

# Kaddish in Hiroshima: Chaim Potok's *The Book of Lights*

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Among Chaim Potok's seven published novels,<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Lights* has a special interest for several reasons. First, although all of Potok's novels deal directly and centrally with religious problems, unlike the novels of most other Jewish writers, *The Book of Lights* focuses for the first time on Jewish mysticism, the Kabbalah, rather than on the Talmud, the monumental compilation of commentary on the Torah or sacred Law.

Second, over half the action of this book takes place in Asia, mainly Korea and Japan. It is here that the central character faces a challenge to his basic religious assumptions. He had been taught and had fully believed that outside of the knowledge of the God revealed in the Bible all was moral darkness, paganism, and idolatry. But in Korea and especially in Japan he encounters a culture which knows nothing of Judaism and its God, and yet he is compelled to admire many of the people and the religious devotion which some of them show. Furthermore, in their art and even in their "idols" which his religion has taught him to abhor, he finds a strange and haunting beauty.<sup>2</sup> In his attempt to discover whether the virtues and the beauty which he finds in this culture which is alien to him and to his religious beliefs are also from God, he receives more illumi-

nation from the mystical writings of the Kabbalah than he does from the more rational teaching of the Talmud.

A third special interest of this novel is that it raises as one of the central issues the moral problems involved with the construction and the use of the atomic bomb.

Chaim Potok is an unusual writer. He makes religion and exposition of material which seems too complicated and difficult for most readers central in his novels. Romantic interest is minimal or almost completely absent. And yet each of his novels has been on the best-sellers list for months.<sup>3</sup> How does Potok weave all these difficult themes together and still keep our interest in the story he is telling? He does so by making us identify with the central characters so that we see the problems through their eyes and struggle with them ourselves. Although Potok's protagonists are very orthodox Jews and face problems which may seem very different from those faced by most readers, these problems are representative of problems all of us face, the problems of faith, love, loyalty, courage, and perseverance, and so the novels have a universality not at first perceived.

The central character of *The Book of Lights* is Gershon Loran, an orphan from the age of eight when his parents were killed on a trip to Palestine. He has been brought up by his elderly aunt and uncle who live in a house in Brooklyn which had "something wrong with it, something had gone awry from the very beginning."<sup>4</sup> His first name, Gershon, has the Hebrew root "*ger*" which means "stranger" or "sojourner in a foreign land" (Exodus 22 : 2),<sup>5</sup> and Gershon himself seems like a lonely, alienated figure growing up in a world awry. In this he is not so different from many people in the twentieth century,

and we may be reminded of Thomas Wolfe's words at the beginning of *Look Homeward, Angel*:

Naked and alone we came into exile. In her dark womb we did not know our mother's face; from the prison of her flesh have we come into the unspeakable and incommunicable prison of this earth.

Which of us has known his brother? Which of us has looked into his father's heart? Which of us has not remained forever prison-pent? Which of us is not forever a stranger and alone?

O waste of loss, in the hot mazes, lost, among bright stars on this most weary unbright cinder, lost!<sup>6</sup>

If his first name suggests Gershon's alienation, his family name suggests the possibility of finding his way. Loran is the name of a navigational system developed in the Second World War, and the word is an acronym for "long range navigation." It depends on the emissions from two radio stations which the receiver can use to plot its position. As a navigator for the United States Army Air Force, I myself used it and can testify that it was much simpler to use and gave a far more accurate fix than either dead reckoning or celestial navigation, neither of which is suitable for rapidly moving aircraft, though at times I had to use them both.

Gershon was, of course, not a navigator in the literal sense, but in the novel we find him depending chiefly on two of his teachers, who can be compared to the two radio stations of Loran. These two were Nathan Malkuson, his teacher of Talmud, and Jakob Keter, his teacher of Kabbalah. Throughout his search for the meaning and purpose of his life, Gershon is conscious of these two figures. Not

only does he frequently recall their words and advice, but he sometimes has visions of them in which they talk to him and occasionally to each other. This happens often in dreams at night, but at times Gershon seems to be in a mystical state in which these two men appear to him and then fade away. The narrator leaves it to the reader to decide whether these are actual visitations from another world or just psychological illusions. For Gershon, however, these visions are as real as anything in his life, and they have a profound influence on him.

