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Over five seasons, America has witnessed the schlemiel-and-schlimazl style idiocies of sidekicks Elaine, Jerry Seinfeld, and George.



The Schlemiel and the Schlimazl in *Seinfeld*

By CARLA JOHNSON

Someone has stolen George's glasses, or so he thinks. He has actually left them on top of his locker at the health club. He steps out from the optical shop, where he is trying on new frames, squints down the street, and "sees" Jerry's girlfriend Amy kissing Jerry's cousin. Never mind that the frames he is wearing have no lenses. He reports the sighting to Jerry. Despite Elaine's caution ("He couldn't tell an apple from an onion, and he's your star witness!"), Jerry believes George. Confronting Amy, Jerry says, "Let's cut the bull, sister!" In the process of trying to extract the supposed truth from Amy, Jerry loses her. Eventually, George realizes that he actually saw a police officer kissing her horse. "I was an idiot for listening to you," Jerry complains.¹

If Jerry is an "idiot," he is a special kind of idiot. The hit show *Seinfeld* regularly employs the schlemiel/schlimazl shtick evolved from Yiddish folklore and literature. In *Joy of Yiddish*, Leo Roslin defines the two types of classic Yiddish fools: "... the schlimazl is the one who gets soup spilt on him.... It is the schlemiel, of course,

whose 'accident' spills the soup ... onto others" (Pinkster 6). In the above episode (aired 2 December 1993), Jerry plays the schlimazl to George's schlemiel. Over five seasons, in episode after well-watched episode, America has witnessed the schlemiel-and-schlimazl style idiocies of sidekicks Jerry, George, and Elaine.² Whereas George Costanza, Elaine Benes, and Jerry Seinfeld exemplify the luckless Jewish fools, the man with one name—Kramer—has all the luck. The predominant comic business of the show resides in the lucklessness of its presumably Jewish characters contrasted with the uncanny luck of the lone gentile-apparent. In *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero*, Ruth R. Wisse contends that "[s]chlemiel humor ... would have been as unpalatable to earlier generations of Americans as gefilte fish, a similar device for camouflaging rotten leavings for a delicacy" (74). The show's roots in Jewish folklore, literature, and humor may, ironically, explain its current popularity with mainstream America.

According to folklorist Nathan Ausubel, the schlemiel traditionally was linked in Yiddish folklore with

"his equally unlucky cousin, the schlimazl.... The two types did have an affinity; they both had their origin in the same economic swamp of ghetto-stagnation. Also their end product was identical—failure" (Pinkster 6). As Jerry's romance fails, George fails to get a suitable pair of glasses and, further, to realize that his "lost" ones are still sitting on top of his locker, a fact revealed to the audience in the last shot of the episode. By definition, the

able, ineffectual in his efforts at self-advancement and self-preservation, he emerged as the archetypal Jew, especially in his capacity of potential victim" (4–5). As the Jewish fool evolved and traveled from Europe to America, the language and modes that present him have changed, but the "fundamental themes of Jewish humor" are basically unchanged (Novak and Waldoks xv). The world of business and "the eternal comedy of food, health, and

going to be successful, and God's going to give me a threatening disease." However, when he receives the negative test results, he shouts into the phone and into a universe he perceives as constantly threatening, "Negative?! Why? Why? Why?"

As the schlemiel's world centers around his essential lucklessness, the schlimazl's world centers around situations, the mundane, everyday pains and pleasures of life. Thus, in another episode, when George cries out, "There's a void, Jerry, there's a void. What gives you pleasure?" Jerry, the schlimazl, replies, "Listening to you. Your misery is my pleasure." Here, Seinfeld has described his character's philosophy on life, which is "To out-order someone in a restaurant, to get the better thing, that's the true contest of life."⁵ Jerry is like the Hasidic fool of the nineteenth century, a "simple man who lives happily, one day at a time" (Wisse 16). The contrasting mindsets of George and Jerry provide much of the tension and intellectual framework for the show.

