

# A. M. KLEIN

## *The Impulse To Define*

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THE POETRY OF A. M. KLEIN seems to lend itself to the critical tendency to categorize, to separate and to label strains of thought and areas of thematic concentration. Critics have consistently divided his poetic canon into three major categories: the "Radical" poems, which exemplify Klein's Marxist leanings in the 1930's; the "Jewish" group (probably written in the late 1920's and in the 1930's), which includes two volumes of poems selected by the poet, *Hath Not a Jew* (1940) and *Poems* (1944), and the verse satire of the Nazi regime, *The Hitleriad* (1944); and the "Canadian" group, which is best represented in *The Rocking Chair and Other Poems* (1948), a volume composed of poems written in the middle and late 1940's and selected for volume publication. Perhaps the sole ground for dispute in the critical pigeon-holing of his work is *The Second Scroll*, Klein's novel-travelogue published in 1951. Some critics, placing their emphasis on the historical context of the novel, declare that it is Zionist in orientation; others claim that the Zionist theme is universalized, and that the state of Israel becomes "a symbolic expression of every man's imagined home."<sup>1</sup>

That Klein's work underwent several shifts in subject-matter is undeniable. There is an obvious progression in his poetry from Velvel Kleinburger and Barricade Smith with their poker and protests in the Radical poems; through Childe Harold, Reb Zadoc and Solomon Warshawer, and the homeless wanderings, ghetto mentality, and persecution which form so much of Jewish history; to the rocking chairs and Roman Catholicism of French Canada. Indeed, without too much danger of contradiction, one can summarize Klein's basic themes as: (i) the need for social reform; (ii) the suppressed potential of the Jewish people; (iii) the nature of the French-Canadian milieu.

Furthermore, Klein's poetry exhibits major technical changes which correspond closely with his transition from "Radical" and "Jewish" to "Canadian" subjects. A prime example of the method dominant in his early poetry is "Design For a Medieval Tapestry" (*Hath Not a Jew*), a series of portraits introduced by the poet's sketch of a Jewish ghetto in medieval Germany. In this sequence we hear

from: Reb Zadoc, a modern version of the Zadoc who had anointed Solomon in Israel's golden age; figures reminiscent of victims of biblical persecutions, but here deprived of the eventual triumph accorded their predecessors — Job, Esther, Daniel; biblical prophets of promise or warning, here compromised by fear — Nahum, Isaiah, Ezekiel. The situation evoked in the poem is distanced from Klein's audience by hundreds of years, and, by shaping his characters on biblical models, Klein forces his readers still further into the past; yet the refrain of the first of his portraits ("Reb Zadoc Has Memories") pointedly finds application in the year of the poem's publication — 1940:

Reb Zadoc's brain is a torture-dungeon;  
Reb Zadoc's brain is a German town.

In Klein's last book of poetry the approach is decidedly unlike that of the early poetry. In *The Rocking Chair*, an object, a rocking chair or a grain elevator, takes on new and complex connotations under the poet's stringent analysis: the rocking chair becomes "act and symbol" of French Canada; the grain elevator gains mythic stature because "bread is its theme, an absolute."

However, despite the seemingly disparate nature of thematic concern and technique in his poetry, an essential element in virtually all of Klein's work is his attempt simultaneously to present and to define his subject. While the early poems take a tradition and create around it a defining situation, the later poems take an object and create for it a defining tradition. The difference between the early and the later poetry is owing to a shift in emphasis rather than any great revelation in poetic vision. Subject and technique may, and do, change somewhat, but the impetus behind Klein's work remains the same. Paradoxically, it is largely because of this compulsion for definition that the thematic concerns of his poetry are in one sense so limited and, at the same time, so fully developed. Within the extremely general divisions of "Radical," "Jewish," or "Canadian," he demonstrates an extraordinary talent for the examination of minute detail; a character, an object, or a moment in time is magnified and expanded into a universal statement which is eventually fitted into the larger, defining pattern of a series of related poems or even a volume of poetry.

