

The American Neighborhood Novel

by David R. Mayer

Irving Howe, in comparing Jewish American and Southern writers, notices that "in both instances, a subculture finds its voice and its passion at exactly the moment it approaches disintegration."¹ He feels that the Jewish-writers are probably the last of such regional types in America.² Interestingly, some years before Howe wrote that introduction to *Jewish-American Stories*, Louis D. Rubin, Jr. quoted Allen Tate's explanation for the rise of Southern writers in the Thirties: "the curious burst of intelligence that we get at a crossing of the ways," and, upon the basis of a similar rise among Jewish writers, prophesied the emergence of Black writers.³ Furthermore, in his discussion of Southern writers, Rubin contended that the presence of Flannery O'Connor a generation after Faulkner and Wolfe was due to her Catholicism which "provided her with an additional and lingering impediment to the general Southern conversion to modern, secular experience."⁴

Both Howe and Rubin accept the categories of Jewish and Southern writers; Rubin suggests that there well may be a similar grouping for Black writers, but neither singles out a category such as "Catholic writers" or at least "Irish-American writers" with people like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Eugene O'Neill, James T. Farrell, Mary McCarthy, John O'Hara, Flannery O'Connor, J.F. Powers, not to mention the many novelists of Catholic matters who appeared in the 70s.

One of the factors which has hindered the development of a "Catholic writer" classification, it seems to me, is the lack of a specifically Catholic territory. The Southern writers are influenced by their geographical loca-

tion and its history of rebellion and defeat. The Jewish writers are identified by their extremely urban experience, usually centered in New York and by the traditions of Russian and Polish Judaism. In what sense can we find Catholicism linking Fitzgerald, McCarthy, and O'Connor? Could we even tell from most of their works that they were born and raised Catholic? Or for that matter, outside an urban neighborhood setting can we distinguish a Jewish writer? Although in *The Curious Death of the Novel*, Rubin identifies himself as a Southerner and a Jew, his novel *The Surfaces of a Diamond* could just as well have had a Catholic boy as its main character. For Omar's going to the Sabbath school differs little from some of the religious practices that set off Catholic youths from their Protestant friends in small towns. In other words the atmosphere of the South is stronger in *The Surfaces of a Diamond* than is the association with Judaism. On the other hand, despite the existence of the Catholic Italian-American Frankie in *The Assistant*, no one can miss the Jewish atmosphere of that novel or would confuse it as the product of a writer with a Catholic background.

Erica Jong exaggerates when she says: "'First novel' is one of those meaningless reviewers' categories, like 'black novel,' 'Jewish novel,' or 'feminist novel.'"⁵ She has a point, however. Too often these terms are used to include writers that do not have much in common with each other except a name, or skin color, or sex. The terms are more useful in bringing together the chief proponents of a particular way of life, or for arranging writers according to the readers' own personality needs and/or group interests. Particularly in regard to writers with a Catholic background, but also for the sake of Jewish and Black writers, I think we need another general category to make distinctions within the categories of Black, Catholic, and Jew. This new category, based on territory and its relationship to the creative imagination would allow comparisons among such writers as James Baldwin, James T. Farrell, Saul Bellow and contrast them with other writers in their respective religious-racial group such as Ernest Gaines, Flannery O'Connor, and Louis D. Rubin Jr. That category is the "neighborhood novel." More accurately, since we will be looking at the American immigrant experience which developed distinctive neighborhood networks, the category is the "American neighborhood novel."

CITY NOVELS

At first glance, "American neighborhood novel" seems to be no more than what was called the "city novel." Usually the city novel, however, involves a contrast with the country or small town or is a place of alienation and absurdity. In *The American City Novel*, Blanche Gelfant enlarges the discussion and distinguishes three types. The traditional contrast between town and country fits her description of the portrait type of city novel, in which the city is made known through the experiences of a single character who undergoes change as he or she accepts the values and ways of the city. In her definition of a synoptic novel, the city itself becomes the protagonist, whereas in the ecological type a spatial unit such as a neighborhood or block with its relationships and ways of life is the center of attention. In general the ecological type, even in the 50s, was becoming the most prominent: "The fact that most recent writers have been born into a particular neighborhood and know of its life intimately explains the increasing popularity of the form."⁶ The 60s and 70s brought even more examples. In relation to Gelfant's terms, the neighborhood novel is often an initiation novel like the portrait type, with the difference that the conflict arises not from a naive country person's contact with the city but from the strivings of a city youth against the traditions and closeness of the neighborhood community. Above all, the neighborhood novel, like the ecological type, stresses the influence of the local territorial unit upon the development of its residents.

WRITERS AS REBELS

Unfortunately, writers, being sensitive and individualistic, find the neighborhoods confining and rebel against them. Gelfant thus generalized the themes of the various types of city novels as follows: "The characters in urban fiction typically feel that they are strangers moving in an alien world."⁷ But is this world alien for all the inhabitants of the neighborhood? Are neighborhoods all to be considered detrimental to the pursuit of "life, liberty, and happiness"? By focusing on the neighborhood and its place in the lives of millions of American immigrants and their descendants, we can

appreciate its close and necessary relation to those who tell their stories. At the same time we can place their stories in perspective, realizing that their vision is but partial and cannot always serve as a guide for correcting the social order.