However, the two characters share a classic sense of Jewish alienation. If George feels alienated from an entire universe, Jerry finds pleasure in the trivial, assuming nothing beyond the mundane would be possible or desirable anyway. Although Seinfeld describes the show as "a show about nothing," the show is, in fact, about the necessity to *care* about nothing of importance. Both George and Jerry reflect the currents of anxiety and skepticism that William Novak and Moshe Waldoks identify as typical of European *shetl* humor (xiv). They challenge not just the possibility of classic heroism but that it is ever desirable (Wisse 39). Better to be a loser than to "risk believing in a newfound strength" (73).

George's sense of universal alienation suggests the ultimate exile. A possible source for the word *schlemiel* is the Hebrew phrase *shelvach min 'el*, which means "sent away from God." With its suggestions of exile and alienation, the phrase reveals the religious connection between "recurrent bad luck with one ... out of God's graces" (Pinkster 58). Like Isaac B. Singer's

As the schlemiel's world centers around his essential lucklessness, the schlimazl's world centers around situations—the mundane, everyday pains and pleasures of life.

two types also have important differences. The schlimazl, like Sholem Aleichem's Tevye, is a "man more sinned against than sinning, as the victim of 'accidents' he did not engineer" (Pinkster 31). The schlemiel "has a hand in his [own] destruction; the more he attempts, the greater seem his chances for comic failure." Thus, when George pursues his potential to become a star hand model in another episode, he ruins his own chances for star status and financial success.³ Caught up in his own importance, he unintentionally blurts out insults that further rile a miffed fashion designer; she shoves him into a burning embrace with a hot iron sitting on an ironing board. Here the schlemiel's "hand" in his own destruction becomes literal. The idea of "hand" signifying manipulation and control or the lack thereof, a frequent theme in the show, is rooted in classic Jewish humor.

Wisse argues that the schlemiel has traditionally symbolized the Jewish people in their "encounter with surrounding cultures and [their] opposition to their opposition" (4). The Jewish fool emerged in the Middle Ages "as a typical prankster and wit," his "utility as a metaphor for European Jewry" only later perceived. "Vulner-

manners" (xiv) and the grimmer themes of frustration, futility, alienation, and humiliation characterize the themes of the *Seinfeld* show as easily as those of Yiddish folklore.

Several kinds of fools exist in Yiddish folklore, but Wisse believes that the schlemiel is derived from "the category of the luckless or inept, like the schlimazl...." (13). She differentiates the schlemiel and the schlimazl in this way:

The schlemiel is the active disseminator of bad luck, and the schlimazl its passive victim.... [T]he schlimazl happens upon mischance, he has a penchant for lucklessness.... [T]he schlemiel's misfortune is his character. It is not accidental, but essential.

Whereas comedy involving the schlimazl tends to be situational, the schlemiel's comedy is existential, deriving from his very nature in its confrontation with reality. (14)

Thus, the character of George follows the pattern of the classic schlemiel. In the 1993 season finale George discovers a growth on his mouth, has a biopsy, and awaits the results, assuming the worst.⁴ He sees the situation as existential: "I was a total failure. Everything was fine. Now this thing [the show he and Jerry plan to co-write] is



Reflecting America's claustrophobia, *Seinfeld* rarely is set outside the confines of rooms, multilevel buildings, and compact cars.

Gimpel the fool, George lives in "total passivity and credulousness," completely open to suffering (Weaver 109).