Though the impulse to define is apparent throughout Klein's poetic career, it is in his novel, *The Second Scroll*, that he provides what may be his most comprehensive statement of the poetic theory that both grew out of, and served to direct, that impulse. *The Second Scroll* has generally been viewed as a work which sheds some light on the movement in Klein's poetry from "Jewish" to "Canadian" subjects. Perhaps the most extreme example of this interpretation of the novel is put forward by John Matthews, who has suggested that the life of the character Melech Davidson may be taken as an autobiographical gloss, a vehicle by means of which Klein defines and assesses his own ideological development:

There is what one might call a trichotomy of parallels throughout: the ancient tribulations of the Jewish people, their modern re-enactment, the spiritual Odyssey of Klein himself.<sup>2</sup>

This statement may be extended still further, for the novel seems also to stand as an autobiographical survey of poetic technique. In *The Second Scroll*, Klein has provided his reader with an examination of the pros and cons of various types of poetry, an examination which, as it was made not long after his own thematic and technical transition in *The Rocking Chair*, may be considered in part as a statement of his own poetic alternatives.

The novel presents a double but interlocking plot: the search by the narrator for his uncle, Melech Davidson, and the narrator's professional commission to find and define the poetry of the new state of Israel. This first plot, through the narrator's accounts of the life of his uncle Melech, provides a basis for a survey of the Jewish experience in twentieth-century Europe; the second plot provides Klein with a forum for an examination of the nature of poetry in a period of accelerated cultural change. From various angles, Klein considers the messianic potential of the return of the Jews from exile, the rebuilding of the state, and the reunion of the dispersed tribes to form a people. However, the tinge of Zionist fervour is also present in his search for a distinctive Israeli poetry, a search which becomes an expectation of prophecy — the great creative "fiat." Significantly, the critical discussion of poetry in the novel is presented in conjunction with the resolution of the political situation which for approximately fifteen years had been Klein's own major thematic focal point.

In the novel, as the narrator sits in a plane bound for Israel, he strikes up a conversation with an American "assimilated" Jew. His acquaintance, maintaining that the founding of the Jewish state is "our version of the Incarnation," concludes about the nation in exile:

It was true, that the Jews qua Jews — the tatters of that original divine vestment, the shreds of the flesh that once showed forth the Lord — had recognizably remained. But not as of yore: they no longer served in their first role, they were not any more the Idea's style and title. They had been reduced to but a single function: mnemonic of the past. . . .

Jewry had ceased as Existence. Among the nations it constituted an anomaly, in speech it was a solecism; the verb *to be* confined to the passive mood!

The state of Israel in Diaspora is described in terms of an "Idea" imperfectly communicated, an incomplete or distorting definition. Significantly, the charge of "mnemonic of the past" has also frequently been levelled at Klein's own poetry, particularly the *Hath Not a Jew* collection. This definition of the state of the nation is offered in terms of modes of thought and expression — "anomaly," "solecism," and "passive mood," terms which could be, and indeed have been, applied to the major part of Klein's poetic canon to the 1940's.

ALTHOUGH KLEIN WAS ACTIVELY INVOLVED in the Zionist movement in Canada,<sup>3</sup> his poetry did not, for the most part, deal directly with the horror confronting the European Jew in the 1930's and 40's. Instead, he appeared to retreat in many of his poems to the Middle Ages and the archaisms of the King James Bible. Denunciation was distanced by time and diction, and was thus, some critics claim, made less effective.<sup>4</sup> It is perhaps that E. J. Pratt's review of *The Hitleriad*, Klein's violent satiric attack on Hitler, was favourable, not because of its poetic expertise,<sup>5</sup> but because

The subject has pulled the threnodist away from the wall of lamentation and placed the satirist in a colosseum with a grenade in his hand and a good round curse on his lips.<sup>6</sup>

*The Rocking Chair* was hailed as a correction of Klein's "nose-dive into antiquity"<sup>7</sup> and as a movement away from the parochial vision created by his concentration on Jewish culture and tradition.

Yet in the majority of the poems in *Hath Not a Jew* and *Poems*, the evocation of past events and continuing traditions is not made for its own sake, but as a commentary on, or symbolic definition of, the present situation. These two volumes, which may be seen as part of a single process of definition, were apparently the product of careful selection and organization on Klein's part. He opens *Hath Not a Jew* by establishing the nature and the limitations of his subject-matter ("Ave Atque Vale"). In the second poem of the volume, "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage," he proceeds to outline through the person of "Harold," who under Klein's direction becomes the archetypal "Jew," the historical and psychological context of his "Jewish" poetry: the history of persecution, the now-present threat of Naziism, and the alternatives for present action. The remainder of the poems in *Hath Not a Jew* and in *Poems*, ranging freely in time and situation from the biblical to the contemporary, fit into the framework provided in these first two poems. As a result, they may be taken to be an organic, if somewhat disconnected, whole — a jigsaw portrait of the threatened Jewish culture.