Nathan Malkuson is a great authority on the Talmud, the vast collection of Jewish laws and commentaries edited about 500 C. E.<sup>7</sup> Malkuson regards the Talmud as the only sure guide upon which a Jew should base his life. He approaches it rationally and intellectually to find its true meaning, but he looks on it as "an art form . . . smooth, clear, coherent, with a depth . . . three-dimensional and lovely." (20) He dislikes the Kabbalah which he considers irrational, magical, and foolish.

For anyone who wishes to become an Orthodox Jewish rabbi, a thorough knowledge of the Talmud is essential, and Gershon is an excellent student. But somehow he feels a lack of inspiration in the Talmud, as though something were missing. Malkuson detects this in him and tells him he has "a good head" but "no enthusiasm. You are without *entheos*." (19) By this he means that he is not possessed by the divine, and has no fire burning in him.

Increasingly Gershon finds his enthusiasm turning towards the world of Kabbalah and the brilliant teacher who lectures on it, Jakob Keter.<sup>8</sup> Keter had come from Germany and had been a mathematician and

theoretical physicist. He himself tells Gershon later on in the novel, "I had a vision one day that science in our century would lead to death." He then goes on to say that he had decided "to explore the demonic that leads to life... It seemed to me that nothing was more demonically creative in all of Jewish history than Kabbalah." (126) This had led him eventually to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem where he taught Jewish mysticism. Gershon met him as a visiting lecturer in New York.

It is impossible in this short paper to explain the teachings and the long history of Jewish mysticism called Kabbalah.<sup>9</sup> Keter himself says, "It is the heart of Judaism, the soul, the core. Talmud tells us how the Jew acts; Kabbalah tells us how Judaism feels, how it sees the world." (24) Probably Jewish mysticism has a history of over two thousand years and traces of it can be found in the Talmud. There were many mystical writings from the early centuries, but what came to be thought of as the "Bible" of Kabbalah was the *Zohar*, almost certainly written by Moses de Leon in Spain around the year 1285.<sup>10</sup> It purports to be stories of the conversations of a group of rabbis in Palestine in the second century, but it is arranged as loose commentaries on the first five books of the Bible, the Torah.

The *Zohar* and Jewish mysticism in general opens up the possibility of communication with the other world, the world of God, and also the constant danger of attack from "the *sitra achra*, the other side, the demonic realm of evil." (49) In the *Zohar* the words of the Bible are often given completely different interpretations from the literal or traditional meaning, and they open up possibilities of "ascents" to the spiritual realm, visions of the Holy, and revelations through

messengers from God.

Gershon, raised under strict Orthodox discipline in a community which expects obedience and good behavior from children, is a "good boy" and a quiet and serious student. He obeys all the many religious laws of Orthodox Judaism, says all his prayers at home and in the synagogue, and is fluent in four languages: English; Yiddish, which he speaks at home; Hebrew for the study of the Bible; and Aramaic, the language of the Talmud and the *Zohar*. Yet he feels his life empty, and he goes on from day to day without any clear purpose or idea of what he will do with his life. Though he had gone "to a very orthodox high school" and had received ordination as a rabbi after graduating from an orthodox seminary, he "did not know what he wanted to do." (8) At the suggestion of a friend, he decided to go to the Riverside Hebrew Institute, a (fictional) non-orthodox seminary in Manhattan, "more out of curiosity than any sort of ideological conviction." (8)

