

Rhapsody in *Blut*: Blood Feud and Blood Fusion in Israel Zangwill's *The Melting Pot*

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers a keyword of current discourse on racial integration and ethnic pluralism in its original context by investigating Israel Zangwill's play *The Melting Pot* (1908). Zangwill's utopian vision for ethnic assimilation, set against his Anglo-Jewish background and his transformation from a Zionist and territorialist to an assimilationist, is read as an attempt to find a feasible solution to the Jewish Question. Characters from the play embodying Judaic orthodoxy and partial assimilation are presented as doomed to failure, whereas the union of the offspring of an anti-Semitic Russian aristocrat with the Jewish eyewitness and victim of massacre David Quixano is represented as the new paradigm of eschewing Old World hatred and espousing New World tolerance and intermarriage. The wound David has sustained in the Tsarist *pogrom* is symbolized as a historical trauma to be purged in the ethnic melting pot. In conclusion, Werner Sollors's idea of descent and consent in conceptualizing the new approach to ethnic pluralism is challenged and modified through a discussion of American President Theodore Roosevelt's initial enthusiastic advocacy of the play and his later backpedaling in immigration policies and immigrant assimilation, demonstrating Zangwill's premature optimism and reinforcing the dilemma of Jewish assimilation.

KEY WORDS: the melting pot, anti-Semitism, Jewish drama, Israel Zangwill, assimilation, Theodore Roosevelt

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血色狂想曲： 桑威爾劇作大鎔爐之血仇與血親

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摘 要

民族熔爐已成為族群融合與種族多元論述之重要比喻，本文即探討最早讓此用語廣為流傳的文本，桑威爾的1908年戲劇《大鎔爐》之衍生歷史文化背景。英裔猶太人的劇作家桑威爾企圖尋找猶太民族得以安居的烏托邦，來解決亙古的猶太問題，而以紐約為代表的美國遂成其理想標的。劇中猶太家庭三代象徵了對移民同化的迥異看法：老一輩全然抗拒同化，中生代表裡不一，新生代則藉由與異族結合而化解恩怨，建立融合。主人翁大衛雖幼時在俄國目睹家人被反猶沙皇軍屠殺，而遭嚴重身心創傷，卻棄絕舊世界恩怨，擁抱新大陸和解，而與仇家結為親家，創傷經由融爐淬鍊，因而昇華。最後藉由老羅斯福總統理論支持族群熔爐，實際卻保留的現實政治，探討美國族群理論中索勒斯所謂由同源至同意的轉向需再商榷的必要。

關鍵詞：民族鎔爐、反猶太主義、猶太戲劇、桑威爾、同化、老羅斯福

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Introduction: The Melting Pot and Israel Zangwill in Context

In his 1899 essay *Zionism*, Zangwill proposes four solutions for the Jewish Question: national regeneration, religious regeneration, disappearance, and non-action (Nahshon 31). Taking an ambivalent stance, he remained open to all four possibilities, until two years later when he officially joined the Zionist Congress in 1901, and by making the well-known statement that “Palestine is a country without people; the Jews are a people without a country,” he made it clear that he opted for the first solution of “national regeneration,” and his preferred choice would be Palestine. However, he came to see the Palestine cause as doomed and experienced an about-face regarding the repatriation issue by breaking away from the Zionist camp and establishing the splinter group ITO in 1902. As will be seen in *The Melting Pot*, the first option of national regeneration remains his top priority, though the nation in question has shifted to the USA.¹

The term the melting pot has been used so often in discourse of American racial relations and its imagery so often invoked in discussions of assimilation that its origin seems to have been obscured by its popularity. Though similar ideas have been explored by thinkers such as Crèvecoeur, Emerson, and Frederic Jackson Turner, it is Anglo-Jewish writer Israel Zangwill who has concretized and popularized the term in his play *The Melting Pot* (1908).² Acknowledged as “a part of the American official mythology” (Gleason 21), the

¹ The obvious reference of the paper’s title alludes to George Gershwin’s jazz-inspired tone poem *Rhapsody in Blue* (1924), with *Blut* meaning blood in Yiddish as well as German. Like David Quixano in the play, Gershwin is a New York resident of Russian Jewish descent. The connection between Jewish immigrant composers of American popular songs and Zangwill’s *The Melting Pot* has been established by Charles Hamm in his paper on Irving Berlin, whose songs are perceived to be celebrations of the ethnic Melting Pot. According to Gershwin, “with its steely rhythms, its rattley-bang. . . I suddenly heard - and even saw on paper - the complete construction of the rhapsody from beginning to end. I heard it as a sort of musical kaleidoscope of America - of our vast melting pot, of our unduplicated national pep, of our blues, our metropolitan madness” (Pollack 704).

² The French-born American writer J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur has alluded to the image of the melting pot in his epistolary travelogue *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782): “Here individuals of all nations are *melting* into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world” (70). The crucible has been a persistent metaphor of the formation of America as a nation, founding father John Adams is known to have argued that “People and nations are forged in the fires of adversity” (Dauer 140). German immigrants also employed the metaphor of *Schmelztiegel* (melting jar) in mid-19th century. In his journal in 1845, not published until 1912, Emerson refers to America as a racially and culturally blended “smelting pot” (Sollors 95). Historian Frederick Jackson Turner in his influential 1893 essay *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* proclaims the frontier crucible: “The frontier promoted the formation of a composite nationality for the American people. . . . In the crucible of the frontier the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality nor characteristics. The process has gone on from the early days to our own.”³⁷ (11)

concept has generated such broad implications and far-reaching repercussions that it would be rewarding to re-examine the original play that has given rise to the term and investigate the historical context in which the metaphor is created.

Capturing the American imagination shortly after the play premiered in 1908, the melting pot metaphor, as a clarion call for peaceful co-existence of diverse races in the United States, swiftly gained currency nationwide, and by 1913 it had been picked up as a catchword in the political arena by President Woodrow Wilson, when he championed the national “melting pot” in his pivotal book *The New Freedom*, thus enshrining it as an integral part of the dominant American ideology (Sollors 96). However, the concept does find its share of critics, having been dismissed as an all-purpose “dumping ground,” or even “witches’ cauldron” for its conceptual ambivalence (Gleason 34).³

The mixed reception accorded the concept finds close parallels in the dramatic conflict of the play, in which warring camps take distinct lines concerning issues of ethnic integration and cultural assimilation. The playwright Israel Zangwill (1864-1926), “a towering figure of Anglo-Jewish life” (Nahshon 2), remains a prominent, if somewhat peripheral figure on the mainstream scene of Victorian arts and letters, admired by Oscar Wilde and discussed by Virginia Woolf and Bernard Shaw.⁴ He was born of Jewish immigrant parents in Whitechapel, London, an East End ghetto inhabited mainly by Jewish immigrants and notorious for its squalid poverty, which the Yiddish actor Jacob Adler found unmatched even by “the worst slums of New York” (232-233). Calling himself “a Cockney Jew,” Zangwill never forgot his working-class origins and always sympathized with the disadvantaged. The stage adaptation of

³ President Wilson views “the great melting pot of America” as embodied in “public schools”, as “the place where we are all made Americans of,” “where men of every race, and of every origin, and of every station of life send their children. . . and where, being mixed together, they are all infused with the American spirit, and developed into the American man and the American woman” (61). However, the concept has been taken to task by both religious and philosophical camps. Rabbi Judah Magnes has rebuked the play for its implied advocacy of “dejudaization” through its urgent calls of complete assimilation (Sachar 379). There were Jews such as Rabbi Joel Blau who preferred to maintain his “Oriental soul” “as his birthright, not to be traded away for the contents of any pot—even though it be the Melting Pot” (qtd. in Sollors 98). It also came under fire from one of its most vocal critics, Jewish American philosopher Horace Kallen, who advocated the preservation of differences in race and culture in a call for cultural pluralism which comes closer to today’s idea of multiculturalism.