However, if the early poetry does not entirely warrant the reductive charge of "mnemonic of the past" levelled at Jews in general by the travelling companion of Klein's narrator in *The Second Scroll*, it does offer a statement almost totally in terms of Jewish culture. Klein's novel, continuing this association between the socio-political state of Judaism and the concerns of the early poetry, proclaims with the political release provided with the defeat of Germany and the subsequent formation of the Jewish state an expectation of the fulfillment of the nation's stifled potential. Israel should provide the Jewish people with the long awaited opportunity for "existence" in an "active mood" and for the articulation of a more universal statement.

The narrator's quest for a new poetry is initially disappointing. He seeks prophecy, a definition of a new spiritual state, and finds only a number of factional and incompletely communicated visions. The first of these is the insular vision of the radical, of which the narrator says:

It would vanish, it did not belong to the essential thoughtways of our people . . . ; it surged up only as an answer to contemporary history. It was Israel's retort to Europe, couched in Europe's language.

The second of the new trends is more positive in the narrator's eyes — the poetry of the settlements. Though derivative, this poetry provides the pastoral "names," the "adamic intimacy," which had been lacking in the urban literature of the "ghetto-gotten Rashi":

One sensed a groping towards the phrase, the line, the sentence that would gather in its sweep the sky above and the earth below and set new constellations in each. But the word did not come.

Next, he encounters the poetry of "the schools," political and religious manifestos, of which:

Only the orthodox *paytanim* dispensed with program notes for their platform did not have to be set up, it was already there, a table prepared, a *Schulchan Aruch*. Their theme was a continual backward-glancing to the past and their technique a pedantry of allusiveness, their work was of Moses mosaic, a liturgy, God's poetry, which is to say poetry for the Most Merciful of Readers.

As Klein's narrator comments: "I had the originals; I was seeking the tone which might yet again re-echo, not the faint echo of the long since sounded." Lastly,

There was also the vogue of the young and very wise Nathan, an agile craftsman who moulded the ancient speech to modern use, whose rhymes were in themselves witty, and whose wit had but one target, the iniquity of the gentiles.

Unlike the original Nathan, the prophet through whom the plans for the Temple and the messianic promise of the Davidic covenant were communicated to David, these poets "referred to" and "did not make, Occasion."

Significantly, a measure of these evaluations may well be self-critical. Several of these unsatisfactory modes of poetry may be credited to Klein himself at some point in his career, for he has amply exhibited his radical, traditional, and satiric tendencies. By the same token, his narrator's expression of a poetic ideal may also offer a definition of the type of poetry towards which he saw himself to be moving. Although he never does find a modern-day prophet, the "consolation prize" in the narrator's search is a poet who at least shares none of the negative aspects of the various trends which have, to this point, been rejected. The unsatisfactory poets are derivative; they grope towards some philosophical, political, or artistic statement which they either fail to attain, or degrade by transforming it into

polemic. The narrator finds a poet whose aim is to reduce derivativeness to a minimum.

Fortunately, Klein also makes this poet a theorist, and is thus able to accompany examples of this "underivative" poetry with a critical analysis by the poet himself:

a poem is not a destination, it is a point of departure. The destination is determined by the reader. The poet's function is but to point direction. A poem is not the conflagration complete, it is the first kindling. From this premise it follows that poems should be brief, laconic. Sparks. I write, therefore, poems that do not exceed one line. Sometimes, of course, it is such a difficult art — I have to extend myself to a line and a half, even two lines. It is a prolixity which leaves me discontented.

One of the examples of this poetry provided by the narrator is equally eloquent in its communication of these principles — (No. 17) "Literature":

Out of that chambered pyramid the trilateral verb  
The mummies rise. . . .

This is, in skeleton form, the poetry of definition: underivative, not because it is totally original in its thought, but because it states its case in an extreme of precision. While Klein did not limit his later poetry to one or two lines, *The Rocking Chair* demonstrates his own growing tendency toward certain elements of this last type of poetry. For the most part, his later work is underivative, complete in its own internal statement; its component parts are often "tri-" or multi- "literal."

