

Joyce, Steinberg, and Acher: A Literary Analysis on the Consciousness of Heresy

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*Abstract— The heretic is a commonly portrayed figure in both religious and non-religious works, and the particulars of their character are defined by the author's religious context. This essay contrasts the heretic figures in the Talmud, Milton Steinberg's *As A Driven Leaf*, and James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. These characters' actions and beliefs reveal how broad the category of heresy is and how its definition is deeply relative to the culture from which it sprouts.*

George Lukacs, the twentieth century Hungarian philosopher, famously defined the novel as “the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God.”¹ This “abandonment” stems directly from the void left by the rejection of medieval Christian society, where the Christian God's immanence in society and institutions contributed to an intuitively comprehensible world in which events happen for a reason. The Enlightenment, the rise of secularism, and later the world wars fractured any sense of singular meaning. In Lukacs' conception of the novel, there is no unifying framework behind the pages and characters, and society is left to grasp for their own meaning independently; they cannot even agree on the anatomy of the world or how they should communicate.

Such a definition is ironic for all religious novels, but is especially so when discussing the Jewish novel. The Jewish novel became possible only because of the secularization of society and the emancipation of Jews in Europe. Though there is a rich corpus of Jewish literature which predates any Western writings, dating back thousands of years, the novel as it is contemporarily conceived is a European creation. *Don Quixote*, published in Spain in 1605, is generally considered either the first or one of the first novels². By contrast, the first Jewish work considered a novel dates to 1819, a book called *The Revealer of Secrets* by Joseph Perl. Only once the Enlightenment had run its course— ending with the Napoleonic Wars in 1815— and once Jews had gained at least partial membership in Western society, could a true Jewish novel emerge.

There are many potential definitions of a Jewish novel, but this essay will define a Jewish novel as a novel with Jewish subject matter and themes. The connection between the plainly

¹Lukacs, G. *A Theory of the Novel* (1st ed.), 1916. 88.

² A internet search will also yield several works published in 11th century Japan where there was a golden age of prose fiction. I consider *Don Quixote* the first novel, rather than earlier 15th century European works and Japanese works from an earlier time period because there is direct developmental continuity between *Don Quixote* and novels published today. The 11th century Japanese movement saw works that, although revolutionary, bear little resemblance to novels published today and more importantly did not directly contribute in the centuries long chain of development. As for the 15th century works published in Europe, these works are important in understanding how the genre of fiction came to develop, the concept of a novel had not been sufficiently fleshed out; “fiction” and “history” were altogether too intertwined.

Christian novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and Judaism will become clear through careful literary analysis.

This discussion of Jewish novels will focus on two works, one evidently Jewish and one which is plainly not: *As A Driven Leaf* by Milton Steinberg and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce. Our arguments will draw upon the Talmud's presentation of Elisha Ben Abuya, also known as *Acher* in the rabbinic tradition, which translates into English as "the other." This is the figure upon whom the fictional protagonist of Steinberg's *As a Driven Leaf* is based. This may seem somewhat counterintuitive; the Talmud is, at the very least, not a novel. It is a complex work of ritual law and argumentation with presentation of at least some historicity. This essay makes the decision to study Talmudic *Aggadah*, or story portions, as literature. To avoid confusion, Steinberg's protagonist will be referred to as Elisha whereas the Talmudic sage will be referred to as *Acher*.

As a Driven Leaf's protagonist Elisha begins his life in pre-Temple destruction Israel in a Hellenistic Jewish family. He learns solely Greek works before his father's death places him in the study of one of the preeminent rabbis of the time. He quickly rises up the rabbinic ranks, landing a spot on the highest Jewish court, the *Sanhedrin*. Elisha experiences a crisis when he realizes that the tenets of his religious life rely on faith unjustified by rationality. He spends years living in the Roman sphere, attempting to forge a theology based on pure reason. His venture is ultimately unsuccessful when he realizes even the works of Euclid are based on faith in certain principles and reason is insufficient to form a philosophy. He dies a broken man, rejecting a Judaism which demands "total acceptance without reservation of their revealed religion"³ and a secular culture with no meaningful belief.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man traces Stephen's development from childhood through religious piety, sensual abandon, and enlightened artistry. He grows up in a strict Catholic school. His family's move to a different town sparks his discovery of the theater and exposes him to his own physical desires. After engaging in sexual relations with a prostitute, he temporarily abandons himself to gluttony and lust. Soon after, a zealous sermon shifts his worldview to fanatic religious piety. His fervent piety does not go unnoticed, and he is offered a position in the priesthood. Stephen realizes he cannot reconcile the rigidity of priesthood with his aesthetic ambition and comes to reject the Church, pledging to let his artistic appreciation grow unconstrained by social and religious institutions.