Jerry, on the other hand, simply has bad luck. The word *schlimazl* derives from the German *schlim* (bad) coupled with the Hebrew *mazl* (star); in other words, "one born under a bad star" (Pinkster 6). Nevertheless, the real distinctions between the two types of fools came centuries after the biblical account and the formations of the words. The word *schlimazl* was common in German usage before the nineteenth century, appearing in Grimm's dictionary as the "Hebrew word *schlimmazl*, meaning luckless" and "traced to Jewish underworld slang" (Wisse 125). The "widespread popularity of the term *schlemiel* traced directly to Adalbert von Chamisso's novel *Peter Schlemiel* [1813] which decisively turned the proper name of its protagonist into a common noun." The title character, suffering "the anxieties of

exclusion," was modeled on the Wandering Jew, as a sort of "comic Faust who sells his shadow ... for a lucky purse" (Wisse 16). The selling of the shadow, Wisse contends, "is the closest metaphorical equivalent for the lack of a homeland" of a man "fated to be different, homeless, alien, and Jewish" (126). The book "broadened the meaning of the word *schlemiel* to include the outsider, comically and clumsily alienated from bourgeois conformity...." (16). George the *schlemiel*, although a man approaching middle age, has no home of his own but, unemployed and seemingly unemployable, lives at home with his parents. Even in New York City, with the largest Jewish population in the United States of nearly two million Jews, George perceives his environment as alien, a backdrop of the sort of "ever-worsening environmental pressure" that heralded the literary evaluation of the *schlemiel* from satire to irony in 1878 with the publication of Masoes Binyomin Hashlishi's *The Travels of Benjamin III* (Wisse 40). The novel's pivotal change in the way the *schlemiel* was viewed regarded control. The ordinary Jew, it seemed, "could no longer be regarded as master of his fate."

The Introduction of Control

Appropriately, then, interest in control is the theme of one of *Seinfeld*'s most controversial episodes, "The Contest."⁶ In it, the concept of control of one's fate is reduced to the ability to refrain from masturbation. After George has been humiliated by his mother's discovery of his masturbation, the four sidekicks enter into a contest to see who can control his or her fate—that is, refrain from masturbation—the longest. They refer to the competition in terms usually reserved for the highest levels of power and control:

JERRY: Are you still master of your domain?

ELAINE: I'm Queen of the Castle.

Kramer, given his lucky status, is obviously less concerned about control of his life and "caves in" first,

with no regret, after peeping at a nude woman in an apartment window across the street. As the others toss and turn at night, suffering as they struggle with control, Kramer sleeps peacefully. The contrast between Kramer, whose uncanny good luck relieves him from anxieties about fate and control, and the luckless sidekicks creates one of the show's most powerful ironies.