It was there that he met Jakob Keter who introduced him to Jewish mysticism from which he received new light and fire which he had not found in his Talmudic studies.<sup>11</sup> It was also there that he met Arthur Leiden, whose short and troubled life would intertwine with his own. His name, like Gershon's, is filled with suggestive meanings. "Arthur" brings to mind a quest and betrayal by those one loves. "Leiden" is the German word for suffering and may remind us of another famous story of a young man who suffered, *Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers*.<sup>12</sup> Arthur's background is completely different from Gershon's. Though he was a brilliant student of physics, he abandoned science when he learned of his father's role in the creation of the

atomic bomb. His studying for the rabbinate is largely a protest against his agnostic Jewish parents and an atonement for his feeling of guilt, rather than a true desire to teach the faith of Judaism. Because he was late in beginning his Hebrew studies he does not have the depth of Gershon's knowledge or understanding. For Arthur, searching for guidance on the dark sea of life, science has become "the death light" (110) and the light of Judaism to *his* eyes is uncertain and flickering.

From the esoteric world of ancient texts Gershon and Arthur are thrown into the harsh reality of life in bleak Army camps of war-ravaged Korea where they are sent as Jewish chaplains shortly after the cease-fire. As the only chaplain in a small unit near the cease-fire line, Gershon faces many problems which he has never even imagined before. Although he is responsible for the religious worship only for the Jews who are a small minority, he must also serve all the soldiers in his capacity as a chaplain, to try to boost their morale, to visit the sick, and to try to solve the many problems they encounter in a strange land away from their families and friends. In dealing with these problems and in associating with his fellow officers, almost none of them Jews, Gershon becomes a man, mature and resilient, respected by his fellow officers and affectionately admired by many of the men.

He experiences great loneliness at times, however, and bewilderment at others. In his solitary worship, the assigned Bible readings sometimes take on new meanings, and on one occasion he has a vision in which both Malkuson and Keter visit him and hold a conversation. Afterwards he feels a great calm and a new strength, as though "he had conquered something inside" him. (216) He continues

to study the Kabbalah for new insights and interpretations of the scripture readings.

During this time Gershon is able to visit Japan several times. On a first trip he is "stunned into speechlessness by the temple beauty of Kyoto." (176) On a second trip he remarks to his Christian friend :

"I was taught when I grew up that the Jewish religion made a fundamental difference to the world.... Well, more than half the world is on this side of the planet. They don't even know what Judaism is, and they're perfectly and marvelously content without it. This is a rich culture, probably no more violent and cruel than our own. (261)

Later the two friends are walking in Asakusa and see candles burning before an image on the altar of an indoor shrine. Men, women and children stand praying before it their hands joined together, and Gershon wonders if the God he worships also hears their prayers. In the commentary of the *Zohar* which he consults that night on the day's scripture readings he reads :

"It is true that the Holy One is glorified for the sake of Israel alone; but while Israel is the foundation of the sacred light from which comes forth light for the whole world, yet when heathen nations come to accept the glory of the Holy One and to worship Him, then the foundation of the light is strengthened... and then the Holy One reigns above and below. (262)

Reading this passage he remembered the scene in Asakusa and the beauty of Nikko which he had previously visited. "He was being taught the loveliness of God's world by a pagan land." (263)

It is on the third trip to Japan, when Gershon comes with Arthur

Leiden, that the two of them grapple with the problem of evil in the enormous destruction of the atomic bomb, and especially in Arthur's case, the guilt involved in it. As we have said, Arthur's father, Charles Leiden (of course a fictitious character), had been one of the scientists who helped to create the bomb. The novel implies that most of the scientists who worked on the bomb were Jews, and that it was Einstein's letter to President Roosevelt which convinced the administration that it was worthwhile for the war effort to assign large amounts of money and a team of the most gifted scientists to the project. This assertion of the book has caused some controversy. It has been pointed out that by no means all the scientists who worked on the bomb were Jews. Furthermore, it was mainly non-Jews who made the decisions to develop the bomb and in the end to use it in Japan to bring the war to an end and to avoid the enormous casualties that a direct invasion of Japan would have entailed.<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, Arthur is obsessed with the images of guilt and evil, going back to the time when he was a schoolboy in Los Alamos, not knowing what his father was working on. One day he saw a blinding light and then hundreds of dead birds falling from the sky with blackened bodies and empty eye sockets. (295) Ironically the Jewish scientists who worked on the bomb had thought they would use it against Hitler and his sadistic Nazi madmen. As Charles Leiden says,

