

Giuseppe Giuliani

“Oh, forgive me, sir. A thousand pardons for talking to you. I didn’t know that to say ‘Good morning’ was such an offence on high.”

Giuseppe — Giuseppe Giuliani — turned his back on the girl who had come down the path and swept the asphalt with thrusts more violent, more fierce still than before.

“Oh, well,” he heard her say behind him, “if you got a flea in your ear, then . . . ”

In the shadow cast by the towering commission flats under a sky struggling towards blueness, the wind coursing in whorls about the grass-mud-and-concrete quadrangle chilled the sweat that made his shirt and overalls cling to him clam-like to his back.

“Just the same,” — he found himself gritting his teeth — “Thought I’d tell you . . . I’m Angela . . . I’ve come to stay for a while . . . Apartment one-one-four . . . To look after Grandad . . . my grandfather Vic St. John who’s gone and had himself a stroke. And I know you’re Joe, the neighbours they told me already and . . . and well, I thought you should know who I am . . . ”

He tossed a shoulder at her — the devil could scarcely have cared less — and with thrusts hard and testy, he struck at the pavement with a vehemence still more virulent, with anger and loathing locked into his marbled jaw, with his nose bristling, his lips compressed near to quivering, and his stark-tendoned,

hard-veined hands taut, like a vice, about the broom. He then opened a plastic bag, the glaucous green of a drunkard's spew, swept a pile of garbage on to a scoop and, dourly, testily, shovelled it in.

"I thought I might have met you before this, but they told me, the neighbours that is, they told me you'd gone away."

He wished she'd stop talking; he wished that she would go away; he wanted nothing other than to be left alone and left to dissolve, unseen, unencumbered and untrammelled into the obliviousness of private thought and unbreachable contemplation. Would the very ground but open and swallow him up! . . . But the girl — blonde, trim, and poised, with convivial dimples beside lively eyes and nimble lips (this much he had noticed on his first glimpse of her as she had come through the door) — the girl who called herself Angela, simply went on.

"Some said you'd gone on holiday . . . Others, that you'd gone back to Italy . . . Others still, that you'd moved to another job . . . You know how people they like to talk . . . And why not? Those poor old sick folk up there, there's so little else for them to do . . ."

To Giuseppe, she seemed now to be receding and, thus heartened, he permitted himself another glance over his shoulder to confirm that she was indeed truly on her way. And Mother Mary be thanked, she was. String-bag in hand, she had skirted around him and was now at the foot of the incline that led up to the noisier, busier, morning-trafficked street above. She paused there for the merest moment as if she might yet have second thoughts, said, "They told me you weren't a talker. But still I tried . . . I did . . ." and, Mother Mary more truly be thanked, tripped lithe and easily up the ramp.

Left to himself, he continued, now unmolested, with his work. From somewhere close, there rose the scent of lavender, as also a trace of cinnamon, and chives, and of a roast, but more pervasively it was the stench of fungused cheese, and of orange peel, lettuce leaf and wilting carrot that sprang from every corner, as also of rotting snot-and-phlegm-encrusted tissues,

stale beer and an uncovered sewerage drain. Around him, there were scraps of paper by the score, depleted grimy bottles of cordial and sauce, and broken egg-shells, fish-skeletons and rancid rind, and, beneath a window, a heap of beer-cans, a soggy glove, a legless doll, and more, and more — the foetid putrefying debris of kitchen, bathroom, bedroom and nursery left to the birds, left to the pigeons, scavengers all, to pull apart, demolish, pulverise and disperse, trash, all of it trash, trash, like everything, like everyone, everywhere, in every age, trash!

It was all so clear, so plain, so patent —

All the chattels with which humanity littered its life — trash!

All the refuse and the leavings, and the shards and detritus and parings it left at every turn — trash!

And, in this world, the seedy flesh itself, and the abandoned, the cast-off, the disowned in the apartments above, and the derelicts at large, along with the wasted, the cadaverous and insane — trash again!