Both Steinberg's and Joyce's works show us the growth of an individual throughout their lives, from an inarticulate baby to an experienced adult. Elisha and Stephen exist not just as heretical characters, unashamed in their contrarian beliefs, but as fully-formed dynamic characters who experience paths of development. When they believe, it is genuine belief; when they disbelieve, it is legitimately understandable character development.

The Talmud's presentation of Elisha as *Acher* is fundamentally different from Steinberg's. The contradictory accounts of the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud reveal relatively few details regarding his personal life. As Rabbi Meir's⁴ teacher, he was an important sage before his heresy. *Hagiga* 15b mentions that he was well-educated in Greek culture. The little that is known about his childhood and development is captured only in what happened before, and immediately after, he was born. The Jerusalem Talmud recounts that his mother would inhale incense from idolatry worship while pregnant with *Acher*, and that his father dedicated *Acher* to Torah study with improper intentions.⁵ The vast majority of what is written about him concerns the moment when he decided, according to the Talmud, to become a heretic. The accounts seem to be contradictory. In one story, esoteric knowledge causes his heresy⁶; in another portrayal, he

³ Steinberg, M. *As a Driven Leaf*. Behrman House, Inc. 2015. Epilogue.

⁴ The compiler of the Mishna

⁵ Jerusalem Talmud Hagiga 2:1

⁶ b. Hagiga 14b

sees a child die while performing the only two commandments for which the reward is explicitly stated as long life in the Torah. The Talmud's *Acher* is a static character and solely a heretic.⁷

The Talmud's treatment of *Acher* is puzzling for two reasons. It clearly is interested in his development and behavior, for if not, it would not have dedicated so much space in the text to discuss his heretical emergence and subsequent rejection of rabbinic Judaism. Yet, the Talmud tells us only drastically different, clearly pedagogical fables regarding his lack of faith instead of any proper analysis into his psyche. This treatment is atypical of important rabbinic figures; the Talmud takes much greater interest in sages such as Hillel or Rabbi Akiva, going into great depth about their character traits and the story of how they reached their seat of importance. If the Talmud wants to treat *Acher* as a representation of a heretic, let it omit stories of his attempts at sincere repentance with Rabbi Meir⁸; if it wants him to be an actual character, give more consistent details about his character development.

When Steinberg writes about Elisha, his philosophy almost directly contradicts that of the Talmud. Steinberg is solely concerned with internal dialogue and rationale, and looks at Elisha and his contemporaries from an internal perspective. Take the following passage from *As a Driven Leaf* which occurs after Rabbi Meir informs Elisha that public opinion has swayed against him⁹:

"Poor wretch," Elisha murmured in response, "have you not suffered enough in your own life that you must involve yourself with me? You cannot approve of what I have become any more than the others."

"Oh," Meir exclaimed impetuously, "surely friendship is like the eating of a pomegranate! One savors the seeds and is sustained by them. Who gives a thought to the rind?"

"That," Elisha teased bravely to hide the sting of the bittersweet judgment of himself, "is a good epigram. But," he went on after a pause, grave again, "there are no seeds. It is all rind. I have nothing left to teach you. Your knowledge almost equals mine. Your faith exceeds mine. What sustenance is there in me?"

Meir's eyes were steady but bright with tears.

"That love," he quoted from the Tradition, "which is founded on earthly circumstance vanisheth with the circumstance; that love which is beyond circumstance abideth forever."

And Elisha was still with grateful wonder.

