturally have to appeal to a wide cross section of those societies. The schlemiel represents the internalised figure, Chelem merely represents a community of schlemiels rather than an isolated one or two characters. This suggests the notion that you can never have too many schlemiels, they are perhaps too useful to limit the number, and, as society broadens, this figure has to become more universal. This is demonstrated with the example of The 'burbs.<sup>20</sup>

As characters they seemingly give an audience the ability to feel superior, but not at the expense of anyone else. In fact, as has been shown, they are the characters that are ultimately looked up to as the ones with stability and form in their lives. This can be seen in the case of Shtetl culture with Gimpel and with the publication of the Hyman Kaplan stories in The New Yorker, intended for an audience who would be largely first or second generation immigrants and who would at least be able to recognise something of themselves and their cohort in the character. It is also true of America in a broader sense, with both the characters of Owen Meany and Forrest Gump. Meany is physically different and is easily recognisable as being the 'other' in all situations; Gump is also easily identifiable, but in terms of his emotional difference and, like Meany, can be seen as the object of derision within the texts as well as out of them. Where the notion of the Superiority theory begins to fall apart is with the notion that the

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<sup>20</sup> Evidence of this expansion can be seen in contemporary cultural artefacts, but in a broader cultural sense. The 'burbs, dir. Joe Dante, USA, 1988, shows a specific community of fools in similar terms to the village of Chelem. However, this contemporary community conforms precisely to the archetypes of WASP middle America and the metaphor applies to all the suburbs. The same can be said for the American television show, The Golden Girls, and the character of Rose who appears as a schlemiel-like character. She comes from St. Olaf, a village of fools in what is ostensibly a very traditional middle-American heartland. These characters serve the same function as Jewish schlemiels, but for a different and contemporary audience. It is also interesting to note that like Chelem, St. Olaf is a real place, although the fictionalised version bears no direct relationship to the real place. This is an interesting contrast to The 'burbs and its image as a universal American 'everytown'.

schlemiel embodies the idealised state of being for individuals existing in a state of Postmodern flux, uncertainty, and instability. The theories of comedy utilised in all three approaches ultimately stem from enlightenment to modernity base and therefore see elements of the comic as evidence of weakness and a loss of the rational and logical. Following the notion of modernity being fundamentally connected with the oppression of anyone who stood outside their discourse, it is a clear path to the notion that the comic is always at the expense of others. Modernity remains firmly anti-humanist in its assertions and actions.

Whilst the notion of superiority is not wholly absent from other theoretical perspectives on comedy, they are addressed in a different form. The perspective that relates most strongly to Superiority theory is Relief theory and is strongest in Freud's work on jokes and comedy.<sup>21</sup> It is important to reiterate Freud's place in critical thought as a proponent of the ideas of high modernity, and his perspective on humour is no different. It is also important to note that his early focus is on the form and function of jokes, and whilst this is not unrelated to a broader conception of humour, it requires different consideration to other comic narratives. His perspective rests fundamentally in the location of humour alongside the specific form of comic expression to be found in jokes, and this is essentially different from novels or films.<sup>22</sup> In essence, the notion of relief is connected primarily with the terror invoked when seeing someone else 'blundering' into a situation and, secondly, the release of that nervous tension when something 'comic' happens as a result.<sup>23</sup> This is certainly not a direct instance of 'laughing at'

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<sup>21</sup> Op.Cit. - Morreall - 1987, highlights the work of Herbert Spencer, Chapter 13, 'The Physiology of Laughter', pp.99-110 as a constituent part in the development of Relief theory. However, it is most fully considered by Freud, Chapter 14, 'Humor', pp.111-116. Whilst this citation is a later essay by Freud, a fuller consideration of Freud's perspective can be seen in Sigmund Freud - The Pelican Freud Library 6: Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious (translated by James Strachey) (1905) - London, Penguin - 1983.

<sup>22</sup> Whilst the joke or pun is different from longer narratives in terms of format and is intended for use in a different social setting, these puns still operate on a narrative structure and contain the basic elements of the humour that exists in other types of comic structure.

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed analysis of Freud on jokes see George McFadden - Discovering the Comic (1982) - New Jersey, Princeton University Press - 1983 - Chapter 6, 'Modern Comic Ethos Continued: Freud', pp.131-151. For an analysis and application of Freud's ideas see Samuel Juni, 'Humor Preference as a function of Preoedipal Fixation', Social Behaviour and Personality, 10, 1992, 63-64, George Kelling, 'An Empirical Investigation of Freud's Theory of Jokes', Psychoanalytic Review, 58, 1971, 473-485, and

in the same way that Superiority theory suggests, but there is still a strong element of needing someone to make the mistakes for society. Schlemiels embody this, but instead of their actions ultimately resulting in disaster, and therefore a release of tension via laughter, and through experience of the comic, they end in contentment. In this case, they do not act as the 'fall guy' for the rest of society, but they deny the release that Freud considered to be so important in terms of relief and as a release. This is a vital point to emphasise; if comedy is not essentially to produce laughter, it must be there to initiate another response. That response is surely one of contentment. Laughter is then created from unease at the recognition of an absence and a lack of something specific that the comic text is portraying, or indeed the potential of the events being portrayed to happen to an audience. The Relief theory, then, clearly identifies something about the nature of laughter and its social function, but this goes no further towards identifying what constitutes the comic in its totality.