And still more trash the doltish in the streets, the mindless in the city, the unfulfilled across the nation, and the gutter-waifs throughout the world, and the criminal, the sluttish, the lewd and the obscene!

Where did it all end? Trash! Trash! Trash! Sandrina, too, now, and Santo and Benedetto and Baby Salvatore, they also become the stuff of trash, even as he, Giuseppe Giuliani, still living, still breathing, was himself nothing more, a mere scrap of flotsam cast up on the junk-heap that went by the name of life, he from Montefalco to Melbourne arrived, from the surrounds of famed Assisi come, abandoning family there, and church and vineyard and olive grove, surrendering language, homeliness, filial duty and friends, and crossing continents, crossing oceans for an existence more alluring, more promising, more fulfilling — at the end of it all, to be reduced to this, to this, a beaten chunk of driftwood, a sludge of carrion, alone now, alone, another offering before due time to the all-leveling, all-annihilating, all-silencing primacy of expendable,

useless, throwaway trashiness that overtook all in a trashy world.

The fact, the reality of it screamed at him, hemmed him in on all sides: the Saundersons, the Habibs, Polidoris, Barkers, Prideaux and Theophanous, and their numberless ilk behind every window and on every floor, proof, if proof were needed, of the physical, mental and moral decrepitude, decay, even debauch to which possessors of human flesh — God-given flesh — could be reduced. He knew their stories. Because ears did not close of their own accord, he had heard them, even as, not wanting to listen, much less bringing himself to care, he had continued to sweep, to mop, to wipe, and to polish away the debris and grime of their fouled-up, unaccomplished and seedily-cankered existence.

He had deliberately turned his back on them — “Let me be,” he had wanted to say.

He had moved from them still further away — “I will clean your pollution but leave me free of your pollutedness.”

He had intensified his activity with brisk and thwarting vigour — “I am not one of you, I am not of your kind, even if that is how you see me.”

But, leeches that they were, they had chosen to cling to him, a janitor being patently safe repository for all the abasement, foulness and mayhem that vulgarised their lives.

Ellen Saunderson, for instance, in Apartment one-three-six, a flabby floppy sixty-eight, in times past mother to a string of many-fathered bastards, one of her own daughters now pregnant with her third, her son-in-law in prison awaiting trial for breaking and entry and attempted rape; and the Habibs, Mohammed and Samira, on the eighth floor in eighty-nine, with four children under five, he, Mohammed, unemployed on mental grounds, whiling away his time in a Russell Street gaming parlour and beating his wife on returning for delaying with his meals; and the Polidoris, Giovanni Polidori paraplegic from a fractured spine, his wife and daughters slave to his every need, his every wish and every whim; and the woman in one-two-four whom he knew only as Lorraine, a chain-smoking tat-

toed stripper with two undernourished children, her face never free of eye-shadow and grease, lipstick and rouge, her alcoholic *de facto* ever threatening to hurl her and the kids from their twelfth-floor window even as he hurled out his beer bottles from that height having them smash to slivers and splinters on the asphalt below, and giving the children matches, daring them to set fire to the curtains, to the apartment, "to the whole fuckin' caboodle of the fuckin' government's fuckin' charity commission flats in a mighty fuckin' bonfire such as none from fuckin' Adam to fuckin' Armageddon such as they's never in their fuckin' lives they's never fuckin' seen!"

And there were others, there were more, more. Trash! Scum! And he felt the pain and the weight of questions he would have preferred not to face but which, at the same time, would not desist from assailing him. For this, for *this* had he left a town of thousands for a city of millions? For *this* forsaken a promising apprenticeship to the carpenter Gianfranco Ricardo, the best of all the Umbrian *artigiani*, enticed by a partnership in Cousin Carlo's quick-money-making catering firm that proved no longer to be, to exist, by the time he came? For *this* to have broken with Rocco Santoro's Montefalco fun-loving bordello-crawling madcap gang, expecting something better, something finer, there stretching before him every prospect of "*lavoro, soldi e il mondo grandioso*", yes, yes, the very world, as he had said to the older folks in persuading them to let him go? For *this*? —

How he despised them, despised them all here, couldn't bear to listen to them.