"We were Olympians to ourselves. Titans. Prometheuses of physics. We were searching for a bomb to kill the Germans before the Germans killed us. Simple, yes? Good and evil.... Invent the bomb, punish the Germans, save American boys, end the war. A benevolent apocalypse.... Not for a moment do I

regret the work we did on the bomb.... And not for a moment am I without remorse over our having used it on the Japanese." (247—48)

It is clear that Charles Leiden thinks there would have been no moral problem if the bomb had been dropped on Germany, but as he says, "Arthur senses nothing of that." Arthur sees the bomb as evil, the destroyer of innocent lives, the "death-light." Potok has been criticized for apparently over-simplifying the case. There is no hint in the book that Japan's military government was the aggressor towards not only the United States but also to China, Korea, and many of the countries of southeast Asia. In the novel, Japan seems to be the innocent victim, the country of beauty, and art, and peace.

Perhaps it is outside of the province of the novel to go into details of war policy, but since the bomb is so central to the book, it does seem that there might be some suggestion of the reasons which caused Truman to make his most fateful decision. The novel never mentions the fact that a direct invasion of Japan seemed the only alternative and that the projected casualties for both sides were many times those of the victims in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Nor does it give more than slight recognition of the fact that the fire bombings of Tokyo were almost equally if not more destructive than Hiroshima. Charles Leiden says at one point, "Hiroshima is an arguable stain, but Nagasaki was without doubt an act of utter cruelty." He was not the first to express this opinion. I myself heard Eleanor Roosevelt say almost the same thing in 1953 in Kyoto. However, the fact remains that even after Nagasaki the Japanese government was not ready to discuss surrender, and it was only the Emperor's decision which finally broke

the deadlock. Historians will no doubt be arguing the possibilities for many years to come, but on August 9, 1945 Truman had received no clear signal that Japan was ready to lay down arms.

From the point of view of the novel, the question of Japan's war guilt is not so important. Gershon seems to fall in love with Japan and its people with no reservations, and Arthur is so obsessed with his own guilt, his father's, and by extension America's, that he is not concerned with whether Japan was guilty or not. What he feels he must do is go to Hiroshima, but he himself confesses, "I'm not sure I know what I'm doing." (327)

After a brief stay in Tokyo the two friends go to Kyoto by train. Like Gershon, Arthur has a passion for the city, its temples and gardens, and everything in it including especially the people.<sup>14</sup> But they cannot stay long for their real destination is Hiroshima. Once they are there Arthur becomes extremely nervous and asks Gershon, "Why are we here?... I can't think what I had in mind. Why did we come?" (343)

In the Peace Park before the monument, Arthur can only murmur, "We killed all these people. Shouldn't we do or say something?... I can't imagine that there's nothing to say,... Nothing?" (347, 349)

When Gershon says, "It was supposed to have been used against Germany" Arthur replies, "I know all about it. I've heard all the arguments. I lived all the arguments... I'm telling you about how I feel... I know about all the thinking." (348)

The next morning Gershon finds Arthur has already gone out, and after dressing finds him in front of the monument with his skullcap forming a black circle over his blond hair. He was holding a prayer

book and reading from the Book of Psalms, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me; why so far from delivering me and from my anguished roaring?" (351) After reading other passages of sorrow and rejection, Arthur begins to recite the words of the Kaddish, "the awesome words of the prayer for mourners," and he recites them in English.

Magnified and sanctified be the name of God throughout the world which He hath created according to His will. May He establish His kingdom during the days of your life and during the life of all the house of Israel, speedily, yea, soon; and say ye, Amen." (352)

And without consciously intending to, Gershon responds with the "Amen," without which the Kaddish would be meaningless. As Arthur continues to recite, Gershon remembers his parents killed in Israel and his beloved cousin killed in the Pacific War, and finally an old Japanese couple join in the "Amen." The two friends leave the park in silence and only a momentary touch on the arm indicates the shared feeling and intensity of emotion.