The above exchange from *As a Driven Leaf* is based on a passage in the Talmud¹⁰ and deals with an obvious question: why was Rabbi Meir, one of the preeminent sages of the time, associating with, and defending, Elisha? Meir answers that Elisha still has good qualities which are compared to the seeds of a pomegranate. He is concerned with Elisha's good points and not his heresy. This justification is given to Elisha himself, who genuinely mulls over Meir's arguments and is emotionally affected as a result. He muses aloud that "there are no seeds" and that Meir has nothing left to learn. Meir, referencing the Talmudic paradigm of David and Jonathan's relationship with no material basis, reveals that their friendship goes deeper than anything practical. It is a moving scene which evokes the bitterness in Elisha's heart in the reader. Meir's sayings are used as comfort and genuine discourse with heresy.

Compare this to the passage of Talmud on which Steinberg's exchange is loosely based, and, at the very least, the source of the fruit-rind metaphor.¹¹

⁷ b. Kiddushin 39b

⁸ b. Hagiga 15a

⁹ Steinberg, M, Epilogue.

¹⁰ Hagiga 15b

¹¹ Ibid 15b

And Rabbi Meir, how could he learn Torah from the mouth of Acher? But didn't Rabba bar bar Hana say that Rabbi Yohanan said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek Torah from his mouth; for he is an angel of the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 2:7)? The verse teaches: If the rabbi is similar to an angel of the Lord of hosts, perfect in his ways, they should seek Torah from his mouth; but if not, they should not seek Torah from his mouth...

When Rav Dimi came from Eretz Yisrael to Babylonia, he said: In the West, Eretz Yisrael, they say: Rabbi Meir ate a half-ripe date and threw the peel away. Rava taught: What is the meaning of that which is written: "I went down into the garden of nuts, to look at the green plants of the valley" (Song of Songs 6:11)? Why are Torah scholars compared to nuts? To tell you: Just as this nut, despite being soiled with mud and excrement, its content is not made repulsive; so too a Torah scholar, although he has sinned, his Torah is not made repulsive.

Though superficially similar, these passages have almost antithetical goals. The Talmud is operating in an apologetic manner, explaining why Rabbi Meir still associated with *Acher* after his heretical proclivities emerged. Rabbi Meir's interaction with him is a utilitarian extraction of raw Torah knowledge, with a *priori* understanding that *Acher* is a rotten individual who has nothing else to offer. Steinberg uses the metaphor as a literary device to dive into the internal world of Meir and Elisha's relationship and allow us, the audience, to sympathize with Elisha. Meir uses it as a veneer of justification for the time he is spending with Elisha, but importantly reminds him that Elisha still has seeds inside of him. This leads to Meir's declaration of their eternal friendship in the very next line. The Talmud's focus on *Acher* is to justify his existence in the reader's world of rabbinic Judaism, whereas Steinberg's line justifies Elisha's struggle to himself.

Joyce's Stephen fits much more into Elisha's paradigm than *Acher's*. *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is told from Stephen's perspective, its language evolving as he grows from child to adult. It centers on the picture of the world around him. Take this opening text from *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:¹²

Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo....

By the end of the novel, the language has evolved concurrently with Stephen. The language has become more complex and evolved from basic descriptors to compound, emotional narratives:

*His father's whistle, his mother's mutterings, the screech of an unseen maniac were to him now so many voices offending and threatening to humble the pride of his youth. He drove their echoes even out of his heart with an execration; but, as he walked down the avenue and felt the grey morning light falling about him through the dripping trees and smelt the strange wild smell of the wet leaves and bark, his soul was loosed of her miseries.*¹³

The Talmud uses *Acher* as a method to understand the world— specifically, the heresy within it — but Joyce uses the world and Stephen's reflections within it as a vehicle to understand himself. The book is written from Stephen's perspective in a stream of consciousness

¹² Joyce, James, P.1, *A Portrait of The Artist As a Young Man*. Penguin Books, 1991.

¹³ Joyce, James, Chapter 5.

form, but not from a first-person perspective. Joyce maps out a dark world which is only illuminated and understandable by the light of Stephen's presence. When he is happy, he sees "trim front gardens" and "kindly lights in the windows."¹⁴ When overcome by lustful desire, he sees only "narrow and dirty streets" adorned with "women and girls dressed in long vivid gowns."¹⁵ Though in many ways Stephen's Ireland stands in direct opposition to his personal values, his presence is what paints the scenes around him in vivid hues or dull colors.