The final, and perhaps most pertinent theoretical position, is that developed most fully by Soren Kierkegaard and Henri Bergson, Incongruity theory. This is a position that again does not lose elements of the aforementioned theoretical perspectives, although it is a form of thought, which ultimately stems from a metaphysical base, unlike the prior concern with rationalism. For Bergson, comedy exists as mockery, 'for it is a social gesture of mockery toward those who are not behaving in a flexible, context sensitive way.'<sup>24</sup> However, this in itself does not apply directly to the schlemiel in the same way that Bergson suggests. His notion of *an absence of feeling and mechanical inelasticity*, does not apply to a text when the character is someone who an audience can relate to.<sup>25</sup> This is not to suggest that an audience will automatically empathise

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Richard O'Neill, Roger Greenberg and Seymour Fisher, 'Humor and Anality', Humor International Journal of Humor Research, 5,3, 1992, 283-291.

<sup>24</sup> Op.Cit. - Morreall - 1987 - p.117.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. - Henri Bergson, Chapter 15, 'Laughter an Essay on the Meaning of the Comic', pp.118 & 121. Bergson is probably the most cited of all theorists on comedy, alongside Freud. Whilst this is a clear recognition of the impact and scope of his work it should be no indication of his approach being more or less accurate or applicable than any other. For the whole of Bergson's essay on comedy and laughter see Henri Bergson - Laughter (1902) in Wylie Sypher - Comedy (1956) - New York, Doubleday Anchor Books - 1956 - pp.61-192.

with a given character. However, the potential exists for this and the crossover between theories again demonstrates that there can be no unified theoretical position.

However, this does not fully strike at the heart of the true nature of the incongruous. It is, on one level, important to differentiate between response to different types of incongruity (the incongruous event need not always be comic) and between event and response to event. In relation to the former, it is useful to consider Morreall's three-fold definition of incongruity that includes a consideration of that which is not funny as well as that which is:

'We do not find all incongruity funny; many incongruities evoke negative emotions like fear or anger instead. [Considering] the ways we react to incongruity, with an eye to showing what is special about humor. I will use three main headings: Negative Emotion, Reality Assimilation (for our puzzlement at the strange), and Humorous Amusement.<sup>26</sup>

Negative Emotion occurs when events and/or responses to events work to produce a result which ends in harm or upset for the individual audience member or the individual character(s). This can be at the extremes of someone tripping and then losing a limb due to the nature of the fall, to the horror of the Holocaust itself. The events are incongruous, that tripping should have drastic results, or that post World War One economic depression in Weimar Germany should lead to near genocide. Despite this clear incongruity, none of these events are funny. Reality Assimilation (puzzlement at the strange) lies in the difficulty of comprehension at any given event and does not have to result in either emotional distress or in happiness or laughter.<sup>27</sup> The event of the Holocaust, once understood in its sheer scope, cannot fail to instil horror, but the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. - p.188. For a detailed consideration of this three-fold breakdown of incongruity see John Morreall, Chapter 20, 'Funny Ha-Ha, Funny Strange, and Other Reactions to Incongruity', pp.188-207. For a more detailed consideration of the process of incongruity see Neil Schaeffer - The Art of Laughter (1981) - New York, Columbia University Press - 1981 - Chapter Two, 'The Context of Comedy', pp.17-34.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. - p.192

incongruous events that led to it beginning can result in Reality Assimilation. The response is not to find it either tragic or funny, but rather a desire to understand the process involved as it breaks the boundaries of the rational.<sup>28</sup> Morreall links Reality Assimilation and Negative Emotion in 'the uneasiness or tension based on unfulfilled desires.'<sup>29</sup> These desires ultimately aim to find some notion of what constitutes the 'truth', although this in itself is a problematic notion; what it does motivate is the desire to find out and therefore change what can be seen to be strange. The response, which fits the character of the schlemiel most explicitly, is that of Humorous Amusement, in that we do not feel threatened by the incongruity and, therefore, are able to find it amusing.<sup>30</sup> However, this is something of a generalisation on Morreall's part and fails to take into account the potential similarity between the implausible incongruity in everyday life and the way it appears in textual examples. The desire to understand is still there and yet the possibility of ever knowing why such incongruous events have taken place remains. Of course, schlemiels <sup>are</sup> the ones who see nothing particularly strange about what everyone else sees as incongruous and therefore becomes the figure to aspire to. They stand outside the confusion that everyone else feels, as they have never had any claim to the rational or any need to find certainties in the logical. What the schlemiel could be accused of is quashing the desire to change anything, to rectify incongruity. They respond to this problematic relationship between events by largely ignoring them and this appears to be the only (ir)rational response to irrational situations. This being said, there is a positive side, schlemiels <sup>are</sup> the characters who remain unaffected by the incongruity of the events around them and their response to those events. The enjoyment involved is not, then, as Morreall suggests, of incongruity but rather in the recognition of and location of self within that incongruity.<sup>31</sup> Where he sees humour as tied to

<sup>28</sup> This issue of potentially tragic events meeting with a comic response from an audience is an issue raised and developed in Maurice Charney - Comedy High and Low: An Introduction to the Experience of Comedy (1978) - New York, Peter Lang - 1991, Chapter V, 'Comedy in Theory and in Practice', pp.143-178, pp.176-177.