For Arthur, saying the Kaddish in Hiroshima was the only thing he could do to bring at least temporary peace to his tortured soul. All the while Gershon has been wrestling with the problem of evil, in the tragedy of Hiroshima, the agony of Arthur, the readings from the *Zohar*, and in the visions in which a messenger from "the other side," the demonic realm, whispers that all this is weariness and means nothing. The diction of the messenger sounds uncomfortably like the voice of Keter. It also resembles in its content the voice of Koheleth, the speaker of Ecclesiastes who speaks of all things being vanity and

a weariness of the flesh. This is the voice of nihilism and it is very seductive for Gershon.

It is now necessary to look once again at Gershon's two teachers, Keter and Malkuson. We must remember that they taught in a non-orthodox Jewish seminary. Both of them were great scholars and experts on the texts and the ancient languages. However, neither one of them was a true believer. Keter was a secular Zionist who "taught only the history of mysticism, and the reading of texts, textual analysis, a dry and technical method of study." (10) He taught mysticism but he was not a mystic. He was a secularist who wore a skullcap as the "sole visible concession to the traditionalism of the school." When Einstein died, Keter, who had known him well, was profoundly upset. He says to Gershon :

"I cannot come to terms with our mortality... I simply cannot. It is all one vast obscurity, one vast hopelessness. A veil. We know nothing, we can hope for nothing. Nothing." (126)

After their visit to Japan, Gershon and Arthur return to Korea, and shortly after, Arthur is killed in a plane crash in an attempt to go back to Japan. Gershon is profoundly depressed and after his discharge from the chaplaincy he is undecided as to what he should do. He does not want to be a rabbi. He feels unable to pray. When he goes to see his old teacher, Malkuson, he is welcomed, but Malkuson soon sees that Gershon is deeply disturbed. In trying to comfort and advise Gershon he reveals his own character clearly.

"It is of no importance. You are now of importance. I will

tell you. Do what you are doing... Prayer is not the only commandment. The study of texts is also commanded..." (383)

Referring to Arthur's death he continues,

"It is a great tragedy. The last of the sons... I will tell you, Loran. What is of importance is not that there may be nothing. We have always acknowledged that as a possibility. What is important is that if indeed there is nothing, then we should be prepared to make something out of the only thing we have left to us—ourselves. I do not know what else to tell you, Loran. No one is in possession of all wisdom. No one." (383)

It is apparent from their words that Gershon's two teachers have no real faith in God. "We know nothing, we can hope for nothing," says Keter, and Malkuson acknowledges "that there may be nothing"—no God, no heaven, no life after death, nothing. To Arthur's question in Hiroshima, "Shouldn't we do or say something? Anything?... I can't imagine that there's nothing to say, ... Nothing?"—they can give no answer. Though they are experts on the texts that are based on faith, they themselves have no faith.

Malkuson's words depress Gershon even more. He does not know what to do and his own faith is obviously at a low ebb. Gershon faces a problem which his teachers and many others have faced before him. When the sacred words of the Torah were believed to be the very words of God given to Moses during his forty days on Mount Sinai it was clear that obedience to those words was a sacred duty.<sup>15</sup> But when scholars began to study the Bible scientifically as a human text and to find variant readings, contradictions, and errors, the simple faith of the past became much more difficult. We may assume that Gershon was well aware of the conclusions of modern scholars that

the "Books of Moses" were edited from many sources, most of them written down hundreds of years after Moses' death. If there are doubts about the text of the Bible, how can we be sure that what the Bible teaches us about God is true? And if this is true of the Bible, how much more must it be true of the *Zohar*, written a thousand years after the death of those whom it claims to quote, and full of historical anachronisms?

The problem of the "fallible text" is a serious one for all modern Jews, and Christians as well, especially since the beginning of modern scientific criticism and the new outlook of modern science, particularly since the time of Darwin's theory of evolution. Fundamentalists and ultra-orthodox Jews may deny part of modern science and assert the inerrancy of Scripture as the Word of God, but most others must seek to find God's revelation within the words of the Bible and the experience of many people, while admitting that the truth must be apprehended by faith through the words of the Bible, even though it is not always a literal truth, and even though there may be errors in the text.