⁴ Virginia Woolf, in her diary entry on April 8, 1918, notes concerning Zangwill’s play *Too Much Money* that she was “fairly overwhelmed—made to bristle all over with ideas, questions, possibilities. . .” (134). For Bernard Shaw, in his letter to actress Eleanor Robson about the play *Merely Mary Ann*, he mentions only his immense admiration for her acting but says nothing about Zangwill’s play (Holroyd 100). The major Victorian novel dealing with the Jewish Question in a more or less sympathetic light is undoubtedly George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*. However, its authenticity has been called into question and despite her “intuition” and good intentions, Eliot has been dismissed as a “brilliant outsider” (Nahshon 22).

his popular novel *Children of the Ghetto* (1892) was “the first English-language play produced on the mainstream American stage to be entirely dedicated to a serious portrayal of Jewish life” (Merwin). His Jewish dramatic representation succeeds in discarding the stereotype of the “stage Jew” popular well into the end of the nineteenth century, portraying instead three-dimensional Jewish characters endowed with complex thoughts and feelings.

Hailed as “the preeminent Jewish writer” (Nahshon 1) as a novelist and dramatist, Zangwill is also well known on the political front as a Zionist and territorialist, founding the ITO (Jewish Territorialist Organization) in 1905.⁵ It is no mere coincidence that the establishment of a separate movement from Zionism coincides with the writing of the play *The Melting Pot*, since the splinter group sets out to locate an alternative territory for settling the European Jews other than in Palestine, and the U.S. has been designated as a likely destination for mass immigration.

Zangwill sees America as the potential Promised Land based not only on the practical possibilities it offers but also on the ideological assumptions about American identity. Being an American amounts to making “an ideological commitment” (Lipset 31), because, as G. K. Chesterton puts it, “America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed” (qtd. in Lipset 31). Shedding the age-old European tradition of seeing national identity as culturally entrenched and ethnically ingrained, Americans regard identity as more about becoming than being, subscribing to a set of secular concepts and convictions rather than a dogma of sacred faith. This American Exceptionalism, which in a sense is shared by Jewish Exceptionalism, is what appeals to Zangwill and drives him to write the *pièce à thèse*, a thesis play built on issues of ethnicity and grounded on concepts of assimilation.⁶

The play was written at a time when Jewish immigration to the US had reached its zenith. Between 1900 and the outbreak of WWI in 1914, an average of one million immigrants entered the US (Gleason 23), and between

⁵ ITO is short for Jewish Territorial Organization since I is the equivalent of J in Hebrew alphabet which does not contain any J. Zangwill’s father hailed from Latvia, and mother from Poland, both from humble origins. His proletariat sympathies are shown in his advocacy of social causes and the suffrage movement. Zangwill deplored the stereotypical depictions of the English Jews, protesting that the Jews, like the English, cannot be “summed up in any single, or indeed in any score, of types” (Nahshon 22). His ties to America were tenuous but sustained: he had more plays premiered in America than in Britain, and he authored many prayers which have entered the American synagogue liturgy.

⁶ Historians such as Dorothy Ross and Ian Tyrrell perceive exceptionalism as “a fiercely held ideology with deep historical roots in two of this nation’s most fertile traditions, republicanism and Protestant millennialism” (Haskell 152).

1880 and 1920, over a million Jews, mostly from East Europe, arrived in New York alone. The Jewish population in New York alone swelled from approximately 60, 000 to over 1.5 million by the time of the Great War, rendering New York the greatest Jewish city in the world.⁷ Settling in a metropolis where only about fifteen percent of its residents are able to trace their family histories in America to more than one generation, the new immigrants are “passionately optimistic” about the future (Hamm 10). Just as the New World was seen as the Promised Land, New York City was regarded as in Rischin’s words “the promised city.” As Rabbi Rothenthim puts it in his poem *The Jewish Immigrant* (1885),⁸

Far, far toward the West,
There is a great country,
Far across the sea it holds out
To us its brotherly hand.

The Jews fled the Old World of “suffering, ignominy and agony” to the New World of hope and liberty “where [they] can find rest.” It is on such a dichotomy of opposing the old and the new that the play proceeds. Yet the mass immigration also brought in its wake a backlash among the elite class who lashed out against the foreign exodus and advocated a “new nativism” (Dyer 123), highlighting the problematic of assimilation that runs as a motif throughout the play.

***Sinfonia Domestica* in Three Generations⁹**

American historian Frederic Jackson Turner compares Europe and America in terms of literary genres, regarding the former as essentially a tragedy and the latter a romance, a polarity fully borne out in the Manichaeic pattern of duality in the play: an evil Old Europe vs. a good New America,

⁷ When an East Side immigrant girl married a New Yorker millionaire in 1908, the union was widely publicized as a demonstration of Zangwill’s melting pot theory as “Christian and Jew, rich and poor, American and immigrant joined in bonds of matrimony” (Rischin 220).

⁸ The poem was first printed in *Die Deborah*, a German Jewish paper published in Cincinnati.

⁹ The heading is derived from Richard Strauss’ symphonic poem *Sinfonia Domestica* or Domestic Symphony, which alludes to his contented domestic life. It premiered in 1904 on his American tour, therefore related to the time of Zangwill’s writing the play.

contrasting the “pain of the old world and the hope of the new” (141).¹⁰ The structure of the play is built on a melodramatic formation of dichotomy, complete with the tried and true formula of the hero and the heroine from enemy camps inevitably falling in love, like the romance of *Romeo and Juliet*; in fact the play has often been dubbed as its Jewish counterpart.

The Melting Pot is essentially a domestic melodrama aspiring to be an ethnic romance. The family at the center of the play, the Quixanos, is descended from Sephardic Jewry in Spain, and their family history in a way encapsulates the evolution of the Jewish Diaspora as a whole: from their Spanish expulsion in 1492, to subsequent exile in Eastern Europe and persecution in the 19th century Tsarist Russia, to the latest immigration to America. Not only does the diasporic trajectory of the family parallel Jewish history at large, but the three family generations also embody three contrasting attitudes towards assimilation that reflect the Jewish identity dilemma as immigrants: the older generation clings to the past, the young generation looks to the future, while the middle generation gets caught in between.

The main character in charge of stirring the melting pot is David Quixano, representing the young generation. A happy-go-lucky boy by nature, compared in the play to “a sunbeam took human form when he was born” (38), David has been plagued by personal demons that keep haunting, a consequence of the traumatic event of witnessing his parents and sister butchered by Russian soldiers and himself bayoneted in the shoulder back in their European hometown Kishineff, leaving him deeply scarred physically and mentally.¹¹

David suffers the common lot of many a Jewish child during imperial Russia as the so-called “orphan of *pogrom*,” when an estimated 2000 families were left homeless in the wake of the Kishineff massacre (Nahshon 32). The trauma results in his indiscriminating rejection of anything European, a repudiation best encapsulated in one single image: his traumatized vision of

¹⁰ According to Fabian, “Turner enlists the Hegelian dialectic in service of the American past. He understands European history as a double plot—romance for the elites, tragedy for the masses. In America, however, history had unfolded as a romance for ordinary men” (576).