<sup>29</sup> Op.Cit. - Morreall - 1987 - p.193

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. - p.195

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. - p.203

the rational side of the human character it is exactly the opposite. Humour and the notion of Humorous Amusement is connected with a final, post-enlightenment freedom, which comes with an acceptance of the irrational. This is to be found in an ability to recognise that the irrational has always existed and it is the schlemiel that has transcended rationalist and empiricist philosophical positions, and in turn transcends the concern for stability that comes with these positions. The potential for both Negative Emotion and Reality Assimilation is only to be had with recognition of this concern.

There are clear examples of this notion of incongruity in terms of Humorous Amusement for schlemiel-keit characters in both Jewish and non-Jewish texts in the same terms. However, it is possible to see incongruity in both events and in the response from characters to those events; with the schlemiel behaving uniquely as an individual, a specific character type and, most importantly, as an irrational character. In terms of incongruity of events there are some which are more explicit than others; for example, Gump running across America, Zelig changing his physical and emotional <sup>state</sup>, Meany killing his best friend's mother with a baseball and King Arthur reappearing in nineteen forties Britain. There are also other examples of incongruity of event which are much more implicit and, as such, are more akin to the everyday experiences of an audience. For example, Gimpel believing that the children are his, Friedman as the Black, Jewish, Texan private eye, Fidelman stealing his own painting and Baxter as the person he is being on the 'top floor' in an office next to Sheldrake's. When it comes to incongruity of response this is where the schlemiel is the master of the art. Incongruity by its very name suggests that this will be an irrational response. It does not have to be farcical, rather just not the expected and commonplace response that may be attributed to other character types. It is Arthur Koestler's notion of Bisociation that really strikes at the heart of incongruity in both action and response:

The sudden bisociation of a mental event with two habitually incompatible matrices results in an abrupt transfer of train of thought from one associative context to another. The emotive charge which the narrative carried cannot be

so transferred owing to its greater inertia and persistence; discarded by reason, the tension finds its outlet in laughter.<sup>32</sup>

Koestler's view is ultimately connected with the determination of what constitutes laughter and he follows the line of the Relief theorists. However, it is interesting to note that he sees this release as coming after an initial moment of incongruity. Despite the plausibility of the notion he presents, it is still something of an over-generalisation. An individual who has become paraplegic as a result of slipping on a banana skin is unlikely to laugh at the same event pictured on a screen or related in a novel. Laughter will probably not be there despite the undoubted existence of shared laughter at this image, but even this may be absent if it is known that someone has been done real harm by doing the same thing. However, the hilarity of someone tripping in the street is there for everyone, despite the number of times this has happened to any one individual. As with the behaviour of the textual schlemiel, the event and the consequences are not wholly damaging to this character as they ultimately find success. In fact, the reaction that is included will undoubtedly be incongruous and this will be the fault of the schlemiel, and yet they find contentment in this illogical action. The point remains that when the two matrices of thought collide, it is located firmly with character and response to events than purely to the events themselves. For example, Meany's conversion of his friend to the Christian faith, despite his killing his mother, Gump's sudden and unexplained stopping of his run across America, despite the mass media coverage or Baxter leaving his job after reaching the position and recognition he has dreamed of. The notion of event, in Morreall's terms, is then connected with the moral and ethical perspective of the individual audience member in question. This, in turn, can be located in temporal, cultural, social, and economic terms. It is, therefore, at the level of incongruity of response to event that the schlemiel can be identified. The social fabric of the

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<sup>32</sup> Arthur Koestler - The Act of Creation (1984) - London, Arkana/Penguin - 1964 -p.59. Koestler's work is concerned with what he calls bisociative thought, or the act of making a 'mental jump' to a higher plane of recognition and experience. Koestler effectively moves to a metaphysical position in his philosophy but still attempts to tie it to a psychological empiricism, which by its very nature is problematic. For more detail of his argument on laughter (not essentially comedy) see Book One, Part One, 'The Jester', pp.27-100 and also Arthur Koestler - Bricks to Babel (1980) - London, Hutchinson - 1980 - Book Two, Part One, Chapter 26, 'Joking Apart', pp.321-343.

contemporary can and has been identified in relation to the incongruity of events; the Postmodern interest in the ideas of Chaos theory and Fuzzylogic would seem to bear this out. However, to limit schlemiels to event would be to suggest that everyone is a schlemiel, a blatantly untenable premise. When limited to incongruity of response the schlemiel does not have to be limited to events which are themselves incongruous; to have this with both event and response heightens the nature of the comic effect overall, especially when the event is non-threatening, non-contentious and particularly strange, and when the response ultimately results in happiness for the character in question. For example, it would be difficult to find the opening scenes of Forrest Gump's physical disability humorous, but it is acceptable to see his running across America as humorous. However, it is his decision to stop that is the truly comic element, which adds closure in a suitably ridiculous and irrational conclusion, and he has transcended these earlier physical disabilities. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this range of analysis to detail the whole of the philosophical implications of the notion of the incongruous, it is worth noting Derrida's notion of Aporia in relation to the connection between the irrational and the place of Poststructural philosophical thought. Whilst Derrida's focus is primarily on linguistics and the instability of language through the concept of differance, he follows up the implications for philosophical thought. The concept of the Aporia is the problem of logic in any given theoretical or philosophical text, where it no longer follows the rules of logic that the text itself has set up. Derrida highlights that the problem with Western philosophical thought is that its claims to truth have always been nothing more than a process of covering the fact that absolute meaning and absolute truth will always remain elusive notions.<sup>33</sup> There is an immediate connection here with the notion of incongruity and comedy, the essence of the comic being to make explicit these Aporias, these gaps in the logic. Therefore, it destroys any pretence to the rational and unified. In this sense, comic texts are, by their very nature, playful in the way they thrive on inconsistencies; it is part of their very fabric. This then, is what makes them satirical as