There is another way of knowing God and the truth that God reveals. This is the way of the mystic. Mysticism assumes that we can know God directly, that we can experience God in our inner selves. The mystic believes that we can be united with God, and that God can speak to us and reveal the truth to our minds here and now. If this is true, then it does not matter whether the *Zohar* was based on an ancient manuscript, or was an original work by Moses de Leon. For the *Zohar* is not really relating the teachings of ancient times. It is recording new insights and revelations, and encouraging

believers to experience God directly in their own lives.

This is why the Kabbalah appeals to Gershon. Even as a boy he had had what he believed was a true vision (6—7), and since then from time to time he hears voices and is “visited” by “messengers” from the other world. For him this is much more real than the academic discussions about passages of the Talmud or even Keter’s textual analysis of Kabbalistic texts. Study of the Talmud too often becomes discussion of the meaning of a single word or passage, and the Talmud is full of minute discussions of laws which have almost no connection with modern life. The Talmud also has many wonderful passages which *are* relevant to modern life, as Potok makes clear in his other novels, but the academic study of Talmud tends to concern itself with details of textual variants, grammar, and the enormous literature of commentary built onto the already enormous text of the Talmud itself.

After the depressing words of Malkuson, Gershon spends time aimlessly not knowing what to do. Then one night he finds himself on the roof of his apartment house where he had experienced a vision as a boy. As he recalls passages of the *Zohar* he himself seems to be making an ascent to the unknowable darkness, and then a descent into himself and finally “he heard a voice, and the voice had a face, and it was the face of Arthur Leiden, and the voice was saying very softly, There must be something we can say or do, dear Gershon. There can’t be nothing.” (386) And a few moments later he hears the solemn words of the Kaddish, and the voice that answers, “Amen,” is the voice of Arthur Leiden.

As Arthur had found that the “something” he could do in Hiroshima

was to recite the Kaddish, so Gershon now goes daily to his uncle's synagogue to say Kaddish for his friend. But the vision leads to a further decision. A month or so later Gershon flies to Jerusalem to do further study in Kabbalah with Jakob Keter. As he sits in the garden of Keter's house after his arrival, waiting for Keter to bring some coffee, he thinks of his future. "He did not think he had made a mistake." The description of the garden is suggestive. "The air was shaded by tall trees through which streamed narrow pillars of light... A bird sang briefly from somewhere in the branches overhead. Gershon Loran sat in the light and shade... waiting." (389)

Thus the novel ends, but the words quoted above suggest that Gershon will find *something* to do, and that it will be something important. "The air... shaded by tall trees" may echo the saying at the beginning of *Pirke Aboth*, "Raise up many disciples, and make a hedge for the Torah."<sup>16</sup> But the fact that "narrow pillars of light" stream through the trees suggests that Gershon will constantly be receiving revelations from above, an idea reinforced by the bird singing above, suggesting the messengers who have often appeared to Gershon in his visions.<sup>17</sup> He sits "in the light and shade" may mean that he lives in the consciousness of the reality of this world as well as under the divine light of revelation. But as he has learned in his visions in Hiroshima, the darkness is a part of transcendent reality, and goodness can only find its completion when it comprehends a part of the evil from the other side. The *Zohar* is full of ambiguities. Light implies darkness. Life implies death. "The Blessed Holy One does not place His abode where male and female are not found together."<sup>18</sup> But Gershon has learned to live in the ambiguities and to find new

truth in them.

Gershon will continue his study of Kabbalah and perhaps he will become a great scholar and the successor of Jakob Keter. But he will not be only a scholar, only an emender of texts. He will use the Kabbalah for personal growth, to point others to appreciation of new truth and new hope.

*The Book of Lights* does not offer solutions to the problems of evil, of suffering, and war, but it does point to the possibility of living with courage in a world of light and darkness with hope and the faith that there is ultimate meaning in this world and access to the world beyond.

