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*There's Only One God and You're Not It*

“We Have Never Been Monotheist”

All the peoples of all the world  
degrade one other's gods  
but Jews first think  
*your gods do not exist.*

An ordinary man, I go with the gods who  
brought me  
but as Babylonians have their way with Yahweh  
I call all concerned to say

we're going in an entirely different direction,  
all other gods *nothing*. And it's done! You  
find tons of  
our

idols  
before exile,  
then  
nearly none.

Yahweh marks  
Israelites  
from Canaanites when Israel's  
Canaan,

the unCanaanites  
or anyway not  
the Canaanites  
bleeding other Canaanites

for the wherewithal to buy Egyptian protection  
to bleed Canaanites  
for more  
protection

as un-  
Canaanites  
take to hills and  
caves, wiping out

Canaan mostly  
slowly from within,  
part of the larger collapses of  
Mesopotamian 'n Egyptian empires

bookending Canaan.  
How sudden's the swing  
to Israel? One or two  
hundred years,

archaeological evidence  
like palace burn marks  
and chopped  
monuments hint

violent overthrow  
in Hazor, more  
gradual  
power shifts elsewhere.

Are you sure Israel  
goes that far back?  
Some doubt it,  
but it's hard to ignore

Egyptian  
references to  
Israelites, plus  
Canaan to Israel

continuity. Pottery's less  
fancy but  
made the same—*big*  
collective fingerprint—

though small  
“pillar-courtyard” homes,  
dearth of palaces, open farm  
'n city planning, show

Canaan  
like  
Jacob  
Israel.

Israelite gods

Canaanite  
except  
the irresistibly

populist  
Yahweh  
who walk in our courtyard  
an intimate name,

El's personal identity—  
but not god qua god  
Yahweh is the god, He's the man  
stern yet bubbly, a bit psycho, warm,

egalitarian,  
not about fertility as much as  
his god pals and his concubine—you need the others.  
Still, Yahweh's for guerrilla, misfit, and dreg so

new take on god Yahu  
from Midian, where Moses  
meets Him and he goes,  
“I met Israelites before but  
they thought I was someone else.”

How awkward. If the exodus couldn't  
have happened,  
it's still the oldest, most stirring  
Hebrew tale, oddly nailing

where they contact

Yahweh

cuz that matters more  
than what  
might have happened to

a few brave Canaanites slaves,  
a story you recall cuz easy to forget.  
Liberation's unnatural—  
you need sappy miracles?

Jews are incredibly serious—funny even—  
about how they treat one another  
but also terrified to be an other,  
you come from the other

and could slip back. Classless  
agrarian utopia morphs to  
monarchy, though King David's self-made  
and the critics who make you feel like crap  
about the direction that the country is going

*still* get enshrined  
in an oddly secular culture—  
ancient Hebrew having no word for “religion”—  
it's so what is

we sway on Yahweh's sword  
tip major to minor  
ev'ry time we say goodbye  
there's such an air of gore.

You  
doven through it—Hebrew  
from the Egyptian “across”  
as in Abraham

going through  
Canaan  
from Mesopotamia to  
Egypt ‘n back to Canaan—  
always an indeterminate backwater—

you swing across  
the universe since  
you can’t erase it,  
setting up

synagogue scales absolutely  
insecure in major  
or minor.  
On the one hand there’s the other

hand. And what’s so Yahweh or the ha-way?  
Am I ever  
monotheist? Hell, I like other gods.  
I know God does.

So what’s with the Book  
of Judges going “all the  
gods of all peoples  
of all the nations are *NOTHING*”?

Plato might  
pick up on this gizmo  
pulling the rug on the obvious,  
giving reason the place of Yahweh over

divine family romance & poetry.  
Later, Greek Jews  
in Alexandria and elsewhere translate  
iconoclasm and monotheism

onto  
one  
operational  
plane or platform or ground

softening  
monotheism,  
opening it  
a little,

inviting  
you in  
and centuries and centuries later—now—  
we want everyone

monotheist so we know they  
play in our  
world.  
If you worship many gods

slobs think you're a snob,

snobs think you're a slob  
so the Japanese, for instance,  
partly to avoid

looking like children, after  
Admiral Perry,  
prop their emperor to  
hide their gods.

You're okay as long  
as you believe in one  
god and since  
there's only one god

it has to be the same  
God—NOT—but that's  
okay with God who  
is also other gods.

Huh? God's just to us, not to you.  
Believing in one god keeps us together.  
In exile, circumcision becomes big.  
People around us aren't

circumcised and you have to stay Jewish, a very creative  
move since Yahweh  
is somehow  
able to move

from land and temple to text.  
Good luck, Yahweh. I love your new home.