"You'd think they'd forgotten they ever had a mother." So, Mrs. MacClure about her daughters who seldom visited, seldom rang.

"An' jus' three days b'fore we're ready after long las' t'move into our own unit, me Albie 'e goes 'n' gets hi'self run down by a bloomin' train of all things." So, Mrs. Cuthbertson every Monday and Friday when she passed him on her way to the doctor's for her multi-vitamin injection.

And "what with me leg ulcers an' piles an' me sugar eatin' up

me toes an' eyes an' me art'ries, the Lord above 'e's really makin' a downright mess o' me, ain't 'e, an' only 'e knows why, god-dammit!" So, Charlie Mauldron stopping to rest every few steps on his walking frame.

So did they talk, talk, talk, had to talk, had to tell — tell about sickness, and paralysis, desertion, alcoholism, decay, suicide, murder, death — had to talk, had to tell, as if he had nothing better to do but to listen to them and had no troubles of his own to gnaw at him and bite and eat away, bit by bit, with deeply-sinking teeth at his own betrayed, frustrated, increasingly hope-denying hope-relinquishing life.

How doggedly they kept bringing him down to their level; how perversely they must have held that because a man dealt in trash, he himself must assuredly be trash; or did his very foreignness identify him with the wretched, the abased and the demeaned, all these by nature and by circumstances made to fall, he in their eyes having perhaps fallen still lower than themselves?

He remembered his father then, and his mother.

Were they but to see him now, and with them his sister Peppina as well! Did they but know — his mother Constanza who had stoically packed his cases for him and lost herself in the throes of incessant preparatory activity, only at the bus terminal dropping her grim demeanour to coddle and throw her arms about him with a passionate clinging tearful "Giuseppe, Giuseppe, my little baby grown up so quickly, my infant so quickly also grown away!"; his father Tomaso admonishing him as at arms'-length he gripped his shoulders, "Wherever you are, whatever you do, remember always the name Giuliani, and for your father's peace and love of your mother and honour towards your sister, never upon the name of your family bring down shame", before drawing him closer to kiss both cheeks; and Peppina, dark, homely, ripening Peppina, who, in saying only "*Ciao, Giuseppe; fratelli, arrivederci*", said all, vesting in him the possibility for herself of another future, too, another existence over there, over there across the continents and the waters, where life, as he himself had kept insisting, must be

livelier, must be finer, freer, grander, more exciting and more exhilarating than anything back home in tiny Montefalco.

Could they indeed but have seen him!

What subterfuges he had had to resort to that they should not suspect, what contrivances, what frank deceptions!

The letters! —

“Dear Mama, Dear Papa, and Peppina,

Carlo’s business — it fell apart. That, you probably know. But I work with just my kind now — with carpenters as I did back home, with cabiner-makers, and, God being good, I make good money. At night, I study English. In a year, two, I will be able to bring you all here.”

That letter written when Cousin Carlo’s promise not honoured, he had become storeman and general labourer in a timber-yard.

“Dearest Mama, Papa, Peppina,

I have gone into building, a very lucrative occupation here. And started a cleaning business on the side. I have met a lovely girl. Her name is Sandrina, Sandrina Gibaldi. You see, she is one of us. Her father he has a good fruit-selling business and he is the finest of men. His family is from Fiesole.

Meanwhile, I am putting aside everything I can. Please God and Mother Mary, it will not be long before I can kiss your hands on these shores.”

That, when, retrenched during a re-structuring of the timber firm, he had turned to brick-laying by day and earned a bit more besides as cleaner in insurance offices, banks and restaurants by night; while Orazio Gibaldi, Sandrina’s father, in truth ran the most meagre stall at Victoria Market, his asthma and a chronic rheumatic heart ailment keeping him from doing more than just enough to support his wife and daughter.