Something even closer to the narrator's poetic ideal is found outside the poetic circles of the new nation, in the physical reconstruction of Israel:

And then — it was after I had returned from Tiberias to Tel Aviv to attend a literary soiree — then the creative activity, archetypal, all-embracing, that hitherto I had sought in vain, at last manifested itself. Not at the soiree. In the streets, in the shops, everywhere about me. I had looked, but had not seen. It was there all the time — the fashioning folk, anonymous and unobserved, creative word by word, phrase by phrase, the total work that when completed would stand as epic revealed!

In what amounts almost to a defence of "found" poetry, Klein's narrator acclaims the poetic potential of the commonplace, the poetry of signs. Tel Aviv's commercial centre has been dubbed *Sneh*, the burning bush, "which had burned and burned but had not been consumed"; a dry-cleaning firm becomes *Kesheth*, "the rainbow, symbol of the cessation of floods." Of principal importance to the narrator is the source of these metaphors: "born not of the honoured laureate, but of some actuary, a man of prose!"

The poetic theory of the narrator's "consolation prize" is realized in the self-definition of the Israeli people. In their signs, simultaneously "archetypal" and newly created "word by word," tradition is remolded, reinterpreted, and is given new and contemporary application in the "sparks" of these one word analogies. While in a sense derivative, the movement of both the poetic and physical recon-

structions of Israel is also seen as prophetic, for its images are redefined and directed to new use. The novel itself partakes in this movement, for it is a "second scroll," a new Torah for a new age. The poetic quest of the narrator, so closely linked with the new Exodus of Israel, is completed only when he feels he has found a definition of the physical development of the state:

The fixed epithet wherewith I might designate Israel's poetry, the poetry of recaptured time, was now evident. The password was heard everywhere — the miracle!

I had found the key image.

On one level, *The Second Scroll* traces the emergence of the Jewish nation from the limbo of incomplete definition and frustrated potential. As Israel begins to achieve self-definition, however, the task of reaffirming the threatened identity of the "Jew" which Klein had assumed in the 1930's and early 1940's is rendered obsolete. His last book of poetry, *The Rocking Chair*, has been lauded critically as a movement towards a more realistic, less confining stance, but the change in Klein's subject-matter and technical presentation may not be evidence of a re-direction of poetic vision so much as an indication of changing times. The "Jewish" poetry, while ethnic, was also extremely topical; Shakespeare and Marlowe are consciously set aside for more immediate considerations. Now, with *The Rocking Chair*, Klein moves once again to new considerations, and new techniques are required for their explication.

**K**LEIN WAS ABLE, IN THE EARLY POEMS, to appeal for his terminology to an exhaustive fund of cultural tradition. The concentration of his later poems, to a certain extent, necessitated the poet's adoption of an expository stance. In order to define, or to move towards a definition of, Canadian subjects, Klein had first to establish the existence of some sort of cultural identity. As a result, as Miriam Waddington observes:

Folkloric objects become important; we are in a world of spinning wheels, Montreal meeting halls, Catholic hospitals, and Quebec liquor stores. It is as though Klein were seeing his real surroundings for the first time without allowing either literary or religious traditions mediate his vision.<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, if the poet is, for the most part, unable to draw on any established "literary or religious tradition" in these poems, the objects, the situations, even the language with which he is working, do have definite if not immediately obvious historical, social, or philological traditions behind them. Klein's ability to capitalize on these untapped traditions forms the basis of his presentation in *The Rocking Chair*.

In "Political Meeting," the issue of conscription, tremendously controversial in

French Canada, is emblematically presented in the counterpoint of the poem's two "political meetings": one in the school auditorium, the other in the street outside. The essential nature of this division, and the problem at its source, are given definition in the last three lines of the poem:

The whole street wears one face,  
shadowed and grim; and in the darkness rises  
the body-odour of race.

Klein's exposition, appealing to the negative "tradition" of French/English distrust, reveals a problem much more deep-seated than the political issue with which the poem is nominally concerned.