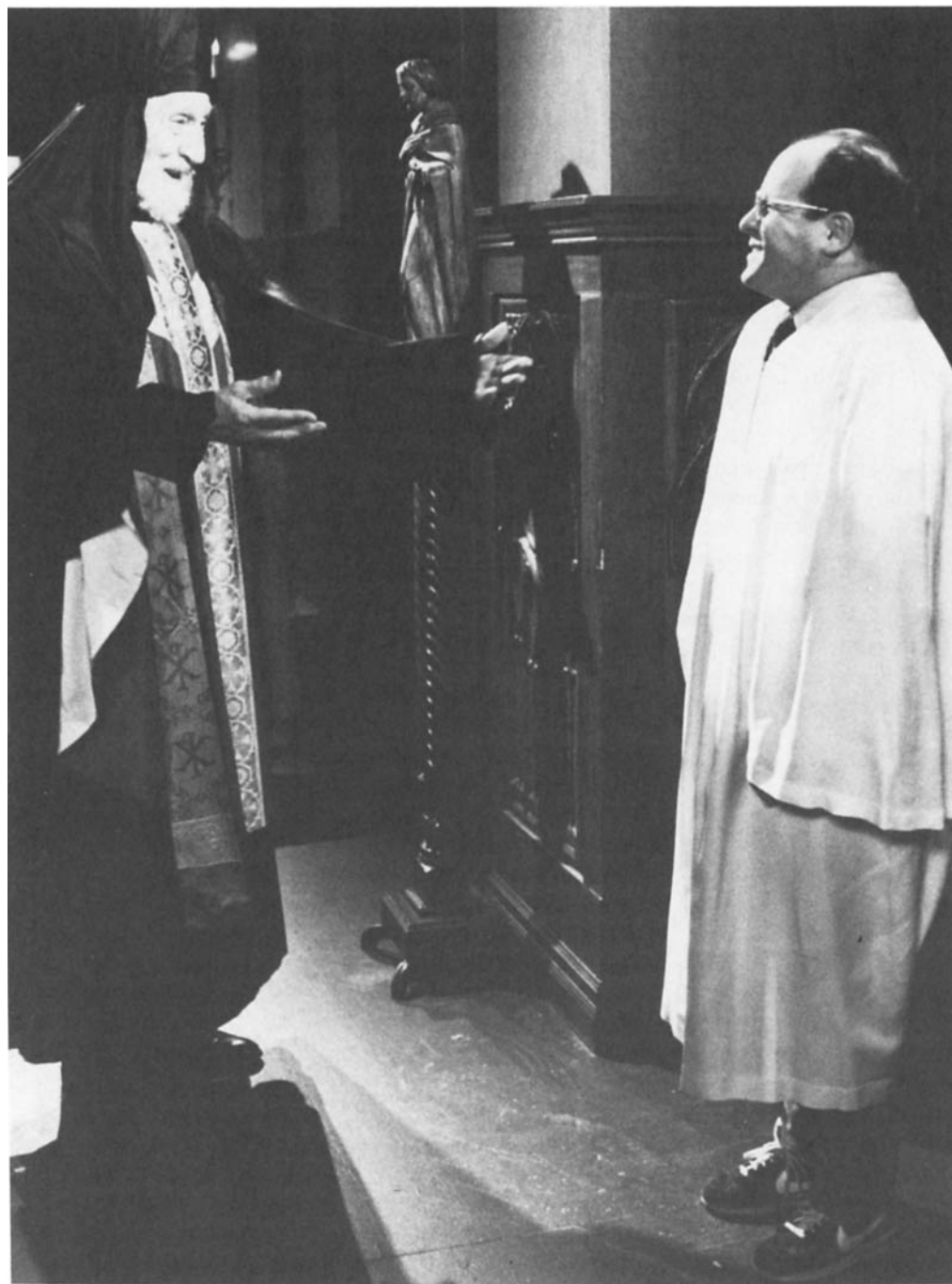
This tightly framed interior shot shows Kramer about to explode into action as the others are frozen in closed positions.

As a metaphor for control, the idea of "hand" resurfaces. In a 1994 episode, George verbalizes his awareness of his own lack of power and control, again using the "hand" metaphor.⁷ He complains to Jerry about problems with his current love interest:

GEORGE: I'm very uncomfortable. I have no power. Why should she have the upper hand? Once in my life, I'd like the upper hand. I have no hand, no hand at all. How do I get the hand?

JERRY: We all love the hand. The hand is tough to get.

George manages to get "hand" when he threatens to break up with the



George's decision to convert to Latvian Orthodox for a girlfriend corresponds to mainstream America's lack of faith.

woman, exacting her compliance in "thinking about him all the time" in order to maintain the relationship. When she discovers that he has lied to her, however, she snatches back the "hand" she had given him:

GIRLFRIEND: I am breaking up with you.
 GEORGE: You can't break up with me.
 I've got *hand*.
 GIRLFRIEND: And you're gonna need it.

George not only loses "hand" but also, with the insulting reference to masturbation, his dignity. George, like the schlemiel of Bernard Malamud's fiction, is "the absolute loser" (Wisse 111). His recourse to the irrational and absurd, the belief that self-control can be won simply by overpowering someone else, turns his hardship into laughter, linking him with traditional schlemiel humor.