“Dearest, dearest Mama, Papa, whom at this most blessed time I miss more, more than ever before.

No, do not send Peppina for the wedding.

First, it will be only a small celebration — something very private, very intimate, a dinner, a few friends, a little music, music from the mother country, and some dancing. All as my Sandrina and I we want it to be.

And second, we will be living in a small apartment. We want to save all we can, and as quickly as possible to bring you out. So, for the moment, there really won't be any room with us for Peppina, much as I would dearly love to have my beloved sister with me.

But it won't be long now. My work is going well. Sandrina, too, she works. When she is not helping her father, she is a waitress at one of our biggest, best-known, most-respected restaurants owned by a countryman from Firenze. *Nicolo Cacciattollo* he is called.

And, oh, the wedding; the wedding, beloved Mama, revered Papa, the wedding itself will be exactly as you would wish for a son of your blood and of your flesh — it will be in a proper Catholic church with all the proper rites just like a wedding back home.

So think of me then as I too shall think of you."

What had they thought, his father, his mother, and betrayed Peppina? Or had they perhaps guessed, even if in their own letters to him, they hinted at no suspicion, complimenting him instead when the time came on his choice of bride — clearly beautiful and comely in so far as they could judge from the photographs he sent them — and asking when, asking only when they might yet set eyes upon their son again.

"Forgive me, Papa; forgive me, Mama; and you, dearest Peppina," he murmured with a fullness of pain, remembering the succession of lies he had fed them as he rubbed and scraped and polished away the grit and grime encrusted during his previous week's absence in thick accretions along the window joints.

That he had married Sandrina, so much, of course, had been true; that was beyond any possibility of faking. Of the marriage, Cousin Carlo, even if no one else, would have surely written home. But, Holy Father, how tell them that after all the prom-

ise, the enthusiasm and the expectations invested in him, he was, in this great and free and blessed land, but a mere janitor; tell them that he had become less than he might have been under the wing of the carpenter Ricardo back home; tell them that in everything he had turned his hands to he had somehow, through no fault of his own, been short-changed; or explain even — if his parents did perhaps expect explanation at all — that while Sandrina's father ought to have helped secure for the couple at least a more spacious apartment as any well-to-do father would surely have done, Orazio Gibaldi, fine as he was, was in fact both sick and poor and in no position to help? As fond as he had been of Peppina, the last thing he had wanted was that she should come and see for herself and report, to his parents' hurt and his own chagrin and shame, on the true state of affairs.

It all seemed so distant now, even unreal. He preferred — he said desperately — not to think of it, but how resist thoughts that from purgatorial blackness the blackest shade of black rose like wildcat demons to think themselves? A man needed to be cut from the coldest granite to put his past, and his present, and his seeming destiny out of mind. How then was he, *he*, born a mere child of flesh, to forget his marriage to gentle, yielding, unspoiled Sandrina, forget the births in short order of Santo, Benedetto and Salvatore, forget the vow shared with Sandrina that whatever they had to miss out upon in their own lives, the children at least should not be denied, or forget their shared happiness and delights, even through fatigue and the enervations of daily routine, taken in domestic constancy, pliability and loving reciprocity, all of it to end between a lorry and a delivery-van in a sudden all-obliterating opening up of quicksand and whirlpools, the earth swallowing up Sandrina, Santo, Benedetto and Baby Salvatore, even as the trash he consigned to the sewers was swallowed up, forever and forever and forever — and, as Father Modesto at Mass was to add — amen?!

He had had to tell Williams, Harvey Williams, his supervisor.

“Yes, Joe, I understand,” the beet-red man behind the desk

laden with papers, rosters, charts and the morning's *Sun* had said. "May it never happen to me, but I do understand. Yes, you can have a week off if that's what you want. You are a poor devil, aren't you?"

After a week — with time, existence and sensation all reduced to the stuff of vacuum — he returned.