In "Pawnshop," Klein appeals to socio-economic and biblical tradition to construct a complicated web of association. The pawnshop, innocent enough in itself, grows to ominous proportions under the accumulated weight of the poet's thematic expansion towards a final statement. From a place where people sell their valuables, it becomes a place where the people themselves are weighed and ticketed. It houses an inventory of objects displaced from their proper setting and deprived of their proper emotional significance. Gradually, the shop and the despair, poverty, and social injustice it represents become in Klein's expanded vision a threat to society as a whole. The instigator of the problem, in the process of universalization, is identified not as some villain who consciously created the time-bomb situation, but as the prototype of humanity:

The architect is rusted from his plaque.  
Was his name Adam?

The Fall, after all, consisted of trading an ideal for a negative reality. At the same time, Klein cites as the culprit Adam Smith, theorist of "laissez-faire" economics:

Was his trade a smith  
Who thought a mansion to erect of wealth  
that houses now the bankrupt bricabrac,  
his pleasure-dome made myth  
his let-do hospitality made stealth?

The dream is contrasted with the "bankrupt," insolvent reality; the fledgling Kubla Khan is left with a distortion of the dream.

The final universalization of the symbol is made in literary terms:

Synonym  
of all building, our house, it owns us; even  
when free from it, our dialectic grave.  
Shall one not curse it therefore, as the cause,  
type, and exemplar of our social guilt?  
Our own gomorrah house,  
the sodom that merely to look makes one salt?



The Klein of the Radical and Jewish poems with his concern with social guilt is evident here, but the statement goes beyond social criticism. The mentality of the pawnshop is his subject; it is, therefore, human nature which is "cause, type, and exemplar." The final biblical allusion to "sodom" and "gomorrah" is to a type of human iniquity: Lot's wife became a pillar of salt because of her inability to escape the "gomorrah" mentality.

In "Political Meeting" and "Pawnshop," we have seen how Klein, in the process of defining a situation or an object, manipulates established traditions in such a way as to give his "Canadian" subject more universal application, and, simultaneously, to create around it a sense of a new and autonomous tradition. Another, more basic, manipulation of tradition is evident in his use of language in *The Rocking Chair* poems.

In his earlier poetry, Klein's language, his mode of expression, was extremely important in the communication of the spirit of the Jewish people. What so often has been criticized as undue use of archaism was, in fact, a species of imitative form.<sup>9</sup> This significance of language is made explicit in *The Second Scroll* with Uncle Melech's purposeful assignment of certain subjects to the language appropriate to their expression. In the letter in which Melech re-establishes communication with his family, the narrator notes the abandonment of Marxist jargon. The letter ends with a series of commentaries, each in the language or type of diction appropriate to its thought: "language biblic," a "Mishna," a Talmudic commentary, a reference to the Cabbal. In the same vein, the narrator-critic in his search for the poetry of New Israel searches primarily for the "word," the mode of expression which will reflect the creative impulse evident in the state's physical reconstruction.

The biblical echoes of *Hath Not a Jew, Poems*, and *The Hitleriad* serve primarily to universalize the particular, to equate, for example, Nazi Germany or the pogroms of the 1930's and 40's with other times and events in a long history of persecution. Klein's mode of expression in this poetry is inseparable from the message conveyed. In *The Rocking Chair*, a variation of this concern is apparent in the bilingual expression of such poems as "Montreal," in which the people of Quebec are given their appropriate voice. As Klein himself explained the mechanics of the poem:

the following verse . . . is written in a vocabulary which is not exactly English. It is written so that any Englishman who knows no French, and any Frenchman who knows no English . . . can read it. . . . It contains not a word . . . which is not either similar to, derivative from, or akin to a French word of like import; in short, a bilingual poem.<sup>10</sup>

This exploitation of the origins, the etymologies, of words also appears in *The Rocking Chair* in Klein's unilingual poems. Miriam Waddington provides what may be an illuminating commentary on Klein's later poetry when she observes

that these poems evidence a movement away from the “archaism” of the Jewish poetry to “metaphor,” which also “doubles, condenses.”<sup>11</sup> Once again, subject seems to determine mode, as the essence of this change is from a tendency to “double” time perspective in the early poetry to a tendency to “double” connotation in *The Rocking Chair*.

Perhaps the most successful example of this type of expression is “Lone Bather” in which Klein demonstrates his ability to manipulate even the smallest significant units of expression. This poem comes the closest of any of Klein’s work to putting into operation the poetic theory of the “consolation prize” poet in *The Second Scroll*: it is not a “destination” but a “point of departure”; the basis of its presentation is the “tri-literal” connotation of words.