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<sup>33</sup> Details of these concepts can be located throughout most of Derrida's work, but for a detailed development and analysis of these notions see Jacques Derrida - Writing and Difference (translated by Alan Bass) (1978) - London, Routledge and Keegan Paul - 1978.



a matter of course. What Derrida is uncovering, by moving to a metaphysical position in his own work, is that rationality has been a cover, but a cover that has been believed until the advent of Postmodernity. It is apparent then, why comedy and the schlemiel as a character that represents the most irrational characteristics of any character would be excluded from the discourse of modernity. It is also clear how and why a character such as the schlemiel could exist and thrive within Jewish communities which were themselves more akin to the metaphysical and excluded from the culturally dominant society and ideology in the same period.

From this perspective, of all theories being right and in some way all theories being incomplete, it would seem that there is little point in continuing to analyse theoretically. However, whilst theoreticians, literary and film critics and also philosophers battle it out, there is an important consideration to be made concerning the social impact of comedy. In addition to this, it is crucial to consider what type of character the schlemiel embodies in relation to the dichotomy between tragedy and comedy and the aforementioned variety of subsections that come under the broad heading of comedy. It is only through a final consideration of this that it will become clear both what type of hero the schlemiel is and why it is the most appropriate character for contemporary expression.

Whilst many theorists and philosophers have attempted to identify the social nature of comedy, it is Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of Carnival that is the most applicable in terms of both its historical and contemporary cultural implications.<sup>34</sup> Bakhtin moves back to a pre-enlightenment

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<sup>34</sup> The theoretical concept of Carnival is developed in most detail in Mikhail Bakhtin - *Rabelais and His World* (translated by Helene Iswolsky) (1939) - Bloomington, Indiana University Press - 1984. This is a concept also raised in Mikhail Bakhtin - *The Problem of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* (translated by Caryl Emerson) (1984) - Manchester, Manchester University Press - 1984, although to a much lesser degree. It is important to differentiate between the theoretical notion of Carnival (capitalised) and the medieval carnival (non-capitalised) as a social event. For further detail on the concept of Carnival see Simon Dentith - *Bakhtinian Thought* (1995) - London, Routledge - 1995 - Part I, Chapter 3, 'Bakhtin's carnival', pp.65-87, Robert Stam - *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film* (1989) - Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press - 1989 - Chapter 3, 'Film, Literature and the Carnavalesque', pp.85-121, and Lynn Pearce - *Reading Dialogics* (1994) - London, Edward Arnold - 1994 - Part One, Chapter 1, 'Theoretical Background', pp.54-60.

Europe in his consideration of the carnival, and what must be noted are the parallels that can be made between the middle ages and the contemporary.<sup>35</sup> The connection, as identified in chapters four and five, is in the collapsing of reason in favour of the broad metaphysics of the contemporary and the strictly religious metaphysics of this earlier age. As Nelson identifies of the Middle Ages:

Harmony and reconciliation rather than wit or hilarity were considered the essence of comedy: comedies were tales which began with obstacles standing in the way of happiness but went on to show these obstacles being overcome.<sup>36</sup>

These obstacles were often in the form of structures of power and these were attacks (albeit in a limited way) through the physical presence of a carnival. Although structures of power may have shifted from the physically overt, repressive to the ideologically covert and repressive they are still both oppressive in their effect. Carnival is still needed, although now it takes on board new mediums and incorporates them into its expression, of mixing the sacred and the profane to become subversive.<sup>37</sup> With this in mind, perhaps contemporary satire is seemingly the most obvious point of connection to this earlier form of medieval carnival. Although it is the broader concept of parody which is the most applicable term due to its scope:

A boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture. In spirit

For a broader conception of the social impact of this notion see Op.Cit. - Charney - 1991 Chapter IV, subsection 6, 'Festive comedy vanquishes all obstructions and asserts a hedonistic, holiday, carnival spirit.'

<sup>35</sup> It is interesting to note the argument of John Ellis - *Visible Fictions* (1982) - London, Routledge - 1992 - Chapter 2, 'Cinema as a Cultural Event', pp.23-37. The most important facet of this is the event that he sees cinema as having the potential to become like a contemporary version of the medieval carnival.

<sup>36</sup> Op.Cit. - Nelson - 1990 - p.1

<sup>37</sup> This is an issue noted and examined in Frank Krutnik, 'The Clown-Prints of Comedy', *Screen*, Vol.25, Nos.4-5 (Double Issue), July-October, 1984, 50-59 and also in Op.Cit. - Jenkins - 1992.

of their variety, folk festivals of the carnival type, the comic rites and cults, the clowns and fools, giants, dwarfs, and jugglers, the vast and manifold literature of parody - all these forms have one style in common: they belong to one culture of folk carnival humor.<sup>38</sup>