¹¹ The massacre of Kishineff is a major pogrom committed against the Jewish civilians with the tacit consent of the Russian authorities. It occurred in 1903 in Kinishieff (or Kishinev), or what is now the Moldova capital Chisinau. It occurred again in 1907, around the time when the play was being written. It was estimated that 49 Jews died, 500 were wounded, 700 houses destroyed, and 600 shops looted (Nahshon 32). Significantly, the carnage not only awakened the world to the complicity of the Russian authorities in anti-Semitic persecution, but also proved a major turning point for the Zionists, as a “morality tale” about the desperate perils of Jewish Diaspora and created the rallying call for overseas Jews to set up a Jewish homeland (Nahshon 33).

repeatedly witnessing “the bleeding body of my mother, the cold, fiendish face of the Russian officer, supervising the slaughter” (139). Traumatic memories tend to send him into a state of hysteria, as indicated by Zangwill’s stage directions throughout the play such as “half-sobbing,” “almost hysterically” (53), “hysterically,” “as if seeing his vision” (97) and “dazed but ecstatic” (141).

David’s traumatic memory is perennially stirred by the physical scar. Despite his brilliant musicality, as suggested by his name that echoes the musically savant, harp-strumming Biblical namesake, David comes to fail in his career as a concert violinist because the very act of playing the violin, with the instrument resting on his shoulder, is a potent physical reminder that literally provokes and metaphorically invokes the traumatizing scar inflicted by the *pogrom*: bowing the violin is tantamount to fingering the wound.

True to the trauma victim who keeps resisting yet can’t help but persist in remembering the traumatizing scene, David is compelled to play with his wound through music almost in spite of himself. The compulsion culminates in the moment when David comes closest to success as a violinist with his debut at the prestigious Carnegie Hall in sight: he is struck by a blow that is literal and metaphoric at once; being hit on the shoulder by conductor Pappelmeister, who in his eagerness to display his appreciation, happens to land his heavy hand right on the spot where David has sustained the severest injury. The physical impact triggers more than corporeal pain, it sets in motion the agonizing memories of atrocities committed against his family in Russia. The traumatic wound leaves an indelible stamp on David: even though physically it could have faded, psychically it remains branded.

David encrypts his trauma in a euphemism as “a legacy from Russia,” referring to his own physical afflictions as well as the psychic shock of witnessing the slaughter of his family (139). As such a relic of agony, the debilitating blow can only come from old Europe, with Pappelmeister being a German musician, further demonstrating the suffocating clutch that old Europe still holds over the young generation even in the new world. To relinquish such an undesirable legacy, the young David is determined to take up the monumental sling by embracing the cause of the American melting pot in order to battle the juggernaut Goliath that is Europe, hopefully also to exorcize his haunting ghosts in the process.

If the German conductor’s vigorous pat spurs through the scar a resounding repercussion of the trauma, seeing the butcher who has murdered

his family vis-à-vis simply sets off crushing shockwaves that send him staggering: as he recognizes the “monster” as none other than the baron, Vera’s father, his violin string “breaks with a tragic snap” (148). The snapped string symbolizes the return to the scene of trauma, conjuring up the tragedy of a broken family and the whole diasporic race behind it.

He manages to inch away from his trauma only by turning away from performing to composing, and the creative conversion from practice to theory proves a salutary step as the symphony he is to compose helps dispel the thrall of persecution paranoia. David’s symphony is more than musical and therapeutical. Entitled *American Symphony*, it is dedicated to his adopted land, a paean to America as the land of freedom and to be played significantly on the Fourth of July to celebrate American independence. The very music is inspired by a vision flashing into his mind when he sees “the Jewish children—a thousand of ‘em—saluting the Flag” on their entry into the new world” (52). The symbolic gesture is reminiscent of the way Czech composer Antonin Dvorak created his *Symphony No.9 “New World”* (1893) as a tribute to the American spirit during his sojourn. In his own words, music for David is simply *Bas-Kol*, meaning a voice from heaven in Hebrew: it should be utilitarian, instrumental in furthering a higher cause rather than staying purely instrumental as an art for art’s sake aesthetic practice. Music thus virtually attains the stature of a heavenly mandate. Instead of “obey[ing] the trumpet call of Isaiah” (Nahshon 32) as in his short-lived Zionist days, Zangwill is playing a different tune through his mouthpiece persona David: an American symphony with the disparate cacophony of instruments merging in the ethnic melting pot into a harmonious whole.

Inspired by “the seething of the Crucible” (33), the symphony targets the new immigrants to America as its audience, a disenfranchised group not conventionally associated with the sophisticated symphonic form. Instead of demanding from them a cerebral understanding of the intricacies of sonata form, David expects his immigrant audience to grasp intuitively with their “hearts” and “souls” the celestial message celebrating the ethnic melting pot in the new world.

The new world symphony could be considered to consist of three movements that parallel the three generations of the Quixanos, and at the center stands Uncle Mendel. As different movements contrast in expression, so do different generations. The conflict between David and his uncle Mendel mainly

results from their contrasting views of assimilation through blood fusion in marriage. While Mendel sees America as nothing more than a shelter for the Jews, hence no reason for an all-out cultural assimilation, David is convinced that old Europe has been encumbered with the sediment of anti-Semitic history to such an extent that it is practically impossible for the Jews to thrive anew as a race without making a clean break with their European past.

Mendel is a man subject to transformation, crossing easily between cultural boundaries, an ethnic masquerade that could be facilely put on and off just like his outfit: he could be “completely transmogrified” from one minute wearing a Jewish *yarmulke* to putting on “a Prince Albert coat and boots” in the next (13). He is no Orthodox Jew, and deems Judaism more as an ethnic and cultural, rather than religious identity. That Mendel uses religion conveniently as a shield of defense can be seen in his disagreement over David’s decision to marry the Russian girl Vera. The usually secular uncle takes an abrupt religious turn when confronted with the potential hostility of the Gentile world outside. Confronted with Vera’s puzzled query about why her letter to David remains unopened, Mendel justifies himself by asserting that “to a pious Jew letters and oysters are alike forbidden” on the holy day of Sabbath, when all labor should cease to make room for spiritual observances (20). Mendel’s rejection of outright assimilation is a far cry from his mother’s unbending religious orthodoxy. As he puts it, “It is not so much the synagogue, it is the call of our blood through immemorial generations” that guides and beckons (95). Mendel objects to the alliance between Vera and David not on religious so much as on ethnic grounds. He adheres to his faith in Jewishness, not through practicing religious Judaism, but through fidelity to culture, history and race. His is an ethnic identification free of strong religious attachment, a secular culturalism that is as pro-ethnic as it is anti-religious.¹²

The conflict takes distinctly cultural forms from the very beginning of the play. The curtain rises startlingly on a curse, “brainless, earless, thumb-fingered Gentile!” (2), Mendel’s private curse hurled against his inept music pupil who has just closed the door behind him, showing Mendel’s own sense of superiority in his European cultural heritage and Jewish tradition of

¹² Mendel’s staunch rejection of blood fusion is representative of a model of ethnic assimilation found in other races as well. “I don’t mind being in the melting pot as long as I don’t melt in it,” a co-habitation without active integration maintains a separate peace that might be fraught with underlying tension. He could only settle for superficial assimilation, including social interaction with the Gentiles and his outward appearance, as shown in his being “transmogrified” into the get-up of a “gentleman” at home (13), but at heart he remains an unadulterated Jew.

virtuoso fiddling. His off-the-cuff epithets also betray the underlying ethnic resentment repressed and concealed beneath the civilized facade.