The first two lines of the poem serve as a definition of its contents, a defence of its internal validity, and a prime example of the poet’s linguistic juggling act. Individual words are made to function as images in their own right as the reader is included in the imaginative self-definition of the bather/poet:

Upon the ecstatic diving board the diver,  
poised for parabolas, lets go. . . .

The “diving board” is “ecstatic” — subject to, or, more fitting here, producing ecstasies. “Ecstasy,” in turn, may be defined as “an exalted state of feeling, rapture” or as “trance, poetic frenzy.” The diver is “poised” — balanced or suspended — in preparation for “parabolas.” The term “parabolas” not only refers to the physical shape of the dive, but also carries resonance of the Greek words from which it is formed: hence, parabolic, of the nature of parable. As the diver “lets go,” he releases not only the physical motion of the poem, but also springs into the “ecstatic,” parabolic frame of mind which allows its imaginative equations:

lets go his manshape to become bird.  
Is bird, and topsy-turvy  
the pool floats overhead, and the white tiles snow  
their crazy hexagons.

The poem inventories a series of states of being — bird, dolphin, plant, merman — as the diver constantly redefines himself according to his element. Yet these are, finally, relinquished, “rubbed” away as the bather becomes “personable plain” — himself.

This ability of the poet/bather constantly to redefine his status, and thus to re-create his world, is the theme of “Portrait of the Poet as Landscape.” This poem, the last in *The Rocking Chair* collection, serves also to some extent as Klein’s statement of the type of poetic definition attempted in the volume, a statement which is echoed three years later in the critical discussion in *The Second Scroll*.

Here, as in *The Second Scroll*, the relationship of the poet to the society he serves

has been altered in some way. The poet's traditional role involves the definition of that society; he is defined as

he who unrolled our culture from his scroll —  
 the prince's quote, the rostrum-rounding roar —  
 who under one name made articulate  
 heaven, and under another the seven-circled air.

Society, however, has found new media of self-definition in its editors, actresses, and broadcasters. The poet is assumed "dead," and though he is potentially useful, he is not really missed:

like the mirroring lenses forgotten on a brow  
 that shine with the guilt of their unnoticed world.

The "forgotten" poet is confronted with a number of alternative roles which correspond roughly with the poetic stances which are to be declared inadequate by the narrator of *The Second Scroll*. The ideal, exemplified by our poet in the moments in which his vocation is reaffirmed, is the perception of poetry as valuable in its own right, without any artificially constructed social application: language becomes a physical thing to the poet, a lover:

Then he will remember his travels over that body —  
 the torso verb, the beautiful face of the noun,  
 and all those shaped and warm auxiliaries!  
 A first love it was, the recognition of his own.  
 Dear limbs adverbial, complexion of adjective,  
 dimple and dip of conjugation!

The poets who have succumbed to the pressures of their anonymity, in searching for an audience, forfeit this relation to their art:

Thus, having lost the bevel in the ear,  
 they know neither up nor down, mistake the part  
 for the whole, curl themselves in a comma,  
 talk technics, make a colon their eyes. They distort —  
 such is the pain of their frustration — truth  
 to something convolute and cerebral.

Some lend themselves to propaganda, "the multiplying word," and lose their autonomy; others, searching in their own minds or in religion or sex for subject-matter, disconnect themselves and their art from reality:

O schizoid solitudes! O purities  
 curdling upon themselves! Who live for themselves,  
 or for each other, but nobody else;  
 desire affection, private and public loves;  
 are friendly, and then quarrel and surmise  
 the secret perversions of each other's lives.

For the true poet it is "infelicity" rather than "fame" or "private or public loves" that proves to be the creative stimulus. His social displacement serves as the basis for the creation of a personal universe:

Therefore he seeds illusions. Look, he is  
the nth Adam taking a green inventory  
in world but scarcely uttered, naming, praising,  
the flowering fiats in the meadow, the  
sabled fur, stars aspirate, the pollen  
whose sweet collusion sounds eternally.  
For to praise

the world — he solitary man — is breath  
to him. Until it has been praised, that part  
has not been. Item by exciting item —  
air to his lungs, and pressured blood to his heart —  
they are pulsated, and breathed, until they map,  
not the world's, but his own body's chart.