With this, Bakhtin raises the importance of the function of, what appears to be, a homogenous folk culture. However, in writing about Rabelais, he is focusing on what is ostensibly a Christianic folk culture and Jewish communities were excluded from this, denying uniformity in this sense. Links can be made to disparate cultural groupings with the notion of parody and the way that this highlights certain character types, or archetypes of comedy, which transcend any socio-cultural base. This can be firmly located with the notion of parody as a form of expression; indeed, the presence of parody clearly outstrips any other notions of what constitutes comedy. Absurdity as a form of expression is something that can be connected with this parody. The schlemiel, or the clowns and fools that Bakhtin identifies, are connected with making strange or absurd the seemingly rational elements of existence. As identified above, it is comedy that, by its very nature, has to uncover the cracks in any discourse; rather than creating any incongruous events on which to base the humour, it merely utilises what is already there. This carnival then takes on a serious edge, which was not perceived to be there, by uncovering serious problems in the structures of societies. Carnival still remains, however, firmly within a framework of popular culture; the high status of Aristotle's Poetics and the low place subsequently given to comedy makes it a form of subversive expression. By highlighting these inconsistencies in society, the schlemiel becomes part of this uncovering, but as a character, they are not aware of what they are involved in:

Carnival must not be confused with mere holiday play ... Carnival is a gap in the fabric of society. And since the dominant ideology seeks to author the

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<sup>38</sup>

Op.Cit. - Bakhtin - 1984 - p.4

social order as a unified text, fixed, complete, and forever, carnival is a threat.<sup>39</sup>

Clark and Holquist's conception of the function of Carnival as a threat is something that is vital to consider, particularly as it was a form of expression that was allowed in medieval times and right through the period of modernity. However, the function of the carnival in these times was different to the way it can be seen to function in contemporary times. This change comes with the shift from parody to pastiche and the move between carnival as an annual event and as a regular and culturally dominant form of expression. Many theorists of the Postmodern, most notably Jameson, have identified a shift from parody to pastiche, with the latter as a form of blank parody, a copying without emotion. In many ways this could be said to be true, particularly in the aesthetics of contemporary culture, but this is not to say that the content of all contemporary texts are devoid of any parodic elements. Rather, the case is that it is the problem of changing anything that is of most concern; the notion is that the ideological structures of capitalism have become so strong that it is impossible to break free. This is obviously a view that is deeply nihilistic in its conception, but it is one that is in keeping with the function of comedy as a release from this form of oppression. By their very foolishness, the carnival that schlemiels portray is of breaking with this hegemonic dominance, merely due to their misinterpretation of what those dominant structure should be and what power these structures should exert.

The notion of the shift between carnival as an isolated event in the pre-Postmodern and of dominance in the contemporary means that it can be seen almost as a safety valve for the population. Where it existed it clearly shows a dominant group exerting ideological control over the rest of the population as carnivalistic parody can be linked to the promise of a respite from this dominance:

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<sup>39</sup> Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist - Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) - Massachusetts, Harvard University Press - 1984 - pp.300-301.

The carnivalesque cosmogony has persisted in the form of a anti-theological (but not anti-mystical) and deeply popular movement. It remains present as an often misunderstood and persecuted substratum of official Western culture throughout its history.<sup>40</sup>

Kristeva's conception of Carnival in terms of a substratum of official culture is vital; it is those in control who allow this carnival to exist, yet by allowing it to exist they minimise the amount of damage it can do. However, Carnival can be seen to have a subversive effect when it moves beyond the irregular and into cultural dominance, although many would see it as still fulfilling the function of a release and having no power beyond that. The schlemiel acts as a comforter, as negotiating a way through the problems of contemporary<sup>life</sup>, but doing it for everyone else. But the fool, developing from a historical conception of Carnival, is the character who can answer back to the 'King' or 'Priest' with no fear of retribution; they are fools and as such they are not challenged in their assertions. The potential damage to structures of authority, then, lies in the acceptance of people to accept the word of the fool; when they appear, through adopting an illogical position, to be speaking 'the truth', then they become subversive. More than that, they are doubly subversive because they speak the truth about the problems of society and then manage to negotiate their way through those problems. It is, however, a limited damage that is done on an immediate social level. What is more important is the notion raised by Kristeva that the notion of Carnival, and the role of the schlemiel in this event, is not anti-mystical, but rather anti-theological. This highlights the more important subversive qualities that the schlemiel embodies; they represent the intangible, the mystical, and ultimately the metaphysical in their actions. As Carole Olsen notes:

That is, the impetus of Postmodern humor is to disarm pomposity and power.  
the Postmodern creator becomes aesthetic and metaphysical terrorist, a

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<sup>40</sup> Julia Kristeva - Part One, Chapter 2, 'Word, Dialogue and Novel' (1969), pp.34-61 - in The Kristeva Reader (edited by Toril Moi, translated by Sean Hand, et.al.) (1986) - Oxford, Blackwell - 1995 - p.49

freeplayer in a universe of intertextuality where no one text has any more or less authority than any other. <sup>41</sup>

This notion of Postmodern humour seems to be nothing more than a response to Postmodernity as signifying an epistemological break with the past. This then draws those once excluded discourses to the forefront, comedy being one and metaphysics being another. This is true of a character such as Gimpel, who ultimately knows and accepts his foolishness but recognises how to have a happy life, despite being destitute. It is true of Meany, who accepts the fact that he will be viewed as a fool, because he is the only figure out of all those both religious and nationalistic characters in the novel that knows his destiny. This is despite the fact that his belief shifts denominations and ultimately he concludes with his own conception of a faith that is rooted firmly in mysticism, not ecclesiasticism. Baxter's final action is to leave the company he has devoted his working life to and, as such, he moves to reject those power structures within business that exist for all. Gump, in turn, rejects any foundational 'truths' and given information and bases his conception of how to live his life on received information, which he interprets, despite the fact that he knows he is not 'a smart man'. His actions, whether saving his comrades in Vietnam, running across America or accepting Jenny back despite the emotional turmoil she has caused him, is tied to an intangible aspect of his character, not rooted in any recognisable system of morality or logic.