However, as Wisse points out, mainstream America would not necessarily have responded favorably to this type of humor in the past. Wisse notes that the schlemiel "was not an indigenous American folk-type, and there is much in his makeup that still seems to go against the American grain" (74). She argues that not until the post-World War II period did the Jewish fool, who "made the transition from Europe to America at the level of popular culture," begin to "flourish in serious American fiction" (73). The idea of loser-as-hero came into the American mindset only recently:

When America as a whole began to experience itself as a "loser" after World War II and ever more insistently in the 1950s, the schlemiel was lifted from his parochial setting into national prominence.... [T]he antiheroic mode inevitably [gained] the more America felt its age and shrinking opportunities.... But the admission of a specifically Jewish humor was only gradual, and the initial response to the schlemiel was frosty. (75)

Although Jewish humor, in a broader sense, achieved popular success in the early twentieth century in vaudeville, minstrel shows, and stand-up comedy, Wisse rightly argues that the schlemiel's acceptance into serious literature came later. As the dramatic form for film and television derives from, especially, dramatic literature, her theory helps to explain the schlemiel's later film appearance as Woody Allen's loser-as-hero in the 1970s.

The United States may have come out of World War II as a euphoric victor, but the Cold War, the Korean War, and especially the Vietnam War damaged the American psyche. Ernest Hemingway's Cohn in *The Sun Also Rises* marks the timely entrance of the schlemiel into serious American literature. Cohn's adolescent behavior foreshadows the adolescent behavior of schlemiels to follow. Wisse explains that "emotional self-indulgence must be puerile...." (76). She describes Cohn as "almost a classic schlemiel.... He accepts humiliation.... He is a tactless blunderer." This adolescent tonality regularly dominates the *Seinfeld*

show. George, in particular, evolves from this model, evoking the same response in viewers that Cohn evokes in the novel: "I hate him," says Jake. "I hate him too," says Brett, "I hate his damned suffering."

Despite his frustrations, George, like Cohn, forges ahead. He develops

in a Jackie Mason joke in which a car owned by gentiles breaks down:

In two seconds, they're under the car, on top of the car.... It becomes an airplane and [the gentile] flies away. But when a Jewish-owned car breaks down, you always hear the same thing: "It stopped." (Telushkin 21)

The Jewish experience has come to mirror the frustrations of mainstream America: the shrinking opportunities, the claustrophobic urbanization, the stalling of the American dream.

an adolescent crush on Elaine's good-looking "mimbo" Tony; he lures an attractive woman to his parents' house for sex while they are away, only to be exposed when his mother discovers a condom wrapper in her bed. He, ironically, is rewarded for possessing lovely hands (although, remember, he lacks "hand"), only to be deflated when his hubris leads to their destruction. This continued tension between possibility and frustration exemplifies the American schlemiel.

Hemingway's Cohn was followed by Saul Bellow's intense, passionate schlemiels, whose erratic and irrational behaviors constitute their charm. Their complexity becomes "an index of humanity"; for human life is more "complex than animal life" (Wisse 81). Thus, Jerry asserts his humanity, his belief that he deserves human dignity, in an episode in which he is spotted in his car, caught in traffic, seemingly picking his nose. He later tries to defend himself for something he actually did not do; blocking an elevator full of people, he shouts, "I am not an animal!" As the situation—being stopped in city traffic—suggests, the *Seinfeld* fool, like Bellow's, suffers "the inevitable consequences of urban, democratic living." Even vehicles of motion—cars and elevators—stall out just at the right moment to degrade unwitting modern man. The dilemma also recalls the situation

Such a Jewish-gentile dichotomy creates irony in *Seinfeld*. In a *TV Guide* interview with David Rensin, Julia Louis-Dreyfus (Elaine on the show) commented on Kramer's capabilities: "If Kramer came in through the ceiling with a parachute, nobody would question it. Kramer's capable of anything...." (22). Getting somewhere in *Seinfeld*'s world belongs to the fantastic realm of the Other. Although the lucky Kramer might manage to fly away, the other three sidekicks are victims of stasis.