"Glad to see you, Giovanni, m'boy," Harvey Williams greeted him when he reported back. "Would have hated to lose a man like you . . . Well, all the tools of trade are in the cupboard where they've always been. I believe you still have the key"; and, without further ceremony, he returned to his rosters and charts, the day's newspaper open on the racing pages beside his elbow.

"Giuseppe", Giuseppe had wanted to correct. But he stopped himself short. He saw no sense in it. Giuseppe; Giovanni; whatever the name, the possessor of it was of no account in the world any more. He was insignificant, a mere creature, a gob of offal, forgettable, dispensable, disposable — as, in the end, were all men, all mankind, mere offal and trash and effluent, ever-accumulating ordure itself shedding more ordure on the surface of the earth, all to be wiped off repeatedly, generation after generation, to make room in their turn, for more, and more, and more expendable crap. He wondered whether anyone truly knew his name. They called him Joe, but did any know him by his christened name before the Lord Jesus Christ, the Giuseppe Giuliani that his father at their parting, so long before now, so long before, had bade him always remember, for the sake of his father's peace, for love of his mother, and in honour towards his sister?

But it didn't matter. Nothing mattered. Not in a world that for him was sinking. If the terrain beneath his feet had ever been in the least bit secure, whether in Montefalco or since arriving in Australia, it was no longer so. Even as he swept and rubbed and polished and gathered up the husks of the slovenly decadent decaying living of the tenants, his legs teetered as if he walked on mounds of jelly. Every so often, the rumble of a tram passing by led him to lean upon his mop or broom or hold to a

nearby rail and look around. Everything had become so alien, unreal, distorted, everything as if he were looking through misshapen lenses, the buildings formerly solid, sharp and square now buckled and warped — they might have been standing in mire — the curtains behind the windows gracelessly awry and the balconies frangibly detachable supernumeraries along the walls, protruding extensions threatening at any moment to detach themselves from their supports and topple in a wholesale cascade of mortar and steel to crush, to maim, eviscerate any inadvertent misdirected wretch or composite of blood and bone and shit and flesh who, at that moment, happened unhappily and unsuspectingly to be passing there.

But if all around him seemed unreal, detached, distorted and remote, the stridulously sibilant squeal of the siren of an ambulance scuttling by promptly returned him to an immediacy hard, sharp-edged, unyielding and intractable. And reality assumed another guise as well. For, on looking up in reflex action, he saw the girl who had called herself Angela coming back down the ramp. She, at least, walked with sure step, walked with poise, with buoyancy, with lightness — with a ductile ease that in its fluidity would deny even the least possibility of adversity, were it not for her string bag laden with groceries swinging and bobbing against her leg and telling of sickness, paralysis, incapacity and dependence of a man incarcerated in a room, in an apartment high, high, high on the eleventh floor above. And, watching her as, more dilatorily, he pressed another bag of garbage into a bin, he was beset by an ache, and an urgency, and a need — a need — a need such as he had for long both to himself and to others denied, to talk, to bare himself, to splay open a soul on which every disappointment, dejection, indignity, abomination and defeat was, as if with a mallet and a chisel, and with trowel and harrow, inex-pungibly writ.

She, at least, would listen, *she* would hear; she had already, after all, shown a readiness, an openness to receive. And though a man was mere garbage, though he was, in space, in time, and before God and the gods and in the wake of every capricious

whim mere trash; and though the man might in his every action be fundamentally alone, be born alone, die alone, and eat, breathe, shit, sleep, dream and suffer for himself alone; and though every shared exchange of love and every promise, and every intimacy, undertaking and ecstasy in rejoicing was in every passing minute subject to precipitate disintegration, annihilation, frustration and collapse; what else did he — what else *could* he — have on this wretched earth if not another such as he, *any* other, who, by listening — no more, no more than by mere listening — would give the man to understand, “I am with you; we are one; whatever may be above, or beyond, or beneath, as long as it is given to us together to be here, you are not, you are not, you are not alone.”