Like many Jews throughout history, Mendel seeks asylum rather than assimilation, regarding America as just another temporary refuge that the Jews take out of necessity, rather than choice. However, David chooses assimilation out of choice, arguing that the Old Europe is beyond redemption: “These countries were not in the making. They were old civilizations stamped with the seal of creed. In such countries the Jew may be right to stand out. But here in this new secular Republic we must look forward” (97). David turns his back on the countries that are “stamped with the seal of creed” as viable destinations for the permanent Jewish settlement, because they all bear the imperishable imprint of antiquated European culture; a cultural stamping that leads inexorably in its racist logical conclusion only to the traumatic stamp of the bayonet on his shoulder. He even gives up the golden opportunity to study composition with *maestros* in Germany due to his virtually knee-jerk repulsion of classical European music. However, if the embedded cultural stamp of old Europe cannot emerge as a clean slate out of the New World melting pot, and consequently should be left out of it altogether, David is convinced that his anguished stamp of physical and psychic trauma is destined to be healed and erased in the American ethnic mix:

David. A fig for your feuds and vendettas! Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians—into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American.

Mendel. I should have thought the American was made already—eighty millions of him. (33)

In the above exchange one can discern dual perspectives on the formation of American identity. Mendel believes that being American is an inherent identity “always already” formulated *en bloc*; this comes in contradistinction to David’s view that American identity is not naturally acquired but constantly in the making, subject to being formed and reformed. In order for the reformation to work, the ancient hatchet has to be buried and the old blood feud amended so that new blood will be fused and refined out of the process of mutual melting in the ethnic cauldron.

As a victim and survivor of anti-Semitic atrocities, David is probably not

the first person one would expect to push for ending the “feuds and vendettas” of bloody ethnic violence. However, he argues that the Jewish people have been punished exactly for constantly “looking backward,” leaving them in a state of “paralysis” (164). In order to evade the “nightmare of religions and races” (97), David advocates the perspective of looking forward, opting for leaving the rigidity of ethnic enmity out of the melting pot, in favor of merging and fusing various races “in the making” of a future America based on assimilation and integration. Blood fusion takes precedence over blood feud, which remains a branding scar easily recalled by will, yet deliberately renounced by choice.

David’s grandmother Frau Quixano, however, adamantly refuses to renounce anything. She represents the elder generation, who stands for the persistence of the past, adhering to the Orthodox Judaic tradition with teeth and nails. As the daughter of a rabbi, she attempts to preserve traditional Judaic heritage through her clinging attachment to the dual pillars of Judaism: religion and law. She incarnates the resistance and failure of assimilation, a relic of European tradition which refuses to make any concessions to American modernity. A reluctant immigrant forced out of her homeland by ethnic persecution, she makes no attempt to make any adjustments to the new environment: speaking Yiddish, “the language of the Russian pale” exclusively (20), and observing Orthodox Judaism to the letter. Her resistance is best summed up by the Yiddish malediction often on her lips, “*a Klog zu Columbessen*” or cursed be Columbus (22).

As one of the “harbingers of the spirit of Judaism,” Frau Quixano, who, like the conservative characters in Zangwill’s earlier novel *Children of the Ghetto* that had aroused the anxiety of the English public wary of any Eastern orthodoxy (Nashon 22-23), is eventually consigned to the recesses of history, but not before the historic tussle between the old and the new is fully played out. As the initial cultural conflict between Mendel’s superiority over the Gentiles discussed above soon gives way to religious clash, with the master’s Judaism colliding head-on with the servant’s Catholicism.

The Catholic Irish maid Kathleen runs afoul with her orthodox Judaic mistress almost at every turn, and she always manages to escalate the master-slave class conflict into religious dimensions: “If ye don’t like God’s own country, sure ye can go back to your own Jerusalem, so ye can” (3). Concluding that Kathleen is biased against the Jews due to religious differences,

Mendel complains that even “one’s very servants are anti-Semites,” suggesting that anti-Semitism is so virulent and prevalent that it could even transcend the otherwise rigid class distinctions. The maid would rather quit than be mocked at by “haythen Jews,” since she could live with being inferior in class but not considered an ethnic inferior to a race she holds in low regard, as she draws the line by maintaining, “breaking crockery is one thing, and breaking a religion another” (5). Interestingly, her ethnic superiority asserts itself at a time when the poor Irish immigrants themselves are barely cleansed of racial stigma in America. Kathleen dares to look down upon the Jews as “haythen furriners” (heathen foreigners), and at one point even goes so far as to exclaim, “Why don’t yet have a sensible religion?” This glaring anti-Semitic proclivity demonstrates the subtle swing of ethnic hierarchy based on religious differentiation: she could afford to disregard the disagreeable reality that Catholics are generally inferior to Protestants in American social standing partly because they remain relatively superior to the Jews.¹³

As far as David is concerned, such cultural and religious contradictions are all destined to dissolve in the melting pot, a crucible designed expressly to transform the old into the new, where encrusted hostility and prejudice would be rendered pliable and subject to eventual transmutation in the ethnic crucible, while what is implacably hard, defying change and transformation, will be left out of the cauldron and eventually consigned to the dustbin of history.

From Blood Feud to Blood Fusion

As pointed out by Sollors, metaphors of hardness resisting melting are associated in the play with the European past (69); they relate to the Baron, the grandmother, and Davenport. The resistant material hardest to melt in the ethnic crucible comes from the old generation, especially David’s grandmother and Vera’s father, people standing at the opposite ends of political and religious spectra, but having in common their uncompromising adherence to antiquated beliefs. Baron Revendal’s unrelenting antipathy towards the Jews is tenacious as Frau Quixano’s rigorous observance of Judaism is perennial. Thus their Old

¹³ Since the English, the Germans, and the Dutch made up the majority of early settlers in America, especially in the WASP privileged class, and they came from Anglican and Protestant persuasions, Protestantism held a distinct edge over Catholicism, a bias that persists and has been called “the last acceptable prejudice” even in 2005, as seen in Mar S. Massa’s book *Anti-Catholicism in America* (Crossroad Publishing Company). As regards the ascending racial status of the Irish since the Civil War, see Noel Ignatiev’s controversial account in *How the Irish Became White* (Routledge 1996).

World credo leaves them both unmeltable materials, eventually reduced to residues of the past and excluded from the ethnic melting pot.

Baron Revendal incarnates all that is ineradicable in Russian nobility's deep-rooted anti-Semitism. He refers to the Jews as "the foes of Christ and the Tsar" (153), denigrating them as "Jew-vermin" (106), "pests" (107), "unbaptized dog(s)" (123), and glorifying the anti-Semitic bloodbath as "a holy crusade" (153). His hatred is so all-encompassing that "a noble Jew" is simply perceived as a contradiction in terms (123). Such is the negating force of anti-Semitic sentiment that it turns everything associated with the Jews into anything but love: he shudders at the thought of loving a Jew, even if that Jew is deeply loved by his beloved daughter. In response to his daughter's request of accepting David out of his love for her, he utters in a "dazed" expression: "I—love—a Jew? Impossible" (125). The difficulty for a Russian Christian noble to love a Jew is insurmountable, he goes on, "Can I carry mountains? No more can I love a Jew" (126), because he contends he has no choice in the matter, since it is a chauvinistic communal mentality beyond the sway of individual will.

Religious and ethnic biases aside, the major cause of his fearing and loathing is that Jews are suspected to be the masterminds of anti-aristocratic insurrection, as the Baron puts it, "their Bund is behind all the revolution." (110). He thus justifies his malicious anti-Semitic feeling with the litany of complaints commonly leveled against Jewish domination:

They ruin our peasantry with their loans and their drink shops, ruin our army with their revolutionary propaganda, ruin our professional classes by snatching all the prizes and professorships, ruin our commercial classes by monopolizing our sugar industries, our oilfields, our timber-trade . . . Why, if we gave them equal rights, our Holy Russia would be entirely run by them (111-12).