Steinberg also uses an antagonistic world to sharply define Elisha's character and struggles, but uses its immobility instead of its dynamism. *As a Driven Leaf* is told from a rigid third-person perspective and paints a grounded image of both first century Judean and Roman societies. As Elisha's belief is sowed with the first seeds of doubt, Elisha is frustrated by the stagnancy of the world. Even as his three friends— Akiva, Ben-Zoma, and Ben-Azzai— form a group to delve into mysticism, they do it only for the purpose of humoring Elisha and attempting to bring him back to mainstream, rabbinic Judaism. He cannot change his friends, he cannot change Roman society from its meaninglessness and immorality, and he cannot change Judaism from its unwavering rejection of reason. This is encapsulated by Elisha's end and Meir's commentary on it:

*Then he[Meir] bethought himself of the poor shattered body before him, and of the weary search which had worn it to death.*¹⁶

Elisha is shattered by the world. He is rejected by every society available to him, and he cannot understand life as he goes off to seek "the answer to this baffling pageant which is the world."¹⁷ Elisha goes off without real hope or chance of redemption, and dies in this state of limbo.

Stephen's heresy and rejection of Irish Catholic society comes to a totally different crescendo. Stephen is not torn between reason and belief like Elisha, but, instead, is sandwiched between aesthetic desire and religious piety. Stephen throws off both the yoke of hedonism and the unwavering practices of the Catholic Church, but he holds on to both belief and artistic ambition. This differs sharply from Elisha's inability to hold on to belief or pure reason by the end of *As a Driven Leaf*. In one of Joyce's most famous lines, Stephen vows to "to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race."¹⁸ He goes off to forge a solution to the inconsistencies he sees in society himself, being fully unaware that a solution does not exist and he himself must therefore create it. In contrast, Elisha goes, in his own words, to "find" something and not to make it. What he seeks does not exist in Milton Steinberg's twentieth century society, let alone the first century world; his quest is doomed to fail. Stephen's usage of the word "race" shows his need for not only personal redemption, but also the drive to bring change to the society around him.

It is worthwhile to discuss the way in which Joyce uses the word "race," through Joyce. In the simplest sense, Stephen is referring to either the Irish people or the Catholic Church. There is ample evidence to dismiss the possibility of Stephen talking in a purely modern racial sense.¹⁹ Historically, the word "race" has meant a group of people bound by common characteristics or beliefs.²⁰ Jonathan Swift uses the word in his 18th century work *Gulliver's Travels*:

¹⁴ Joyce, James, Chapter 2.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Steinberg, M, 477.

¹⁷ Steinberg, M, 475.

¹⁸ Joyce, James, Chapter 5.

¹⁹ However, this perspective is not universal among literary critics. See Vincent Cheng's *Joyce, Race, and Empire*, which is of the opinion that Stephen's race is primarily biological.

²⁰ Merriam-Webster

*"...whoever could make two ears of corn..would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together."*²¹

While Irish nationalism and identity are essential themes in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen is discussing his ideological race, the people from whom his perspective sprung from, and those who occupy his social landscape. Importantly, he does not use race to mean the "human race," which can be seen by Stephen's conversation with Davin in which, during their discussion, Davin attempts to convince Stephen to adopt a mantle of unwavering Irish nationalism. Stephen struggles to keep calm and defends his practices by leveraging his identity:

*"This race and this country and this life produced me, he said. I shall express myself as I am."*²²

Stephen's argument hinges on particularism, and it would be extraneous to refer to the human race in his defense; he is obviously a member of humanity. Instead, he is referring to his identity-group, whether that means the Irish people, Catholics, or a specific subset of Europeans in a similar state of religious doubt.