This world is sentient because it is a reflection of the artist who "names" it; the "pollen" of the "flowering fiats" is in "collusion" both with creation and creator. The poet, assumed dead at the beginning of the poem, undergoes, through the act of creation, a vital physical regeneration, for that same "body" of words which previously confirmed his sense of poetic vocation now enables the process of "fiat." Simultaneously object and subject, world and creator, the poet is able to negate the "schizoid solitudes" which plague poets of less comprehensive concerns.

In *The Second Scroll*, Klein looks to the poets of the Israel of a second Exodus to provide a new Torah. The ideal poet, although he is never really discovered, would be a poet of "the miracle," a new Moses. In "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape," Klein's poet partakes in the archetypal act of Adam: as the "nth Adam," his art approximates as closely as possible the divine act of Creation. In re-defining, and thus recreating, the world in their poetry these ideal poets move away from the traditional stance of the poet as definer/preserver, a stance which has either been rejected by a modern technological society, or as in *The Second Scroll*, been made obsolete by political circumstance. They become instead definers/creators who seek to accomplish by their creative redefinition of the world around them something that the "distorting" poets, with their propaganda or self-absorption, cannot:

To find a new function for the *déclassé* craft  
archaic like the fletcher's; to make a new thing;  
to say the word that will become sixth sense;  
perhaps by necessity and indirection bring  
new forms, anonymously, new creeds —  
O somehow pay back the daily larcenies of the lung!

This passage could ultimately qualify as Klein's own poetic creed in the 1940's. His attempt to "make a new thing" is evident in the transition from the "Jewish" concerns of the 1930's and early 1940's to the "Canadian" subjects of *The Rocking Chair*. His craft made "déclassé" by contemporary history, he moved from close adherence to tradition and traditional modes of expression to the consideration of new areas, and a culture which was in need of creative definition.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Tom Marshall, "Theorems Made Flesh," in his ed., *A. M. Klein* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1970), p. 159.
- <sup>2</sup> John Matthews, "Abraham Klein and the Problem of Synthesis," *A. M. Klein*, p. 147.
- <sup>3</sup> Klein was a member of B'nai Brith Youth and the Labour Zionist Organization. He also edited *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* from 1939-1955 in which time he became a prominent spokesman for Canadian Jews.
- <sup>4</sup> Louis Dudek raises what may be the most extreme of the critical objections to Klein's use of archaism: "this language experiment of Klein's — really a private language — cannot be called a success. It is when he accidentally quits his turgid rhetoric that he is most successful. Some words one feels, are seen in print for the first and last time: 'farewelled,' 'nihility,' 'insignificantest,' 'maieutically.' As for 'beautified,' which occurs in *Poems*, Shakespeare himself called that 'an ill phrase, a vile phrase, "beautifies" is a vile phrase.'" ("A. M. Klein," in *A. M. Klein*, ed. Marshall, p. 70.) Even one of Klein's chief supporters expresses some doubts on this account. Miriam Waddington comments: "Klein's use of archaisms has always puzzled me. If he were a bad poet who used archaism to make prosaic language poetical, there would be no problem. But a poet with an ear as fine and as clever as Klein's and with a skill that Thomas Mann calls 'the visible accoustic' would never mar his poems with archaic words unless their use had a deeper significance." *A. M. Klein* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1970), p. 111.
- <sup>5</sup> Klein himself denied that *The Hitleriad* was of any great value as poetry. However, as he wrote to James Laughlin, his publisher (New Directions Press): "I do think that apart from poetic merit, perhaps because of poetic demerit, *The Hitleriad* has great potentialities for large-scale distribution." (As reported by Waddington, *A. M. Klein*, p. 81)
- <sup>6</sup> E. J. Pratt, "Review of *The Hitleriad*," in *A. M. Klein*, ed. Marshall, p. 21.
- <sup>7</sup> John Sutherland, "Canadian Comment," in *A. M. Klein*, ed. Marshall, p. 59.
- <sup>8</sup> Waddington, p. 92.
- <sup>9</sup> As Tom Marshall observes in his introduction to the Ryerson collection of essays on Klein, Klein's use of "his private pseudo-biblical or Elizabethan English" followed "the example of Spenser who sought to re-affirm tradition with deliberate archaism." (*A. M. Klein*, p. xxiii.)
- <sup>10</sup> A. M. Klein, *Preview* (September 1944), as reported by Miriam Waddington, p. 110.
- <sup>11</sup> Waddington, p. 113.