In that moment, he saw the fact clearly; it had every sharpness, wholeness and potency of a vision; it gave new lightness to his every movement; and it led him to take one deep breath, and a second, and a third, each assuring him of the possibility of liberation, extrication, release. He would talk to her, yes, he would, to Angela, and she would talk to him; he would reach another, and would yet be reached in turn.

And finding cause through clearing away accumulated debris from the foot of the ramp, he moved closer to her, permitting himself to look straight at her in the hope that, as before, she might open the gambit in speech, that he might in turn be given reason to respond, and thereby be able to talk, and thus to open himself out, out, out, with all the pent-up pressure, and with all the pressing need, to her who would surely, surely, surely listen.

And speak she did in fact.

A metre, two, from him, she looked at her watch in a hurried motion and said, “Lordie, I didn’t know it’d take so long to get the merest handful of things. Even as early as this, there was a fair bit of waiting in the shops, while old Frank Diabolo in the milk-bar, once *he* gets to talk, it takes all one’s cunning to break away. Meanwhile, Grandad must be starving for his breakfast and I still have to get to uni for classes, and . . . and . . . Well,

you know . . . As long as there's life, there are duties . . . There's always something that's got to be done . . . ”

And before he could as much as formulate any reply that would keep her near, she was as good as gone, limbering ever so smoothly along the path towards the door and through the foyer to the lift, there in the merest blinking disappearing and being whisked away, her being, even her shadow, in that swift, even, unbroken transit past him, scarcely touching, impinging upon, or acknowledging his own.

The opportunity was lost. Even now she was rising up the lift-well unseen somewhere between the ground and the eleventh floor. But she would have to come down again. And therefore, he would yet get to see her. If not later that day, then the next perhaps, or the day after, as long as her grandfather old Victor St. John held out. The all-pervading greyness would stay, of course, and the hardness and the lifeless obtuseness of that constricting filth-strewn enclosure of asphalt, sky and wall. But these did not matter now. They were all in the nature of things. Garbage was garbage, waste was waste, scum was scum, and garbage, waste and scum would for all his efforts ever remain and ever be renewed. But he would yet rise above it all, he would like a phoenix yet rise out of it. For Angela would return. And they would share a word; he would yield to her questionings; he would open himself out, he would, and, by so opening himself out, be brought back, returned, into that human circle of oneness and exchange from which for too long, too long, by shutting himself off, he had shut himself out.

So buoyed, he moved towards the door, there to wash its glass, to wipe its frames, to polish its handle. And when Mrs. MacClure on her way to the doctor's passed him and said, "Me daughters, you'd think they never had no mother", and Mrs. Saunderson said, "Me son-in-law, 'e's out on bail", and Giovanni Polidori, wheeling himself out, said, "*Mia Francesca, mia figlia*, she leave her sick papa and leave her mama and run away with a married man", Giuseppe paused in his work, reached out as if to touch, support and hold, and, hesitantly,

tentatively, keeping pace with each, nodded and murmured,
nodded and murmured,

“Yes.”

“Go on.”

“I am listening.”

“I hear.”

Glossary

Apikoros — an unbeliever, a sceptic, a heretic; one who negates the rabbinic tradition; derived from Epicurus, the Greek philosopher

Artigiani — artisans

Baal Shem Tov — Master of the Good Name; originally applied to Israel ben Eliezer, (c. 1700–1760), the founder of *Chassidism* in Eastern Europe.

Bar Mitzvah — Son of the commandment; a boy's initiation into responsible religious adulthood at the age of 13, marked by the assumption upon himself of Jewish precepts, observances and duties. Cf *Bat Mitzvah* — the female analogue, but observed at the age of 12.

Beth Din — House of Judgement; a Jewish court of law with a minimum of three men as members

Blondinies — blond ones; here used derogatively.

Bontsche Schweig — Bontsche the Silent; a character in a story by I. L. Peretz, and, ever since, seen as the fictional epitome of humility

Buba — grandmother

Capote — a kaftan or gaberdine-like coat traditionally worn by religious Jews

Chassidism — also *Hasidism* — a popular pietist religious and social movement, founded in Eastern Europe in the 18th century, with emphasis on miracle-working, joy, ecstatic prayer and charismatic leadership. See Baal Shem Tov.