Stephen's decision to leave Ireland, his homeland which he loves, and his desire to forge the "uncreated conscience" of his race cast him in the role of an unlikely Christ figure. Stephen's struggle between aestheticism and piety manifests itself primarily in personal struggles with lust and religious guilt, both of which are personal experiences. His epiphany that causes him to devote his life as an artist—the sight of a beautiful girl wading in Dollymount Strand—is also an experience that pertains solely to him. However, his final words of what he wants to do for his people leave no doubt that he is seeking redemption not just for himself, and is leaving Ireland on a sacrificial self-imposed exile. Pericles Lewis sees the "uncreated conscience" as God and Stephen's race as "the body of faithful in need of redemption."²³ Stephen transforms society's rejection of his values into a rejection of society's values, which places the onus on him to create an environment in which he, and those like him, can thrive. He seeks to redeem himself by redeeming his world.

Elisha's situation parallels Stephen, but Elisha's conclusion differs radically. Elisha explores Jewish, representing belief, and Roman society, representing reason, and finds both unappealing. By the end of the novel, he is frustrated by society entirely and doubts his ability to thrive in any environment. He embarks off, alone, in an attempt to find some semblance of meaning in the absence of society. Elisha does not pretend to have lofty goals of changing the world after spending years of his life on that goal. It seems unlikely he has much hope of finding anything at all as the first century world he lived in had few other options.

Elisha is defined by "finding," and Stephen is defined by "forging." Elisha spent his life trying to find something to no avail, though he was sure of its existence at the beginning of his quest. Stephen is elevated to a Christ figure by his willingness to forge something new. Lewis claims that Joyce is alluding to Jesus with his "uncreated conscience." Jesus also fashioned an "uncreated god," for his followers. Only the artist is capable of creation, as a work is defined by its author: it comes into being only when its artist wills it into being. Elisha acts as a kind of logician who can only discover true tenets of the world and is totally unable to create, only to find things that he proves to be true.

²¹Swift, J.; Womersley, D. *Gulliver's Travels*. Cambridge Univ. Press. 2012.

²² Joyce, James, Chapter 5.

²³Lewis, P. *The Conscience of Race*, 89.

While the image of a Christ figure allows us to contextualize some of Joyce's imagery, there are many areas where the analogy fails. Robert Russell's analysis of Joyce's usage of the word "forge" also follows in this vein:²⁴ "forge" clearly indicates a process that is given to both success and failure. Stephen may succeed at his redemption but he also admits a serious possibility of failure. Jesus, being godly, was absolutely certain in his divine mission from the beginning and acted out a predetermined process. In the novel, he seeks redemption but does not become redeemed. Russell's analysis further complements this approach by recognizing the dual meaning of the word "forge," which can also mean to fake or falsify. Stephen's quest may be impossible, and he may have to conceive of something that does not, and cannot, exist. Stephen's own decisions can also be taken as proof that he is not truly a Christ figure; he rejects the institution of the Church and its conceptions of redemption by surpassing Jesus. Whereas Jesus required self-sacrifice to redeem, but Stephen can rescue his society through self-improvement and the sheer will of artistry. He bypasses the divine rules established by Christianity, which provide the paradigm of Jesus in vicarious atonement. By stepping into the domain of men, he enables the possibility of gain without sacrifice but must also risk failure.

There is little precedent for the concept of substitutionary atonement in Judaism, and there is no genuine equivalent to a Christ figure within the tradition. *Acher* in the Talmud represents a figure which is almost wholly opposite from that of Jesus' role in Christian imagery. *Acher* is doomed to be the sole person for whom repentance is impossible, at least in the rabbinic tradition. The logical corollary of this is that repentance is possible for everyone else. The following passage from the Talmud, in which *Acher* seemingly genuinely attempts to repent, provides the basis for our analysis:

The Sages taught: There was once an incident involving Aher, who was riding on a horse on Shabbat, and Rabbi Meir was walking behind him to learn Torah from him. [Aher] said to him: Meir, turn back, for I have already estimated according to the steps of my horse [that] the Shabbat boundary ends here [and you may therefore venture no further.] [Rabbi Meir] said to him: You, too, return. He said to him: But have I not already told you I have already heard behind the curtain[from the Divine]: "Return, rebellious children," apart from Aher? [Rabbi Meir] took hold of him [and] brought him to the study hall. [Acher] said to a child: Recite your verse that you studied today to me. He recited to him: "There is no peace, said the Lord, concerning the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22). He brought him to another study hall. Aher said to a child: Recite your verse to me. He recited to him: "For though you wash with niter, and take for you much soap, yet your iniquity is marked before Me" (Jeremiah 2:22).²⁵

The Talmud portrays *Acher* as being at least somewhat regretful of his actions and only have reservations about his ability to atone for them. The simplest reading of the story is God willed that *Acher* would be denied the chance of repentance. *Acher's* former position as an erudite, righteous sage made his fall from grace so horrifying that, being codified, God himself welcomed all other sinners to repentance except for *Acher*. The verses recited by the children finalizes his damnation, at least in his own mind.