It is noteworthy that the victimizer here adopts the rhetoric of the victim, emphasizing how the "ruin" that the Jews have wreaked on everything from the financial, the military, the professional, to the industrial, needs to be addressed and redressed by the Christian victim. To its logical conclusion, anti-Semitism is far from a form of hate, but inevitably a supreme expression of "Christian love" (107). Such a perverse reversal of values is further seen in his calling the notorious anti-Semitic Tsarist secret police Black Hundreds "the white hosts of Christ" (111). It is little wonder then that the Baron's

vehement opposition to the match between Vera and David is couched in the language of religious sacrifice and familial affection. He regards their misalliance as a “supreme insult” that will be “put on the blood of the Revandals,” whose purity he is willing to defend even at the cost of shooting his own daughter dead with his own hand and sacrificing his own life to boot (107). Therefore, the Jews constitute the “deadliest enemies” for both Church and Crown not only because of their revolutionary sympathies, but also that Jewish blood poses a contaminating threat to be purged from the pure lineage of Russian noble blue blood.

Known as the “butcher of Kishineff” he brandishes his record of atrocities like a badge of honor, reminiscing fondly the time when “at Kishineff we stick the swine” (109). According to plan, he attempts to clinch the fate of Russian Jews once and for all: “One-third will be baptized, one-third massacred, the other third emigrated here.” In other words only three options are available for Russian Jews: conversion, extermination, or immigration, a common destiny that Jews in history were repeatedly subjected to.

From the Spanish expulsion of 1492 to the Kishineff pogrom of 1903, the historical traumas of the Jews hover over the play like a haunting specter. However, the ruthless either/or dilemma facing the Jews found a ready answer in the Quixano family history. According to Vera’s account, David’s family rejected conversion in favor of immigration: “preferred exile in Poland to baptism” back in 1492, even when they were the *hidalgos*, or court favorites, of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella (123).

The refusal to convert led to exodus from Iberia and subsequent immigration to Bessarabia for the Quixanos, only to meet with the same menace of extermination in their adopted land in Russia, after four centuries. They are left with no choice but to emigrate again, if only to escape complete annihilation. In the newly adopted American land of seeming religious freedom and racial equality, the possibilities of religious conversion and ethnic extermination are basically ruled out; however, the issues of immigration remain unresolved, taking the slightly altered form of conversion, not of religious so much as secular and cultural in nature; in other words, the issues of assimilation linger on.

It is left to the younger generation to meet half way on the issue of assimilation, as David and Vera, Baron Revendal’s daughter, manage to prove that “fires of hate, not fires of love” are what get melted in the ethnic melting

pot (96). She, in stark contrast to her father, endeavors to overcome her Old World belief in ethnic animosity by tossing it in to the workings of the melting pot. As her name which suggests “faith” in Russian,¹⁴ Vera tries to renounce the long-held creed of anti-Semitism popular among the Russian upper crust and espouse a new-found faith of racial reconciliation and integration among the new Americans. Vera has always been one to bridge divisions and close gaps, as evidenced in her volunteer social work. The major block in her way remains what she was born into—her aristocratic class. She manages to cross the hurdle of class barrier by sympathizing with the revolutionary cause, almost forgoing her noble pedigree in the process by designating herself as a “radical” as opposed to the “reactionary” which is her father.

Next to class distinction stands ethnic division, which looms as a seemingly insurmountable divide that requires not only an article of faith but virtually a leap of faith. As an early champion of women’s rights, it comes as no surprise that Zangwill would portray the leading lady as a strong-willed self-reliant woman, advocating the cause of the poor, working as a volunteer for the disadvantaged immigrants in the house of settlement. However, Zangwill stops short of depicting the angel of the slums as angelic in every aspect; rather, she is presented initially as racist by both birth and breeding, despite her liberal, even revolutionary leanings in terms of class and politics.

When the Irish maid first mistakes her as Jewish, she immediately retorts, “I, a Jewess! How dare you?” (11). Being taken for a Jew is as good as being given a social slur. Blinded by such deep-seated ethnic prejudice, Vera in the beginning even fails to recognize David as Jewish, thinking he must be of Spanish descent. Her superficial identification of surnames with ethnicity aside, the assumption is based purely on her ingrained notion of excluding Jewishness from any association with positive qualities. After her initial shock of recognition of his true identity, Vera tries to sidestep the thorny “Jewish question” by focusing solely on his talent, “I was thinking only his genius, not his race” (72-3), until finally she is ready to confront her own bias, confessing to “struggling with anti-Jewish prejudice” (14). As her struggle prevails, she overcomes her personal demon of racism and comes to terms with his alien ethnicity, accepting him for what he is: a Jew. Later she confesses to David in contrition, “And to think that I was brought up to despise your race,” David answers, “Yes, all Russians are,” and Vera replies, “But we of the nobility in

¹⁴ Vera is derived from the Latin root *verus*, which signifies true.

particular” (92). The exchange confirms that anti-Semitism in Russia presents itself as ethnic animosity crossed with class antagonism.

Apart from obvious sentimental reasons, what enables her to conquer “the mountains of prejudice” is their common subscription to the melting pot creed (126). As David succinctly puts it, it is a love that transcends the personal realm; “the love America showed me” that has brought them together in a steadfast alliance (96). Both Vera and David are blessed with the philanthropic spirit, volunteering for charity work; with David playing for handicapped children and Vera working for newly arrived immigrants to “fight against poverty” (119). It is this shared concern for social justice and humanitarian aid that helps rid her of the bigoted mindset and overcome their religious differences since they “serve the same God,” that fosters universal philanthropy, contributing to the overcoming of sectarian misanthropy.

It should also be noted that Vera rules out David’s conversion to Christianity as a possible solution to removing the obstacle of their marriage. Continuing the recurrent motif of blood in the play, she argues that, though the virtuoso Russian Jewish pianist Nikolai Rubinstein has been baptized, “did the water outside change the blood within?” (127), suggesting that neither environment nor circumstances would alter the identity within, and hence concluding that hereditary blood should be disregarded altogether through espousing a common cause that serves the God of love for humanity.¹⁵

It may require the same strength and smarts that the Biblical young David employs to fight against the gigantic Goliath for David Quixano to be able to stir the melting pot, since even if he could leave out of the pot “unmeltable ethnics”¹⁶ such as the Russian Baron and his grandmother, David is still shouldered with the daunting task of stirring the blood that simply won’t commingle: the Old World immigrant who clings to ethnic blood, embodied by his Uncle Mendel as previously discussed; and what’s more disturbing: the New World American natives who desire to mingle with old European blood, epitomized by Quincy Davenport.

America represents a melting pot in which the polluting residue of old

¹⁵ Nikolai Rubinstein is a virtuoso pianist of Jewish descent and brother of eminent composer Anton Rubinstein. Tchaikovsky’s great *Piano Concerto No. 1* is dedicated to him.

¹⁶ Though “unmeltable ethnics” is a concept coined by political philosopher Michael Novak in the 1970s, in his eponymous book *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics; Politics and Culture in the Seventies*, it is applicable to the condition of immigrants who reject ethnic and cultural assimilation as an erasure of identity. It also proves the durability and renewability of the melting pot concept in different eras.

Europe needs to be purged and removed; the purifying process is imposed on everyone to renounce and denounce the contaminating legacy. And if denunciation of Europe is directed at the Baron's ethnic cleansing, the need of renunciation is embodied in the case of Quincy Davenport.

Quincy Davenport is deliberately set up as diametrically opposed to David Quixano, in a polarity that seems to be genetically encoded in the chiasmus of their names: their initials of QD vs. DQ. In terms of class division, Quincy represents the moneyed class which, as David protests, never makes the money he spends. In terms of cultural affiliation, they also couldn't be more different, with Quincy an ardent admirer of European heritage and David its outright detractor. Refuting Quincy's unreserved Eurocentrism, David declares categorically that "I come from Europe, one of her victims, and I know that she is a failure" (87).