Hence *Chassidim* — adherents of the movement

Cheder — room; an elementary school for Jewish learning; see, *Yeshiva*

Chumash — the *Pentateuch*; the first five books of the Bible. From *chamesh*, meaning five

Dybbuk — also *dibbuk* — adhesion; in kabbalistic folklore, the notion of a soul of one who is dead transmigrating into another's living body

Eshes chayil — A woman of valour; the first words of *Proverbs* 31:10–31, describing the virtuous housewife

Farvisht un farnichtert — wiped out and annihilated

Feter — uncle

Folkshule — folk school; public school

Gehenna — hell

Glick — luck, fortune; hence *Umglick* — misfortune

Goy — a Hebrew term employed in the Bible to refer variously to peoples, nations and gentiles. Today, applied more commonly to non-Jews, in both a simple descriptive and, depending on the context, derogatory form. *Goyish/e* — adjective

Grosz — a Polish monetary unit; one hundred grosz totalled one *zloty*

Gymnasium — European secondary school

Internationale — revolutionaly socialist hymn, first sung in 1871 in France

Kadimah — Forward!

Kiddush Ha'Shem — Sanctification of the Divine Name; acceptance of martyrdom in preference to apostasy or performance of actions likely to bring disgrace on Judaism. Its opposite is *Chillul Ha'Shem* — Profanation of the Divine Name.

Kosher — fit to eat; ritually clean according to Jewish dietary laws. Also used, depending upon context, to denote acceptable, approved, authentic, legitimate, legal, ethical, okay

Liebeniu — dearly loved one — an endearment, usually addressed to a child

Liebeskind — dear child; essentially interchangeable with *liebeniu*

Maalach Hamavet — Angel of Death

Mashiach — messiah

Maskilim — literally, the enlightened; adherents of *Haskalah*, the post-C18th Jewish enlightenment

Mitnagdim — literally, the opponents; applied, historically, to Jews opposed to the more populist *Chassidic* movement, and stressing devotion to talmudic learning and formal, as distinct from ecstatic, prayer

Mittelmensch — literally, a middle man; figuratively, a mediocrity

Mitzvah — commandment, precept, good deed; plural: *mitzvot*

Poalei Zion — literally, Workers of Zion; a socialist Zionist movement in Europe founded in 1907

Ribbono Shel Olam — Master of the World; can be used in exclamatory form as “Oh, God in heaven!”

Sanhedrin — the supreme political, religious and judicial body, constituted of 71 Elders, in the Land of Israel during the Roman period through until c. 425 C.E.

Schmutz — dirt, filth, smut

Seder — the Passover feast celebrating the exodus of the ancient Hebrews from Egypt

Shabbos — Sabbath

Shechinah — the Divine Presence, the numinous immanence of God in the world

Sheine malke — a lovely or beautiful queen

Shikse — a non-Jewish woman, more especially a young one; the female counterpart of *shegetz*, in certain contexts used in the derogative

Shlemiel — simpleton, a loser, a sad sack

Sh'ma, the — from *Sh'ma Israel*, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One" (found in *Deuteronomy & Numbers*), a twice-daily recited prayer affirming God's unity; also recited on one's death-bed and the final prayer of martyrs being led to their deaths

Shtetl — town, village. *Shtetlech* — plural form

Shul — synagogue

Suk — marketplace (Arabic)

Tante — aunt

T'chias ha'messim — resurrection of the dead

Tsibel — onion; *tsibele* — little onion

Umglick — misfortune; see, *Glick*

Vieg lied — cradle song, lullaby

Yeshiva — a higher institution of Jewish learning; see, *Cheder*

Zaida — grandfather

Zohar, the — *The Book of Splendour* — a major work of Jewish mysticism, written in the form of commentary on the *Pentateuch*, and containing vividly imaginative symbolic description of the inner life of God and His relationship to man.