#### Notes

- 1 *The Chosen* (1967); *The Promise* (1969); *My Name is Asher Lev* (1972); *In the Beginning* (1975); *The Book of Lights* (1981); *Davita's Harp* (1985); and *The Gift of Asher Lev* (1990). All except the first, which was published by Simon and Schuster, have been published by Alfred A. Knopf.
- 2 Potok himself faced the same challenge, as he records in *Wanderings: Chaim Potok's History of the Jews* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1978) p.13.
- 3 In an essay entitled, "The Phenomenon of the Really-Jewish Best-Seller: Chaim Potok's *The Chosen*" Sheldon Grebstein asks, "What would seem an unlikely best-seller than a first novel by an unknown writer with an unpronounceable name, a novel about orthodox Jews, especially Hasidic Jews set in Brooklyn of the early 40s, and a novel whose stirring action is a schoolboy softball game?" Quoted in *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, No. 4, ed. Daniel Walden (Albany: SUNY Press) p.6.
- 4 Chaim Potok, *The Book of Lights* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1981) p.3. Subsequent references will be to this text with the page number in parentheses.
- 5 The reference in Exodus 2:22 is to Gershon, the son of Moses, but this name and Gershon, the son of Levi, are sometimes interchanged, as in I Chronicles 6:1 (Compare Numbers 3:17). It is probably no coincidence that

- the great authority on Kabbalah, who, like Keter, taught at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, was Gershom Scholem.
- 6 Thomas Wolfe, *Look Homeward, Angel*, 1929.
  - 7 For a short description of the Talmud see Edward A. Abramson, *Chaim Potok* (Boston : Twayne Publishers, 1986), p.7.
  - 8 The names, Malkuson and Keter, are obviously related to the Sefiroth of Kabbalah (see Abramson, p.120), but I have thought it best not to try to explain this difficult subject.
  - 9 Kabbalah means "tradition" and Kabbalists believed that their secret tradition was given to Moses on Sinai along with Torah, but passed on only to certain selected initiates. Over the centuries there was a great admixture of magic and superstition, but there was also a genuine mystical core.
  - 10 For the authorship and origin of the *Zohar*, see Daniel Chanan Matt, *Zohar : The Book of Englightenment* (Ramsey, NJ : The Paulist Press), pp.3—14.
  - 11 *The Book of Lights*, as its name (which is a paraphrase of *Seder ha Zohar*) implies, is full of light and fire symbolism which is also important in the *Zohar*. I have indicated only a few of these.
  - 12 Written by Goethe in 1774.
  - 13 For criticism of the novel's implication that "Jews were largely responsible for the creation of the atomic bomb" see Abramson, pp.127—29.
  - 14 Arthur's parents had urged him to see Kyoto. and the novel attributes to Elizabeth Leiden part of the responsibility of having Kyoto spared as the target of the first bomb (379—80). This seems to be a fictional version of the theory that it was Professor Langdon Warner of Harvard and the Fogg Museum who had had a hand in saving Kyoto. He himself denied the responsibility, and the matter has been definitively clarified by my friend and colleague, Professor Otis Cary in an article in the October-December 1975 issue of the *Japan Quarterly* and in several other publications. As Professor Cary conclusively proves, it was Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson who was responsible for the decision and it was his personal decision based on his own knowledge of Kyoto which he had visited at least twice.
  - 15 The first words of *Pirke Aboth* are : "Moses received Torah from Sinai..." It was believed that the whole of the first five books of the Bible, including the account of his own death, were revealed by God to him there.
  - 16 These words are the end of the first "verse," as the words in Note 15 are

the beginning. I have followed the translation of R. Travers Herford, *The Ethics of the Talmud : Sayings of the Fathers : Pirke Aboth* (New York : Schocken Books, 1962), p.19.

17 Birds are mentioned frequently in the novel and have obvious symbolic significance. See Abramson, p.123.

18 Daniel Chanan Matt, *op. cit.*, p.56.