Quincy, therefore, represents a haunting specter of the catastrophic "failure" that threatens to arise again, a constant reminder of the possible recurrence of his trauma. David's perception of Quincy as his "nightmare" in the new world is subtly implied in the rescue fantasies he indulges in, as characteristic of trauma victims, of being "shipwrecked" "on the great lonely Atlantic" and rescued by "a great safe steamer" (55). However, the one who greets him on safe ground turns out to be the Eurocentric American native boy Quincy Davenport, implying him as a macabre figure of *memento mori*.

Though confident of his ability to "mend the future," David regards the Old Europe as beyond mending and remedy, not even qualified for any space in the melting pot, "The Past I cannot mend—its evil outlines are stamped in immortal rigidity" (87). Here the recurrent metaphor of stamping is set up as opposed to forging: stamping is associated with rigidity that resists transformation, while forging with flexibility that accepts changes.

Different from the indelible stamping of the old European generation such as the Russian baron and Jewish grandma, Quincy embodies the new American generation that defies forging in the melting pot. Quincy worships unreservedly the ancient cultural tradition of Europe, maintaining that modern arts are tasteless compared with "the Medici gardens at Rome," a view echoed enthusiastically by the Russian baroness (102). Such Eurocentric cultural elitism is ironically assaulted most severely by an artist from Europe: David, who rebukes the musical connoisseurs as mere "musical vampires," who are "rich, idle aesthetes to whom art and life have no connection, parasites who suck on

our music” (172). What is usually considered as a lofty, high-brow cultural Europe is deprecated by David as a “Europe with her comic-opera coronets and her worm-eaten stage decorations, and her pomp and chivalry built on a morass of crime and misery” (87). The European culture David has in mind remains a ruins of death, and its music means nothing but a “death march” (52). Europe is dismissed by David out of hand as such a den of sin because it leaves him only a vale of tears; his traumatic scar is Europe’s sole legacy.

Quincy and his idle class stand for the very antithesis of the philosophy that Theodore Roosevelt advocates for Americans: “the glorious strife” by practicing what has been denounced as “the doctrine of ignoble ease,” which should be repudiated by the “true American.” (qtd. in Dalton 184). In addition to his Old Money status, Quincy is also chastised for his unabashed Eurocentrism, turning his back on American native soil. As David sarcastically points out, Quincy spends only two months in the US, and then only to entertain his European guests who come to visit (84).

As a play *The Melting Pot* strains for the status of a national allegory, thereby rendering everything in the personal realm inextricably bound up with the collective field. This is seen in the case of Quincy’s dual disloyalty. His personal morality is called into question: as a married man, he risks committing polygamy in trying to win the hand of Vera. The “true blue blood” that Quincy celebrates is not only adulterated by his prospective adultery with Vera but also pales beside the mixed but red-hot blood that David and Vera promise to produce through their united devotion to marriage and social cause.

Private disloyalty is compounded by national disloyalty when he reveals his criterion for a new mate: “the right breed—the true blue blood of Europe” (67). His rejection of New World values in favor of the Old testifies to his adherence to the European tradition and lack of commitment to the American cause, rendering him unfit for propagating the new race in the melting pot.

Quincy’s quest for true European blood pursues the principle of preservation and exclusion to the point of in-breeding. It in fact continues the aristocratic tradition in Europe that demands “*limpiza de sangre*” or cleanliness of blood that originated from Spain, and developed following the expulsion of Iberian Jews in 1492.¹⁷ Quincy advocates the cessation of “all alien

¹⁷ The doctrine of *limpieza di sangre* flourished after Jewish expulsion and Moorish re-conquest in 1492, appearing as a form of collective anxiety of the aristocrats concerning their legitimacy and casting suspicion on the converted Jews and Muslims as false converts or converted Christians. The concept proved particularly crucial to Spanish colonial nobles settling in the Americas.

immigration.” (112), a doctrine of European culturalism and American nativism which represents Zangwill’s nightmare scenario of the melting pot: open only to Old World cultural blue blood but closed to immigrant American new blood.

In contrast, David tries to ensure the continued infusion of new blood in the melting pot through an ongoing influx of immigrants. While Quincy openly declares his willingness to get a divorce, it is ironically implied by David that what he is in urgent need of declaring is to divorce himself from the antiquated values and embrace the novel values championed by David.

Almost in Biblical overtones, David’s conception of the melting pot is loving and all-embracing when it is inclusive, but could turn menacing and punitive to those it excludes. His Janus-faced attitude is best demonstrated when he assaults Quincy’s pro-Europeanism with “prophetic passion,” delivering his personal verdict with vindictive fervor that, “There shall come a fire round the Crucible that will melt you and your breed like wax in a blowpipe” (88).

However, Quincy’s flaunted American nativism, far from deterring the immigrant David, serves only to strengthen his resolve to claim America as his own, especially when the native-born American has been tainted with the polluting European stain and stamp, “What would these Europe-apers have understood my America—the America of my music?” (90). Ironically, David, as a foreign-born new immigrant, not only identifies with his adopted land whole-heartedly, but also appropriates his America through his own artistic creation, dismissing the native-born Davenport as nothing more than mimicking the despicable European. David strongly stakes his claim on America twice in the play, both emphasizing “my America,” to battle for establishing his conception of America as authentic, not inherently possessed by native-born, yet poor imitators of the European heritage, who are categorically excluded by David from the pantheon of true Americanism (86, 90).

Their differences inevitably come to a head on the issue of who can lay a stronger claim on America, the settlers or the immigrants? As David accuses Quincy of “killing my America,” Quincy dismisses David’s identification with a taunting retort, “Your America, forsooth, you Jew-immigrant!” bluntly stating that Jews could never become Americans (86). However, what Quincy regards as incredulous is exactly the task David sets out to accomplish:

Not understand that America is God’s crucible, the great melting-pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming! Here, you stand, good folk, think I, when I see

them at Ellis Island, here you stand in your fifty groups, with your fifty languages and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries. (33)

As mentioned earlier that America is considered the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed, and David considers himself better qualified for being an American than “sons of the soil” like Quincy (87) because of his unswerving belief in the creed rather than his birth. David’s newly adopted creed is built on his hysterical denial of the past and optimistic acceptance of the future. Repudiating “the immutability of descent” (Sollors 74) as rigidly stamped from old Europe the way he would involuntarily repulse another attempt to stamp infliction on his shoulder, David advocates the forging of fluid American identities into a unity, like the erstwhile American national motto *E pluribus unum*, or out of plurality comes unity. Unlike the received idea of the melting pot as a cauldron mixing and assimilating immigrants into the mainstream culture, David regards the melting pot not as a site where immigrants will be melted, incorporated, and acculturated so much as forming, forging, and making it happen. Being American is a flux process of becoming, rather than a fixed state of being.

Quincy’s *bête noir* status helps to accentuate the main thesis of the play that authentic American identity is not based on birth, but on faith, as Sollors says, “American ideals are not transmitted by descent but have to be embraced afresh” (70). Being born American does not guarantee the authenticity of one’s identity, since it is more a state of becoming, a state of coming into being through conviction and confirmation. Therefore, even though not born American, as long as one chooses to believe in the American creed of the melting pot by forgoing the European creed of blood feuds, a new blood fusion will be created.