The figure in the text orients  
like Japan opening to the west

reordering itself around the emperor  
'n making him God to show  
a face of unified strength to the outside world.  
They go along to get along. Believing in many

gods is okay among themselves  
but infantile to the West.  
The Japanese aren't monotheist  
and neither are we, handy as it is.

One god sweeps the others  
in a dustpan and walks away deist-style  
so we're all cool  
'n study what he left.

Computers hang on  
God's trickster  
track connecting all computable operations.  
Another god can't come out of nowhere.

The culty Enigma code  
changes  
every day, but each day monotheism  
reasserts itself and

wins World War II.  
Monotheism  
everything

not even itself,

it's nice to be a monotheist—  
one god, one people, one person—  
but God has no friends,  
it's boring without

figure-ground excitement  
sustaining on and off again oneness, i.e.,  
Jewish  
culture,

the pivot *everyone*  
has to make  
to the accident-in-reverse  
we all come from—

the Midian of Deuteronomy—  
giving up on teenage  
drama for Shakespearian  
soliloquy. Who are you talkin'?

Even  
Jews go back  
cuz they left  
something.

Like Odysseus,  
Moses returns  
not as Moses  
but many Moseses,

Moses descending a staircase.

“In his constant shifting from major to minor keys”

Cole Porter “consciously wrote Jewish melodies (191),”

says Jack Gottlieb in his *Smithsonian* book.

Richard Rodgers and Yip Harburg are surprisingly

intent on Porter admitting his Jewish debt

though Porter makes no secret Irving Berlin’s his man—

Berlin writes words and music too. Rodgers writes music

so Jerome Kern’s his avatar.

Berlin looks up to George M. Cohan so

it’s not ALL about being Jewish—

I never say it is,

just hard to avoid and

radical as in a root of much

culture, art, and poetry.

Yahweh’s the top,

but I’m a flop of

infinite grammatical equivalences,

and Rodgers

feels Porter

hides too much,

singling out “Night and Day,”

“Begin the Beguine,” “Love for Sale,”

“I Love Paris,” and “My Heart Belongs to Daddy”

as Porter’s greatest *and* most Jewish pieces.

Harburg and Rodgers compile  
things Porter tells them and colleagues  
proving how consciously Cole adapts  
Yiddish and East European

synagogue tonal shifts and syncopations.

Porter's says he needs to base his  
music on that music  
to write his version of this fine

and elegant  
new American music.

I don't know anything about music  
but feel God's favorite poetry

is fine and elegant, and  
before it ever occurs to me  
Jerome Kern might  
be Jewish

I can't get over  
how songs don't  
sound like songs  
before him, but

the divide's Berlin's  
1911's  
"Alexander's  
Ragtime Band," "the first  
real

American  
musical  
work,” raves George

Gershwin. Porter’s labeled  
*the great non-Jewish American song*  
book writer—but what about Johnny  
Mercer?—though he’s younger and collaborates

so much with Harold Arlen and other Jewish  
songwriters, but there are other brilliant  
non-Jewish twenties and thirties  
songwriters such as Ellington

and a plethora of other African Americans,  
yet I hear what’s riles Rodgers and Harburg.  
Not only does Jewish culture  
influence popular music,

it makes it what it is, a jazzier  
take on the pogo,  
dovening  
as you move.

It might be a one god world  
but Jewish culture’s always shifting  
from minor to major to  
minor to major

before you can crack where you are.  
When the 19<sup>th</sup> century empire of poetic form

disintegrates,  
poets emigrate to Whitman—

Irving Berlin and Cole Porter in one—  
or *really* Whitman is Moses—  
as important as it is  
to Freud that Moses bit be Egyptian *not*

Jewish  
since Freudian Moses needs  
a good murdering  
to be mourned, celebrated, eaten,

and postdated in  
new Jewish ways.  
Before the temple burns,  
the ten commandments

are found  
miraculously  
in temple archives  
making Josiah cry at what a bad ass

Moses, the Deuteronomy Moses, is.  
He way back knows many gods  
will fuck us, says Josiah  
and when

the temple smokes  
Moses is reborn.  
Similarly, poets Whitman

inspires right

off don't carry Whitman to us.

His greatest influence is indirect.

He needs to be ignored before permeating  
poetry.

Through Whitman

biblical forms spread—

just talking, or anyway talking

in Yahweh's most intimate

public address,

exquisitely makeshift

grammatically parallel improv,

syncopated logos

pulling

rabbits out of the text,

neurotically close-to-the-vest

redistributions of relaxed

poetic emphases—

hallmarks of

how Jews succeed in modern poetry

without even being there.