The American Experience

The point is that Jewish experience has come to mirror the frustrations of mainstream America in the 1990s: the shrinking opportunities, the claustrophobic urbanization, the limitations on movement in a country filled all the way to the west coast, the stalling of the American dream. Jews have understood the necessity for and yet difficulty of movement since the diaspora; they have centuries of experience with the often depersonalizing, degrading conditions of urban life. Jewish humor comes from understanding the suffering and alienation of the outsider, the equally degrading option of assimilation, the pain of judgments based on the physical self—the nose, the hair, the clothes. In *SeinLanguage*, Seinfeld writes:

Like it or not things represent us. Most of the time, people's things even look

like them.... [E]verything you have is really a layer of clothing. Your body is your innermost and truest outfit. Your house is another layer of wardrobe. Then your neighborhood, your city, your state. It's all one giant outfit. We're wearing everything. That's why in certain towns, no matter what you've got on, you're a bad dresser. Just for being there. Some places you're better off just moving instead of changing. (103)

In *Seinfeld*'s world, there is really nowhere to go. He writes, "I love to travel. Much more than I've ever enjoyed getting anywhere. Arrival is overrated" (67). The show features establishing shots of the familiar *Seinfeld* haunts: Jerry's apartment and the generic restaurant. Interior shots show the small rooms in which the sidekicks congregate—Jerry's efficiency apartment with the kitchen and living room blended into one; the crowded restaurant with the familiar booth just big enough for the four pals, who are eternally subjected to eavesdropping by those in breath-close, neighboring booths. A recurring claustrophobic image is created by tight shots of any number of the group pressed together in a car. Even scenes located at Elaine's health club reveal a space no larger than the misnomered hotel "fitness center." Leslie Fiedler, writing on *Saul Bellow and His Critics*, describes the "gradual breaking up of the Anglo-Saxon domination of our imaginations; the relentless urbanization which makes rural myths and images no longer central to our experience" (Wisse 78). The *Seinfeld* camera rarely travels outside the confines of rooms, multilevel buildings, and compact cars.

Jewish literature and humor thus moved into mainstream America as the gentile world discovered "a people essentially urban, essentially Europe-oriented, a ready-made image for what the American longs to or fears he is being forced to become" (78). Ironical tensions that have grown to trouble American minds—"gun-toting neighbors" (now no longer across the globe but down the block) and frightening political realities—are "not at all unlike the ironic tension of the Jew.... [T]he schlemiel, who embodied so

much of the irony of the Jewish situation" that it has become an "ironic vehicle on a national scale." *Seinfeld* reflects the claustrophobia that America is experiencing. Seinfeld concludes

on the show), Jane Pauley commented, "You burst onto the scene!" Richards agreed, adding, "I come right into life!"⁸ Kramer, ever savvy, resists despair. For example, when Jerry's car is stolen,

humanity by loving and suffering in defiance of the forces of depersonalization..." (82). The forms of Jewish humor have changed: the American schlemiel speaks English rather than Yiddish, though it's an English enriched "with Yiddish phrases and rhythms ... the *sphritzes* (spontaneous monologues of Jewish comedians)," which are the verbal equivalents to jazz (Novak xviii). But the most dramatic difference between the European and American schlemiels regards faith. Elaine and Jerry, asked to be godparents at a *bris*, show complete ignorance about the ritual of circumcision. George decides to convert to Latvian Orthodox to keep a girlfriend of that faith. "Why not?" he asks, "What do I care? I could actually do this. What's the difference? You make a contribution, have a little ceremony." This aspect of the American schlemiel represents the most troubling area of correspondence to mainstream America: lack of faith.