The question remains as to how far the actions of the schlemiel can be subversive in the contemporary, through their links to a metaphysical origin. It is this contemporary form of metaphysics that is now the dominant, however a subversive quality to the schlemiel can still be identified in similar terms to their earlier incarnations. Where the schlemiel and schlemiel-keit characters of the Middle Ages and modernity were opposing those oppressive forces in society, both ecclesiastical and political, the schlemiels of the contemporary <sup>period</sup> are challenging the complete absence of order and structure. The change comes in society, not in the nature of the character,

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<sup>41</sup> Op.Cit. - Olsen - 1990 - p.18

as their faith remains stable and remains in the intangible. Their spread in the contemporary <sup>period</sup> can be tied to a number of reasons, a development of the means of mass production of texts and the acceptance of different cultures being perhaps two of the most important. However, these technological and social factors would have no bearing on the character if it were not the willingness of an audience to accept them, to read about or view them and for them to have a suitable and important social function in turn. As textual characters they give hope. By all the conventions of society, they should be losers, but they win in the end, albeit in an unconventional form; or at least they win in an unconventional way by all the definitions given by the dominant in society. As a by product of their actions and through their comedy, they move to uncover the cracks in the thinking that dominates society, whether it be finding problems with rationalism, or disavowing the hopelessness and nihilism of Postmodernity. In these terms, they become heroic characters, but to suggest that they are such challenges conventional conceptions of what constitutes heroic action. If they are indeed deemed to be heroes, particularly in their dominance in contemporary society, then a new conception of what constitutes 'schlemiel heroics' needs to be considered.

Throughout this analysis, it has been the case that the schlemiel has been almost considered as a hero, particularly for contemporary society. Defining what constitutes a hero is not a simple process and as with all definitions it proves to be limiting and problematic to attempt to be too dogmatic. In fact it is important to raise Harry Levin's notion that:

'... it is comedy which typifies, where it is tragedy which individualizes; where tragedy observes the nice distinctions between man and man, comedy stresses those broad resemblances which make it so difficult to tell people apart. <sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Harry Levin - Refractions : Essays in Comparative Literature (1966) - New York, Oxford University Press - 1966 - Chapter 7, 'Two Comedies of Errors', p.128-150 - p.130.

This is important in the way that it highlights the problems of differentiating between hero and anti-hero, but most importantly between character types of different socio-cultural and geographical origin. As Levin notes, it is about the shared generalities of life, the shared experience that a general audience will be able to relate to. This is an idea confirmed by Carla Johnson, who notes that, 'the point is that Jewish experience has come to mirror the frustrations of mainstream America in the 1990s ... Jews have understood the necessity for and yet difficulty of movement since the diaspora.'<sup>43</sup> If it is an audience who ultimately make the judgement about what constitutes moral actions, then the same follows for the definition of heroic actions. If they are considered to be an anti-hero then it implies that they completely lack any sense of morality or nobility. In the period of pre-enlightenment and throughout the period of modernity, this could be considered to be the case; the schlemiel then flouts the conventions of society in their own right and also by comparison with the 'great heroes' of tragedy. However, this is not to say that they are not heroes, they do not even fit the concept of the anti-hero, as (through adopting the notion of Carnival) they are not inadequate or even ordinary. They are more than ordinary; their apparent inadequacy is challenged by the ultimately positive results of their actions. They are ordinary and inadequate only by the definition of those who see themselves as 'better' than these characters. Throughout any textual representation of the schlemiel, it is always those who see themselves as better who define the character in terms of their own limited knowledge. It is important to return to Olsen's argument, which states that:

The comic protagonist is always less concerned with mastering his environment than with making sure his environment doesn't master him. The comic vision loves to pull the rug out from under wishful thinking, egocentricism, affected dignity, silly pedantry, absurd pride, wilfulness, and other human follies.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Carla Johnson, 'The Schlemiel and the Schlunazi in *Seinfeld*', Journal of Popular Film and Television, Vol.22, Part. 3, 1994 116-124, p.121. This is an issue also raised in Mark Shecker, 'Dear Mr. Einstein : Jewish Comedy and the Contradictions of Culture', in Op.Cit. - Blacher Cohen - 1987 - pp.141-157

<sup>44</sup> Op.Cit. - Olsen - 1990 - pp.23-24.



Although Olsen's conclusion is in itself somewhat negative, it remains evident that just because comic protagonists are viewed as being 'numskulls' it does not follow that they should be any more or less noble than anyone else. Gump is rejected as an imbecile by those people he meets whilst sat on the park bench, where in fact it is they in their ignorance of his true standing who are later made to look foolish.<sup>45</sup> Schlemiels <sup>are</sup> then, comic heroes; comic in the sense of celebrating the flaws in their characters and using those flaws to good effect rather than trying to shroud their own inadequacies. Where the schlemiel (as comic hero) uncovers the flaws in the philosophical and ideological structures in society and collapses them, then the character can become an unchallenged hero. They are no longer bound by definitions of worth dictated by a presupposed system of belief with its claims to truth. They become clear heroes by any definition, they remain content, and this contentment is tied to a faith, which is denied by all those around them. What is left is for the audience member in question to decide is whether schlemiels are heroic in their endeavours, which lead them to the truth. This is clearly an impossible position but, ultimately, a much better one; the freedom the schlemiel has is then transposed on the rest of society. This is ultimately the true value and function of the schlemiel in contemporary society. Who cares what their definition is or whether they are heroic in a classical sense or not? These types of definitions are largely intangible anyway. The most important thing is that they are recognised as schlemiels and that people enjoy and find strength in their irrational and ultimately subversive actions - it is this that makes them heroic.