Blood is thus transmuted from something violent and physical to something visionary and metaphysical. It has become a vision of the future bred in the New World, rather than a nightmare of the past engendered from the Old. The fiery red sunset in the finale purges the “crimson mist” of blood-stained violence (157) to paint a rosy picture of purified rebirth through ethnic fusion, implying that even hatred as implacable as a blood feud can be reconciled and dissolved through the intermingling of bloodlines in marriage. Like the ever-changing sunset the embracing couple rhapsodizes over in the final *tableau*, forging a new American identity is hardly a foregone conclusion,

but an ever-evolving process, not a state of being so much as a state of becoming. David Quixano, succeeding in his recovery from an almost hallucinatory fantasy of repeatedly seeing blood through re-visiting the traumatic scene of carnage, is finally discharged from the haunting of traumatized vision and released into a salutary reality, as the sanguinary act of atrocities committed in the Old World becomes purged and transforms itself into a sanguine hopefulness for the future in the New World. Zangwill's optimistic vision of his American melting pot thus ends on an upbeat note. Inspiring and to a certain extent prophetic as it may be, it nevertheless leaves unanswered questions about the validity of his idealized ethnic integration and the legitimacy of his rhapsodies over Jewish immigration, thorny issues that rear their ugly heads as his idealization collides with the harsh political realities in the case of Teddy Roosevelt.

Teddy Roosevelt's Consent and Dissent

The Melting Pot was published in 1909 with a dedication to American President Theodore Roosevelt, "in respectful recognition of his strenuous struggles against the forces that threaten to shipwreck the great republic which carries mankind and its fortunes" (Zangwill v). Zangwill's enthusiasm did not go unreciprocated. When Roosevelt saw the play in Washington, D.C. on Oct. 5, 1909, he is known to have leaned over the theatre balcony and shouted his bravo, "That's a great play, Mr. Zangwill, that's a great play" (Szuberla 3). He later even went so far as to express that "I don't know when I have seen a play that has stirred me as much" (Taubenfeld 14). Such a presidential sanction in public represents more than his deep appreciation for a theatre piece but an active approval for its doctrine that echoes his own political agenda. He is known to have commented, "We Americans are children of the crucible." As a result, the presidential audience has been taken up by Zangwill as the yardstick against which all subsequent responses were to be measured, since Roosevelt, in his multi-tasking capacity as anything from cowboy to President, was regarded by the dramatist virtually as "the ideal spectator" (Zangwill 201).

Roosevelt's father, a patriarch of a Dutch Knickerbocker family which counted as one of the elite "four hundred" in New York,¹⁸ did everything to

¹⁸ The list of "four hundred" prominent New York families was organized by Caroline Astor, as the arbiter of polite society, against the encroachments of the New Money class. Theodore Roosevelt's father was one of the patriarchs of the high society.

ensure that the “stern old Dutch blood” coursing through the veins of their Old Money family would be preserved intact in his son (Dalton 1). However, if Theodore Roosevelt managed to elevate his Dutch blood into the blue blood of Presidency, he was also wary of the power of the wealthy clans and even known for being a trust-buster by introducing anti-trust laws, a gesture that exhibited his espousal of the cause of the common people regardless of his own upper-class upbringing.

Despite his own Dutch extraction, Roosevelt advocates complete Americanization stripped of European attachments, as he puts it, “We, by descent from her, become a new race, innocent of all European, and all human origins—a race from the earth . . . but an earth that is made of her” (qtd. in Sollors 79). Roosevelt, a noted historian before his presidency, acknowledges the European descent but puts premium on the complete severance from its origin and the completely new formation of a “new race,” a line of thinking that accords well with David Quixiano’s rhapsodic vision of the American as the new man.

The shift of emphasis from descent to consent built on the democratic agency of the people marks a paradigm shift in American literature as well, a trend noted by scholar Werner Sollors. However, what is worth considering more than Roosevelt’s willingness to give priority to consent over descent is his power to dissent. It is not well known that *The Melting Pot* holds the dubious distinction of being both applauded and censored by an American President. Aside from his highly publicized approval of the play, Roosevelt was actually alarmed and offended by a particular line in the play which suggests that native-born Americans favor divorce by citing Quincy’s attempted bigamy case, a perspective that Roosevelt finds smacking of anti-Americanism and out of line with his well-flaunted patriotism. Consequently, Roosevelt was said to have demanded Zangwill alter the line, a typical case of the authority as self-appointed author.¹⁹

Roosevelt intervenes in script censorship, yet he refrains from intervening in anti-Semitic violence. More than most American Presidents, Theodore Roosevelt was revered by the Jews all over the world, not only for appointing Oscar Strauss Secretary of Commerce and Labor, the first Jewish American

¹⁹ The original line reads: “We are not native-born Americans, we hold our troth eternal.” Zangwill changes the line in the published edition to “Not being unemployed millionaires like Mr. Davenport, we hold even our troth eternal” (124). It has been suggested that Roosevelt wanted the line changed to “No being members of the Four Hundred. . .” an ironic reference to the elite group of New York clans his own family belongs to (Kraus 6).

Cabinet official, but also “for his efforts to halt the persecution of their co-religionists in Russia and Rumania” (Morris xviii), an overstatement more in tune with Morris’s hagiographic blandishment than historical reality. The truth is though he did play a significant role in protesting the ethnic cleansing in Kishineff by sending a petition to Tsar Nicholas II in 1905, he stopped short of any direct intervention to halt the atrocities.²⁰

Furthermore, Zangwill’s expectations of Roosevelt to lend a helping hand in his prized Galveston Movement were soon dealt a severe blow, as the project to divert an excess of Jewish immigrants from the East Coast to Texas, initiated in 1907 and concurrent with the writing of the play, fizzled out in just seven years due to local objections and more importantly, lack of official support.²¹

Not only did Roosevelt show more rhetoric than deed regarding putting an end to anti-Semitic persecution abroad, he also showed more imposition than tolerance when it comes to ethnic assimilation at home. He envisioned America at the time as what Gerstle has defined America during the 1890-1900 decade as a “racialized nation” (14-42), since his advocacy of a creed-based “civic nationalism” is tempered by the blood-related “racialized nationalism.” He is even known to have remarked that the Americans should “keep put races which do not rapidly assimilate with our own” (Dyer 129), showing his melting pot endorsement is hardly universal but highly selective, with strong opinions concerning who should stay in the melting pot and how the ethnic pot should be stirred. Before his presidency, Roosevelt’s ideas about immigration were formulated and entrenched as a historian, outlined in his four-tome *Winning of the West* (1889-1896), which employed the frontier myth to “lionize the immigrant in American culture” (Dorsey and Harrow 1), an approach that seems to concur with Zangwill’s concept. However, his support is far from unconditional, resting instead on a specific set of requirements to be met by the immigrants. As early as 1894 in his epochal speech *True Americanism*, Roosevelt already mapped out the polarity of

²⁰ The Jews were united in their protest against the Russian *pogrom* but the Jewish groups lobbying for American intervention into Czarist persecution of Russian Jews sprang from two diametrically opposed sources: one was opposed to mass immigration, as represented by German Jews; the other pro-immigration, by Israel Zangwill.

²¹ The Galveston Movement refers to the immigration project to divert an overflowing flux of immigrants from the overcrowded East Coast to the more sparsely populated port city of Galveston, Texas. Rabbi Henry Cohen is credited with founding the movement and Zangwill was an enthusiastic sponsor.

immigration in highly dramatic terms, contrasting the hero and the villain of immigration as it were in a lurid melodrama:

The mighty tide of immigration to our shores has brought in its train much of good and much of evil; and whether the good or the evil shall predominate depends mainly on whether these newcomers do or do not throw themselves heartily into our national life, cease to be Europeans, and become Americans like the rest of us. (9)

The “rest of us” are obviously the majority who enjoy exclusive say in setting the conditions for latecomers to follow. The us/them line distinctly drawn along the American vs. European boundary gives little room to new immigrants to exercise their general consent as new American citizens. Instead, consent is conferred by the settler majority, deemed as endowed with the right to dictate the new immigrants on how to become Americanized. It is a top-down command, further reinforced by the moral rhetoric of good vs. evil dichotomy, showing that Roosevelt is more enamored of the idea of the melting pot than its reality.