The Emergence of the Jewish Fool

As America's attitudes toward itself changed, the Jewish fool rose quickly to the forefront. Woody Allen's bitter-sweet urban sagas came along "at a cultural moment when ethnicity was becoming a box-office 'plus' rather than the marginal minus it had always been considered" (Pinkster 168). The "same cultural changes affected what a stand-up comic could, or could not, do behind a mike." Taboo subjects were broached, including sex, race, and religion. Originally a stand-up comedian, Seinfeld has pushed the boundaries of the taboo subjects for television. "The Contest" was followed by an episode in which Jerry discovered that Elaine had faked orgasm throughout their entire love affair. In a 1994 episode, Jerry arranged a blind date for Elaine with a friend of his who, at the end of the date, exposed himself to her. Another episode exploded the taboo grammar of political incorrectness with racial and ethnic insults uttered alongside the offensive physical presence of a cigar-store Indian. Religion received irreverent treatment in an episode in which a novice nun fell madly in love with Kramer while her

Jerry's pomposity is kicked in the pants when a talk-show host humiliates him for his appearance in a "puffed-up" shirt.

SeinLanguage with his most profound observation about life:

To me, if life boils down to one significant thing, it's movement. To live is to keep moving. Unfortunately, this means that for the rest of our lives we're going to be looking for boxes. (179)

On the show, the sidekicks demonstrate life's limitations in their darting movements around their box-like enclosures. Elaine's office is the size of a closet, stuffed full of furniture, piled high with paperwork. Even the streets are oppressive: people find a space to park their cars, then are afraid to move them for weeks, fearful another space will not be available. A beep heard through an open window on the show signifies the need for someone to move a double-parked car.

In contrast to the other characters, Kramer is all about motion. In an interview with Michael Richards (Kramer

Kramer talks to the thief on the car phone, exhorting him to look into the car's glove compartment to first verify that Kramer's gloves are there and then to return them to him. By the end of the episode, Kramer has his gloves, but the thief has chosen not to return the car as Jerry requested. Kramer believed he could get his gloves back; Jerry, pessimistic, never believed that the thief would return the car. In the show's scheme of things, one must believe in luck to have it. The distinction could be viewed as a didactic message; the show belongs, after all, to the genre of satire. However, Jerry's lack of faith also suggests the key difference between the European and the American Jewish fool.

In depersonalized America, faith seems lost. Whereas the Yiddish fool "was an expression of faith in the face of material disproofs," Wisse asserts, the American schlemiel "declares his



superiors approved George's obviously insincere conversion.

Importantly, the show bears other characteristics ascribed to Jewish humor that have been, typically, satiric. Its critical edge "deals with conflict between the people and the power structure...." (Novak xx). In its satiric quest, the show typifies the tendency of Jewish humor to ridicule "grandiosity and self-indulgence," to expose hypocrisy, and to kick "pomposity in the pants" (Novak xx). The show's satiric thrust impugns George's arrogance and self-indulgence when he becomes a hand model. He looks ridiculous, wearing oven mitts to protect his now precious hands. He bullies his mother into waiting on him, literally, hand and foot. When she plays the part of "scrub nurse" during one of his primping sessions, handing him a scissors, he yells at her: "Don't hand them to me with the points facing!" Her sheepish response is, "I'll try to be more careful." Pride, George's exaggerated vice, will surely lead to his downfall, and it does.

In the same episode in which George's vanity destroys his lucrative career as a hand model, Jerry is punished for the same vice. Too proud to admit that he did not hear what someone said to him, Jerry agrees to wear an outlandish puffy shirt on national television. The shirt itself is the image of pride. Kramer says, "People want to look like pirates, be all puffy and devil may care." When Elaine sees Jerry ready to go on the show, she articulates the travesty:

You can't wear that on the show! You're promoting a benefit to clothe homeless people! You can't come out dressed like that. You're all puffed up! You're supposed to be a compassionate person that cares about poor people.