The sinner figure²⁶ is characterized by creating a redemptive opportunity for others through his or her own sinful actions. Though there is ample evidence to paint Stephen Daedalus as a Christ figure, a more careful analysis points to him being a sinner figure. Though Stephen views his decision to pursue aestheticism and leave the Catholic church as a moral and holy endeavor, he is by definition committing what Christians consider a sin. By leaving Ireland, Stephen is dooming himself to be the sinner of his own generation in the hopes that, through his new

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ b. Hagiga 15b

²⁶ *Acher's* position is so parallel yet opposite to a Christ figure that it would be apropos to consider him an "anti-Christ figure," but we will refer to him as a sinner figure to negate confusion with the term "Antichrist." I have created this term specifically for this essay.

“uncreated conscience,” he can be considered righteous in the following generation. Stephen’s inner struggle after contemplating leaving Ireland support this view:

*March 24. Began with a discussion with my mother. Subject: B.V.M. Handicapped by my sex and youth. To escape held up relations between Jesus and Papa against those between Mary and her son. Said religion was not a lying-in hospital. Mother indulgent. Said I have a queer mind and have read too much. Not true. Have read little and understood less. Then she said I would come back to faith because I had a restless mind. **This means to leave church by backdoor of sin and re-enter through the skylight of repentance. Cannot repent. Told her so and asked for sixpence. Got threepence.**²⁷*

Stephen feels he needs to “leave the church by [the] backdoor of sin” as he “cannot repent,” or at least not under his current conditions. However, he hopes to “re-enter through the skylight of repentance” at some unclear point in the future.

The sinner figure framework is more applicable to *Acher* and Stephen than it is to Steinberg’s Elisha. A core aspect of Stephen’s intent is to redeem his society. The Talmud reveals nothing about *Acher*’s intent, but he is construed by the Talmud into a sinner figure role. For Elisha, nothing about his character arc suggests any sort of redemption on behalf of his people or society. His key motivator throughout *As A Driven Leaf* is to find an answer to theology based solely on reason in order to satisfy his need for philosophical completeness:

*He could not believe simply because it was easier or more expedient. He could not have faith unless his mind were first satisfied. He had set himself to a task, the discovery of truth by reason, pure and unafraid.*²⁸

Elisha’s actions are not selfish, but they are personal in their aims rather than societal. His last words to Meir have him convey his desire to “find” an “answer” to his life for himself. This is in stark contrast to Stephen’s wish to “forge” something for his “race.”

The sinner figure has a dark side which is in both the Talmud and *Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man*. Rabbi Yehuda Amital, the first *rosh yeshiva*, of Yeshivat Har Etzion²⁹, analyzed *Acher*’s story of attempted repentance and concluded that there was no divine voice condemning *Acher*. Rather, he had closed the gates of redemption on himself out of despair.³⁰ Similarly, Russell’s analysis of the word “forge” as an artifice implies that Stephen may be unconsciously faking an ideology that has basis in reality and that can only be manufactured fraudulently. In this analysis, Stephen strays even further from righteousness and in turn becomes a false messiah: his approach to life is unholy and illegitimate.

George Lukacs’ definition of the realist novel, “the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God,” only applies to some of the works this essay has mentioned. The Talmud is not a novel, and this would seem to be the work where God has least abandoned the world. There are countless examples of divine intervention found throughout the Talmud. However, this analysis concerns *Acher*’s life, which is perhaps the only passage of the Talmud in which

²⁷ Joyce, James, Chapter 5.

²⁸ Steinberg, M, 244

²⁹ A *rosh yeshiva* is the religious leader of a *yeshiva*, or a Jewish educational facility which traditionally studies Talmud and other religious texts. The term literally translates to “head of *yeshiva*.” Yeshivat Har Etzion is one such program in Israel.