The presidential perspective on how to become an American naturally raises the question: What constitute the grounds on which rests David’s conviction that America would not fail his expectations about the melting pot? It amounts to nothing more than a tenuous but tenacious belief that the country he pledges himself to would also keep the end of its bargain, as he puts it, “I keep faith with America. I have faith America will keep faith with us” (98). Traumatized by the past, David is simply left with no choice but to champion the cause of America, however one-sided his advocacy might seem. In a feeble attempt to cement his faith, he salutes the American flag “in religious rapture,” (98) a gesture that serves only to underscore the embarrassing fact that the allegiance he pays his adopted country is blatantly more unilateral than reciprocated.

Even though Roosevelt’s hearty response for the play has been dismissed by critics as “stupendous naiveté” (Zangwill 201), his hyperbolic reaction bespeaks more of a cunning politician’s well-calculated political gambit than any spontaneous gut reaction from an avid theatergoer. His shouts of bravo from the balcony are as much a response to an appreciated performance as a performance gesture itself.

In retrospect, the epithet “stupendous naiveté” seems a more apt description of Zangwill’s unquestioningly positive response to the president’s support and his blind trust in Roosevelt’s sympathy with the Jewish cause at all costs, an enthusiasm that is mirrored by David’s one-sided optimism in the play.

In light of Roosevelt’s initial backing and subsequent backpedaling,²² one should reconsider the ethnic paradigm brought up in Werner Sollors’s influential chapter on the play (66-101): The concept of consent overtaking descent as the dominant mode of thinking American multicultural ethnicity. It is true that consent figures more prominently than descent as the decisive factor in shaping ethnic interaction in America, to the extent that Zangwill “sacralizes loving consent as the abolition of prejudices of descent” (72). However, one risks over-valoring the agency and efficacy of consent by individuals without taking into account the impact of official consent, whose dissent could create as strong a bias as the “prejudices of descent.”

Therefore, even though the play promotes the “cult of consent” (Sollors 74) or the concept of popular consent rather than authoritarian descent, popular consent is not entirely free of restraint, but conditioned not only on the ultimate consent of higher authority such as the President, whose affirmation could reinforce popular consent but his dissent could just as easily undermine its popularity; it also hinges on the consent of the majority, which often means the dominant ethnic group in a democracy. Despite Mendel’s claim of “our Russia” (25), and David’s claim of “my America” (86), both as individuals of the Jewish minority are subject to being defined and identified by the other competing claims from the powerful majority.

Conclusion

Zangwill’s biographer Joseph H. Udelson, inspired by the title of Zangwill’s collection of essays on eminent Jews *Dreamers of the Ghetto* (1898), places him also in the pantheon as another “dreamer of the ghetto,” referring to the utopian idealism evident everywhere in his works. “The dreamer of ghetto” dreams the impossible dream of finding a final shelter for the Wandering Jews, and finds the perfect embodiment in David, whose quixotic

²² Later in 1915 at an address to the Hamilton Club in Chicago, Teddy Roosevelt asserted in a statement that would certainly raise the eyebrows of multi-culturalists today, “There is no room in this country for hyphenated Americanism. . . . The only absolute way of bringing this nation to ruin, of preventing all possibility of its continuing to be a nation at all, would permit it to become a tangle of squabbling nationalities” (qtd. in Parrillo 171, Huntington 306).

pursuit is genetically encoded in his very name Quixano, obviously inspired by the name Don Quixote. His impossible dream of creating a fully integrated ethnic melting pot has been adopted by many since, yet it remains an idealized vision with its complete realization as elusive as ever.

In the afterword to the published play, Zangwill compares his inner vision of the crucible to Blake's vision of "the inner reality of the sunrise." Though visible only to one's mind's eye, he argues, the crucible remains "a roaring and flaming actuality" (199). If the crucible is such a glaring "actuality," it is because it brews burning issues that clamor to be addressed: melting the flames of Old World blood feud and merging the roaring call of blood fusion in the New World.

His critics dismiss or even scoff at such a Blakean vision, especially when applied to public affairs like immigration, calling it over-exaggerated "rhapsodizing" (Zangwill 201). The rhapsody, however, realistically depicts the state of ecstatic visions that David experiences when traumatic recurrence of Kishineff massacre sends him into raptures about the urgent necessity of the melting pot, through which bloody vision of blood feud of the Old Europe is transformed into sanguine vision of blood fusion in the New World. As Zangwill argues, those who never "lacked Liberty, nor cowered for days in a cellar in terror of a howling mob," may find the genuine enthusiasm of the play as mere "theatrical exaggeration" (199), yet through a deeper understanding of the historical backdrop one comes to realize that his vision is grounded on historical necessity. Far-fetched visions in others' eyes may be an "actuality" staring into the face of Zangwill and his fellow East European Jewish immigrants.

However, though the rhapsodies evinced in the play are historically grounded, it should not detract from the fact that Zangwill overplays the idealism of the consenting power exerted by immigrants in the new world. In the preface to his *Dreamers of the Ghetto* (1898) Zangwill claims, "The Zionist ideal offers one possible re-baptism, but to doubt whether Palestine can support the Jews may be a higher patriotism than to rhapsodize over Zion" (qtd. in Udelson 157). However, though he questions the over-idealistic rhapsodies of Zionism about Palestine, he is not above rhapsodizing over the promises his American melting pot could offer for the Jews. What Zangwill refers to as "higher patriotism" takes shapes as ex-patriotism; a modified extension of Diaspora with settlement as the ultimate aim. In other words, he is convinced

that his territorialism functions better as an advanced form of Jewish patriotism than any form of nationalism; and in the play America becomes his idealized territory destined to shelter the Jews, which he designates with an urgency that almost decrees that the American melting pot be a success story grounded on consent rather than descent, yet conveniently precluding the potential block of dissent.

Zangwill's dream of abandoning the nightmare of descent obviously has no place for the rude awakening of dissent. William Archer, the eminent English drama critic credited for introducing Ibsen to Britain, is most discerning when he contends that *The Melting Pot* "as a work of art for art's sake, the play simply does not exist." But then he is also acutely aware that Zangwill "would not dream of appealing to such a standard" (Zangwill 201), because his criteria of good theatre are far from the aesthetic, where "art and life have no connection," as David astutely puts it in the play (172). Instead, his yardstick is unabashedly thematic and pragmatic, if not downright preachy, at least directly relevant to social reality. In the same vein as what Rabbi Stephen Wise has said on the publication of Zangwill's novel *The Children of the Ghetto*, "it was not a book; it was an event," because it marked "the first conscious act of self-disclosure" after centuries of Jewish "self-effacement" (Nahshhon 22); one could conclude by saying that Zangwill's *The Melting Pot* was more than a play, it was also "an event," not only as an interpretive event that gave rise to a host of definitions about the most enduring metaphor of immigrant assimilation, but also as "an actuality" that tried to engage in the harsh realities facing persecuted Jews who were "dreamers of the ghetto" like Zangwill himself yet rhapsodized about the promises of the American melting pot. "The Great Alchemist that melts and fuses" (185) Old World discord into New World harmony is still in a state of becoming forged, yet one has to be aware that not only discord would be hopefully purified but that cultural diversity could also be purged in the process.

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