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<sup>45</sup> It is interesting to note that Op.Cit. - Charney - 1987, has no problem in determining comic characters as heroes alongside tragic heroes with no discernible prioritisation of one type over another. Charney breaks down the function of the comic hero into seven functions, and whilst it would serve no useful purpose to detail these functions it is important to note that even a consideration such as this is fraught with problems. For details of this see Chapter V, 'Comedy in Theory and in Practice : Seven Aspects of the Comic Hero', pp.143-178.

The Schlemiel and Anomie: The Fool in Society

**Conclusion:**

**'Let My People Go!' - A less rational conclusion**

To paraphrase one of Woody Allen's stand-up routines: I would like to leave you with a positive message, but I don't have one - will you take two negatives instead? This really sums up sections one and two of the study. Section one provides a socio-historical context regarding the nature of the schlemiel, and raises questions about the nature of Yiddish. In terms of proving something regarding the specific traits and attributes of the character nothing more than conjecture can be offered. This is no damning indictment of the methodology or the analysis, but what it does demonstrate is that the character cannot be categorised in Structuralist terms. The character has been subject to change throughout time. When the analysis moves to contemporary incarnations then it is a character that exists in only one particular episteme and to try to identify the future of the character would only be conjecture. What is presented is how the character functioned for Jewish artists within an Eastern European tradition, most specifically as they move to America with all the associated problems created by assimilation. When examining a broader social function of the character for a range of socio-economic groups and sub-groups in the contemporary then it can be measured against the experience of the Eastern European Jewish groups who developed the character. Yiddish does have a function in naming the character but it does not follow that the character is purely a Jewish creation. It is the very fact that the character is most dominant in Jewish folklore that means that a specific term has arisen, but it is the very existence of the term in the Yiddish language that means an audience may assume a sole location within a Jewish tradition.

Section two confirms the suggestion that at the minutest level of the text there is nothing specific which locates the character within a Jewish paradigm. This comes from the perspective of the audience who use received information to categorise. The reliability of the theory is thrown into question by the nature of the reception that an individual audience member or an individual reader may impose. Whilst narration informs at the diegetic level within literature and narration and the visual image (the showing) inform within cinema, it is the socio-cultural constitution of the audience that determine both what type of character the schlemiel is and whether that character is

Jewish or not. The behavioural characteristics that have been identified throughout are the very characteristics that are ascribed mainly by the audience. To suggest that the schlemiel embodies faith as a recurrent character trait is true, but to suggest that anyone who maintains a strong faith is a schlemiel would be incorrect. It is what the character does with that faith that is of prime importance. An example of this being Gimpel's happiness at the end of the tale, as bleak as it may seem. If we view him as an idiot who has lost everything, then he cannot be a schlemiel, he needs to achieve – in the end he finds contentment. If the audience do not recognise that success in any way then he is a pure failure and a gullible idiot. The determining factor is then out of the control of the ('dead') creator/s of the text and the critics and theorists alike. This moves any analysis into the realm of the ideological, not the ideological position of the text (which still remains of concern) but the ideological position of the society who may receive these texts and respond to them.

Section two provides conclusions about narrative theory. In essence that it is concerned with the imposition of reductive structures in order to impose order rather than uncovering any deeply rooted structures that may be there. There are broad statements that emerge from a Narratological approach alongside a useful vocabulary of critical terms. As an approach it states the obvious, but it is the obvious that needed to be said, otherwise things may be taken for granted with no analysis. The notion of characterisation being the primary level of engagement is supported by Toolan's assertions about setting acting like character. This is also supported by the fact that a great deal of information about character is derived through intradiegetic narration, both within literature and cinema. This is true of characters revealing something about themselves from what they say and also from other characters discussing someone who may be absent. In these terms, Narratology highlights some of the structures and methods by which information is communicated to an audience, but this is the end of its capabilities. The treatment of character is one of words on a page or images on celluloid and so it falls to alternative approaches to view characters in an ontological sense.