³⁰ למועדים הישיבה ראשי שיחות. Retrieved March 21, 2022, from http://etzion.gush.net/vbm/search_results.php?koteret=%D7%A9%D7%99%D7%97%D7%95%D7%AA+%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%A9%D7%99+%D7%94%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%99%D7%91%D7%94+%D7%9C%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%A2%D7%93%D7%99%D7%9D&subject=%D7%A9%D7%99%D7%97%D7%95%D7%AA+%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%A2%D7%93%D7%99%D7%9D#8

God is exiled. Whether *Acher* was exiled by God or whether he exiled God from his own life, it is clear he is operating in a framework in which God is suspiciously absent. *Acher's* disbelief, according to the Talmud, is intra-religious. He sees contradictions within Judaic theology — either as a child dies for the very actions which should be rewarded with long life, or a Torah scholar dying to a Roman barbarian — and operates as a heretic only *vis a vis* his Judaism. The Talmud does not define *Acher* by what he believes, but by what he does *not* believe. *Acher's* character development depicts the heretic when God's exile is formed by willful expulsion and exclusion.

Steinberg's *As A Driven Leaf* positions God's abandonment into his work through His absence. Elisha is thrashed around an unforgiving world and, thus, is unable to find acceptance within any civilization or ideology. He departs from his world without friends and philosophically bankrupt. Elisha longs for a belief in which he can invest his days, and, yet, his wish is unresolved by God. He is the independent heretic, the one whose heresy stems from a theo-philosophical perspective. As compared to *Acher*, his mission is to find *the* answer and his gripes are not specific to Judaism. Elisha is the heretic who feels God's abandonment is through his absence and lack of presence.

Joyce's work contrasts these approaches by presenting a world in which God's presence is just beyond reach. The end of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* seems to indicate there is a possibility of redemption for Stephen. Stephen's heresy is institutionally grounded against the hypocrisy and policies of the Catholic church; it has little to do with fundamental religious beliefs. Stephen feels God's presence, and God is simply chased out at certain points during the novel, whether by Stephen's rote piety or overbearing hedonism. At the end of the novel, Stephen's mission to leave Ireland symbolizes that God's exile is only temporary, and there is a possibility of paradise in this world. Stephen's heresy is characterized as a search for God, whereby if there is any exile at all, it is temporary.

Lukacs, who hated modernism³¹, was essentially describing a realist novel. According to Christopher Keep, a professor at Western University, the defining feature of a realist novel is its closure and harmonization.³² Life is a zero-sum game with society as the static factor, with any changes or disharmonies that occur during the novel resolving by its end. This mode of thinking can be seen in Elisha and *Acher*, who end their journey by dying without changing their base religion. Stephen is different from them in that he leaves Ireland with his fate uncertain while attempting to change the world. He alone embodies the passions of modernism, which exists in an uncertain and shifting civilization but admits the possibility of change and redemption. In a modernist work, paradise is not some otherworldly concept, but, instead, is a rational possibility. If a realist work is a circle whose conclusion is identical to its beginning, a modernist work is a line pointing out towards an uncertain future.

Though the characters analyzed in this essay appear similar superficially, their differences are important in understanding heresy and belief. All of these characters chose a path of intellectual suffering in the face of an acerebral tranquility, but the way they approached their challenges and their quest's conclusion is grounded in the writer's cultural background and approach to belief and religious reform. The tragedy of these heretical figures, many of whom— or their symbolic personalities— were integral to the rich array of Jewish philosophy and thought we see today, is in the way they dealt with their doubts on a socio-cultural level rather than the doubts themselves. Intellectual challenges and struggle should be incorporated and pondered, not banished or exiled. James Joyce, who struggled with belief his entire life, encapsulated this point perfectly. When he was once asked “When did you leave the Catholic church?” He simply responded, “That's for the Church to say.”

³¹ Gluck, Mary. “Toward a Historical Definition of Modernism: Georg Lukacs and the Avant-Garde.” *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 58, no. 4, University of Chicago Press, 1986, 845–82, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1880111>.

³²Keep, C., McLaughlin, T., & Parmar, R.). Realism and the realist novel. (n.d).