The shirt becomes the scarlet letter for Jerry's hypocrisy, causing even the show's tech people to openly ridicule his puffed-up appearance. The show's host humiliates him on the air: "You're all kind of puffed up." The episode ends with all the puffy shirts that had been manufactured being given to Goodwill. As Jerry leaves the television station, he is confronted with the

sight of the bearded, hungry homeless wearing the cast-off, prideful shirts. Pomposity has, indeed, been kicked in the pants, and American society has been chastised for its prosperity in the face of widespread homelessness, national pride personified and ridiculed in a puffy-shirted Jerry.

Of course, Jewish folklore, literature, and humor are not the sole domain of luckless fools, irony, certain themes, and satire. But *Seinfeld* shows strong evidence of evolution from Jewish tradition. As producer, writer, and star, Jerry Seinfeld shapes the material into his own image, for certainly the comic business of the shticks bears the imprint of the man whose stand-ups begin and end the show. And the stuff of his comedy exists as a continuum of Jewish tradition. In the first pages of *SeinLanguage*, he describes the immediate source of his own inspiration—his Jewish father:

There has never been a professional comedian with better stage presence, attitude, timing, or delivery. He was a comic genius selling painted plastic signs.... He hated to see those serious businessman faces.... Often when I'm on stage I'll catch myself imitating a little physical move or certain kind of timing that he would do.

"To break a face."

It was a valued thing in my house. I remember when Alan King would walk out on the Ed Sullivan Show hearing my mother say, "Now, quiet." We could talk during the news but not during Alan King. This was an important man.

Seinfeld's reluctance, evident in his show, to "accept anything at face value," has been defined as the core of Jewish thought, the result of constant searching "for evidences of storm beneath the surface of the tranquility of everyday" (Novak xvi).

The show's unexpected success attests to a new sensibility on the part of American viewers. Americans confronted with an increasingly grim landscape—closed-in, littered with problems—find a way to laugh at their troubles in humor born in "one of the grimmest stretches ... of Jewish history" and characterized by the ironic byproducts of forced urbanization—alienation and frustration (Novak xiv).

On 4 February 1993, *Seinfeld* moved from Wednesday, in a tough slot opposite the baby boomers' beloved *Home Improvement*, to Thursday night. Already in its fourth season, the show suddenly shot from its lowly number 40 in the Nielsen ratings to 10 (Schwarzbaum 16). During the fall of 1993 the show dominated all demographics, sharing the number 2, 3, and 4 slots with *Roseanne* and *60 Minutes*. The successful marketing of *Seinfeld* t-shirts, cups, and greeting cards gives the television show a status that, in the film world, would be called "blockbuster." The show's one-liners have entered the repertoire of American idiom; for instance, "not that there's anything wrong with it" may now be appended to comments about homosexuals or other volatile subjects affected by American political correctness. Even the show's rhythms and phrases, like the Yiddish from which they derive, have become part of everyday conversation: I love the show. Don't you love the show? Everyone loves the show!

NOTES

1. *Seinfeld*, prod. Jerry Seinfeld and Larry David, Castle Rock Entertainment, Beverly Hills, 1992–94. Quotes from the show have been transcribed from episodes aired on NBC in 1992 and 1993. Writers vary from episode to episode. This one was written by Tom Gammill and Max Pross.

2. The show will go into syndication in the fall of 1994.

3. This episode was written by the show's co-creator and co-producer Larry David.

4. Larry David wrote the 1993 season finale.

5. This quote is from Jane Pauley's 1993 interview with the *Seinfeld* cast on "Sein of the Times," *Dateline NBC*, prod. Margaret Murphy and dir. Robert Brandel.

6. "The Contest" was written by Larry David.

7. This episode was written by Larry David. The fact that I have chosen so many examples of the show's themes from episodes written by David suggests the validity of an auteur approach. Since David and Seinfeld are co-creators and often co-writers, a study of David's role might be illuminating.

8. See note 5.

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- cial and cultural realities of
- film and television, filmo-
- graphies, bibliographies, and
- book and video reviews are
- regular features.