This perspective on character/audience relationships is as hard to 'prove' as any other perspective, but the notions presented at the end of section two bridge the gap between one set of theories, tied to logic and rationality and another tied to metaphysics. The essence of the argument is that empathy, like Bergson's laughter, does not exist outside of the realm of the human. Heidegger's argument takes that one stage further, that the human animal will only look at things in relation to what it represents and what it can do for itself. In these terms, the purpose of character and indeed of literature and cinema in general is not one of abstract 'art' but of some form of socio-cultural function for the individual audience member. Intentions on the part of an 'author/s' is still absent from the equation; an audience will make of the text what they will, not just in terms of interpretation but also in terms of use. The symbolic value that Baudrillard develops about applies to the text in these terms, but has always been a function of the text; it is not purely a symptom of the contemporary. Chapters four and five, in examining the notion of the Postmodern, do little to criticise this idea, but do isolate elements of a new episteme which potentially identify reasons as to the resurgence of the character and why the schlemiel finds a new importance in cross cultural terms. This is one of response to new ideological pressures rather than merely physical ones. Where Jameson and Grossberg identify the presence of late capitalism they also posit the impossibility of positive reaction to that all dominant force. The oppression that Jewish society has always faced, both physical and ideological, has happened for the rest of society in a different form but with similar effects. Many of the uncertainties that exist in a philosophical sense are almost self-imposed; they are the logical conclusion of late twentieth century philosophy. Pressures that are imposed in economic terms are not, and reaction against these restraints is as equally impossible. The danger in critical terms is to see an absence of the schlemiel and schlemiel-keit characters from all but Jewish texts through the period of modernity. The absence remains on a critical and academic level, not for the masses that are still engaged in what is (often cynically) termed popular culture. The matter of analysis of texts from this period dictates that only those pre-determined as 'important' and 'serious' would be considered, (thus ignoring the majority of Yiddish works).

The schlemiel remains a comic character and chapter six clearly identifies that the comic does not have to equate to funny nor does it have to equal frivolous. In many ways, serious issues can be identified in the comic in a way that they cannot be identified through the tragic. It is a reverence for Aristotle that has led to an absence from critical debate of the kind of texts that might feature this character. The schlemiel identifies as much about the theoretical approach as the theoretical approach is meant to consider the character of the schlemiel. It is the comic that can be identified as perhaps the most pertinent mode for contemporary expression purely in the way that it uncovers the inconsistencies in any discourse or mode of expression. It is schlemiels that typify this as they wade through contemporary life without any recognition that their (il)logical systems are so different from anyone else's. The function of the schlemiel is then not to just identify aporias in life but rather to show everyone else how to negotiate them. However, the character trait that makes this ultimately impossible is the trait that blurs the distinction between the wise fool and the holy fool. The schlemiel is the character who can hear the voice of God, whether it is Owen Meany knowing his own destiny or Alan Felix seeing Humphrey Bogart. Their metaphysical belief is not one of religion but can be seen in similar terms. The points where contemporary schlemiels find faith points to some of the concerns of modern life; for Allen it is often cinema itself, for Zemeckis it is in the family and in America as an ideal, for Malamud it is survival as a perpetual outsider.

To summarise a much broader argument, what conclusions could ever be drawn from a premise that suggests that there can be no conclusions, particularly about what actually constitutes a schlemiel? There have been certain traits and attributes identified; that the schlemiel may be interpreted as a hero, but also may not. The schlemiel is a character who has ultimate faith when standard logical structures dictate that <sup>he or she</sup> should not - but someone who has faith does not therefore have to be a schlemiel. Schlemiels <sup>have</sup> ultimate conviction in their actions, but people believe in what they do all the time without being schlemiels. The schlemiel is then a culmination of traits and attributes in a given context and, more importantly, with a given interpretation. The danger with this study was always that an absolute definition could have been

imposed, and presented as conclusive. That would have been clearly one interpretation determined by a socio-cultural context in itself. That is perhaps what makes the schlemiel so appealing, that they are ambiguous; they fit different temporal, cultural, and geographical locations. This is a fact of character generally and whilst the Narratologists detailed in section two may find discomfort in them being the least amenable facet to systematic analysis, this allows the analysis of their function to be identified in section three. To speculate for a moment, the schlemiel will always feature in texts of whatever sort may emerge, not as a stock character or even as definable character. Schlemiels exist where society imposes a barrier to progression, and in not 'beating the system' they do not appear as fools but as those who can plough their own furrow safe in their faith. Their wise qualities lie firmly in their ability to ignore the aspects of life that the rest of us see as being so important and by raising the mundane to a level of importance never before seen. Perhaps the world would be a happier place if the contentment they find was our goal.

The Schlemiel and Anomie - The Fool in Society

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<b>Films</b>
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*Only the films discussed in the body of the thesis are referenced here. To attempt to detail the huge range of films which are relevance or have been influential to this study would be an impossible task. For more detail on Jewish cinema specifically see Lester D. Friedman - The Jewish Image in American Film (1987) - New Jersey, Citadel Press - 1987.*

Alice, dir: Woody Allen, USA, 1987

Annie Hall, dir: Woody Allen, USA, 1977

The Apartment, dir: Billy Wilder, USA, 1960

Au Revoir Les Enfants, dir: Louis Malle, France, 1987

Brighton Beach Memoirs, dir: Gene Saks, USA, 1986

The 'burbs, dir: Joe Dante, USA, 1988

Crimes and Misdemeanours, dir: Woody Allen, USA, 1988

Forrest Gump, dir: Robert Zemeckis, USA, 1994

Homicide, dir: David Mamet, USA, 1991

New York Stories, dirs: Martin Scorsese, Francis Coppola, Woody Allen, USA, 1989

Manhattan Murder Mystery, dir: Woody Allen, USA, 1993

Stardust Memories, dir: Woody Allen, USA, 1980

A Stranger Amongst Us, dir: Sidney Lumet, USA, 1994

Shadows and Fog, dir: Woody Allen, USA, 1993

Take the Money and Run, dir: Woody Allen, USA, 1969

Truth About Cats and Dogs, dir: Michael Lehmann, USA, 1996

Zelig, dir: Woody Allen, USA, 1993

**Audio-Material**

Woody Allen - Woody Allen : The Nightclub Years, EMI, 1989