

Title - Truly Jewish: Diasporic Identity and “Chosen Glory” in “Monte Sant’Angelo”

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Abstract: In her memoir *Unorthodox*, Deborah Feldman observes, “A Jew can never be a goy... even if they try to become one. They may dress like one, speak like one, live like one, but Jewishness is something that can never be erased” (96). Her intriguing observation parallels the major themes of Arthur Miller’s short story “Monte Sant’Angelo,” which explores Jewish identity. The modern psychological constructs of diasporic identity, “chosen glory,” and “chosen trauma,” developed after the short story was written, help to interpret the psychological drama unfolding in the little village of Monte Sant’Angelo. Bernstein, a diasporic Ashkenazi Jew, struggles with his Jewish-American heritage. His internal conflict burgeons as he watches his Italian friend Appello enthusiastically explore his ancestral village. He acutely senses his lack of a homeland, a people, and a heritage. Rather than identify with his Jewish heritage, which he perceives to be insufficient, he tries to embrace his American heritage but fails. Through his experiences with his friend Appello and the assimilated Italian Jew Mauro di Benedetto, Bernstein realizes that he will find identity security not by renouncing his Jewishness, but by embracing a diasporic identity and “chosen glory” along with his American identity. Bernstein’s visceral struggle with shame ends in triumphant security as he at last embraces his diasporic identity and “chosen glory.” Feldman aptly summarizes this newfound identity in describing her own reconciliation with her heritage: “For a while, I thought I could un-Jew myself. Then I

realized that being Jewish is not the ritual or the action. It is one's history. I am proud of being Jewish, because I think that's where my indomitable spirit comes from, passed down from ancestors who burned in the fires of persecution because of their blood, their faith. I am Jewish; I am invincible" (250). By reconciling with his heritage, Bernstein has also become invincible.