

From **MAKING JEWISH: MLA Talk – December 27, 2009**

Sources: Jonathan Boyarin (B), *Thinking in Jewish; Radical Poetics and Secular Jewish Culture* (RP); Emmanuel Levinas (L) *Totality and Infinity*; my Notebooks, from Notebook 13.

“It is consistent with the general Jewish tendency to view citation as more authoritative than originality.” (B / 142)

“Bernstein understands Jewishness as something made, not given.” (RP / 3)

“Bernstein constitutes his Jewish identity by way of his distance from a secure sense of what it means to be Jewish.” (RP / 3)

“. . . Lambropoulos risks the claim that ‘Jewishness was elevated to a cultural idea . . . and Judaism became the new counter-politics, oppositional culture.’ (1992: 303) (B / 132)

“. . . to be a Jew concealed in the world is to manifest and imitate the concealed divine light.” (RP / 65)

“The particularity of Jewish difference . . .” (B / 67)

“. . . this Jewish genius for unmythicality . . .” (B / 85)

Making Jewish.

Like a postmodern or Derridean sense of
the word, of meaning, of presence, Jew is
an unstable site, a place for making & renewing,
something that is not one thing, a term &
a person in process, being made not already made.

Assimilation? I cannot be a Southern non-Jew
nor can I simply be a Jew.

POETRY ARE JEWS
THAT STAY JEWS

Why can't the Jews just act & think & write like everyone else?
Who are they, anyway? And if their poetry is really meant for
everyone, I ask again, why can't the Jews be just like everyone else?

And here in Philadelphia, December 27, 2009, or Tevet 10, 5770,
what is the time of the Jews, and what is the (proper) place of the Jews?

from *Extracting the Jewish Book*

N13P24 [with pdf of notebook page]

And so the moment takes on an imagined shape
connecting to architectures manifesting the turns the verse
that words the work of breath of hands of heart
ebb & flow we are subject to
& come to know ourselves
as the wavering ones
in search of a way to cross over
or simply to be still enough here
so that the shape & flow of this instant
is telling enough

one meditates another puts up the dishes

one is calm another lives a life suspended in tension

one has the means another does not

one is like every other another is not

one already knows it another is learning it

one looks to oneself another is “thus the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, to whom I am obligated” (L / 215)

one listens another speaks

one is one thing another is something else

one is this another is that

one is aware of how many of us there are another is a common pebble

one is trying to keep it clean another goes about his business

one is not what anyone is another is an altogether different mix

“Thus if the minyan is a kind of provisional Jewish center, it is one founded on the loss of the Temple as foundational center. It is not, then, that the minyan is the essence of Judaism, if Judaism has an essence at all. Twenty years ago, I made this mistake, venturing in a conversation with a rabbi the opinion that ‘Judaism is a minyan.’ ‘No,’ he said; ‘Judaism is a school’: education and continuity are more important than collective prayer.” (B / 69)

“Midrash, like the minyan, is a response to the loss of a state and its totalizing communal forms: language in midrash is not a secondary reflection of some hidden meaning whose dispensation is entrusted to authorities backed by temporal powers, but is the historically constituted field within which singular beings compear as Jews.” (B / 84)

“Furthermore, by envisioning the putative asylum of America as a sideshow in which he would be trapped, Benjamin marked this New World as an ironic anti-paradise, a place one goes to not so much to escape disaster, but *after* the catastrophe has already hit.” (B / 144)

“Let me call it here post-Judaism, not only because it comes after Judaism in a way analogous to postmodernism following modernity, but more specifically because it comes after the catastrophe as the betrayal of the hopes for redemption central to Judaism.” (B / 158)

“It could be, for example, that what a Jew writes – particularly in a non-Jewish language – is Jewish and not Jewish at the same time.” (B / 195)