The writers had their reasons, of course. For the group which insisted on traditional values for mutual support and unity could be severe against outsiders competing for the same jobs and housing. (Prejudice against Jews and Blacks seems to be rife in the Irish-Catholic community of *Studs Lonigan* where the people blame Jewish bankers and real estate men for selling to Blacks and breaking down the neighborhood.) Also such a group tended to feel that non-conformists were traitors. And in the early years of immigration, the non-English-speaking groups felt threatened even by their children and those who used English because in the process of gaining the new language assaults were made against the old language and customs.⁸ Consequently Chaim Potok has noted how the American novel, iconoclastic by nature, became the medium by which those who felt stifled or injured by their group and left it, tried to rationalize their departure ever after.

The modern novel is the instrumentality of the rebel. It is the art form of individuals who grew up in established communities with inherited systems of value. Somehow in the growing up they felt themselves terribly hurt by their community. . . . Hurt by their world, these people either broke with it or were crushed by it or somehow managed to make some kind of accommodation with it. Many of them left it and then spent the rest of their lives writing novels to justify their break and trying to explain it all to themselves and to anyone else who might be interested in reading about it.⁹

Jerre Mangione gives similar reasons for writers of ethnic fiction: a way of striking back at the group that made them feel out-of-place, a kind of self-analysis, and a means for putting order into a jumble of experiences.¹⁰ Even the sociologist and novelist, Andrew Greeley who generally presents the positive aspects of the ethnic neighborhoods, admits that they can be "narrow, provincial, repressive places."¹¹

By explaining the stages of ethnic assimilation, Greeley's study helps us place the writers in relation to their community and to the larger society. The six steps in assimilation are: "1) cultural shock; 2) organization and emergent self-consciousness; 3) assimilation of the elite; 4) militancy; 5)

self-hatred and antimilitancy ; and 6) emerging adjustment.”¹² It is during the third stage, as the group emerges into the middle-class, that the more talented members try to break out of the group and into the mainstream of society. Greeley cites writers James T. Farrell and John O’Hara as examples of those who become “ashamed of their ethnic background. . . . There simply are not enough others of their own background who have also made it for the ethnic arriviste to feel at ease. No longer part of that from which he came, neither is he fully accepted by those among whom he has arrived--on the contrary, he may occasionally find himself displayed as an interesting objet d’art.”¹³

Thus the stage of ethnic assimilation has something to do with the writer’s relation to the group. But the age of the writer is another factor. Sociological studies of the neighborhood have shown that the period of life which least needs the services of the neighborhood is that of the young, employed, unmarried person. Children and the elderly lack mobility and have their attachments in the area. Young parents also rely on the neighborhood as a safe place to bring up their family. However as the children grow, the larger urban life has more attractions and draws them out of the neighborhood and its ties.¹⁴

Even if the American novel itself did not have an iconoclastic nature, the vocation of novelists would still pose problems for a young ethnic. In the first place, according to Marcus Klein, “To be a writer (in English) in itself was an act of emigration, and therefore an act of hostility directed against a most peculiarly sensitive and imposing society.”¹⁵ In addition to the betrayal of the group through language change, for other groups such as the Italians and the Gentile Poles writing did not count as manual labor. In the 70s Paul Wrobel, a doctoral candidate in Sociology, could report that he was somewhat suspect in the Polish-American working-class neighborhood he and his family moved into, because he did not have a real visible job.¹⁶ Sitting at his desk at home, and writing or conducting interviews were not considered work. Eventually after he became a teacher in the local grade school, he was accepted. Among the story-loving Irish, Greeley reports that “In the narrow, provincial, rigid, achievement-oriented community of the Irish parish, scholarship, art, and even storytelling were luxuries. To move beyond the parish ghetto to the world outside where art and scholarship were valued was to run the risk of ‘losing the faith’ and cutting oneself

off.”¹⁷

Despite the seemingly universal experience of dissatisfaction, some writers still revere their traditions and their community. As a rabbi, Chaim Potok cherishes the Jewish religious and ethnic values and traditions, and yet as a modern American he is fascinated by the world of literature which often runs counter to his own values. Out of this struggle to maintain both have come a series of intensely Jewish novels in which the hero finds himself embracing a study or discipline or art antithetical to his Jewish commitment.

Not all those who live in ethnic neighborhoods find them so oppressive. Nor are they ashamed of their past ethnic and religious ties. In fact some are puzzled by the actions of those who proclaim their liberation and intellectual growth as if it were necessary for everyone to cast away their past as they had done. Joseph Sobran openly criticized current autobiographers who ridicule their past but are amazingly uncritical of their new allegiance. Instead of achieving a real “intellectual independence,” these writers may be “simply uttering a more respectable set of clichés.”¹⁸

Perhaps literary critics are also somewhat responsible for the state of affairs in which more attention is given to the tension-torn novels than to those which depict the ordinary struggles and successes of any ethnic neighborhood. Tony Morrison suggests that white critics sometimes misread Black writers because they themselves are unable to see any good in the ethnic community, and expect a writer to lash out at its defects. However, Morrison maintains, the Black writers have an affection for the city which they feel is theirs, and they relate to “the village within it: the neighborhoods and the population of those neighborhoods.”¹⁹ Since the critics cannot appreciate such community values, they “tend not to trust or respect a hero who prefers the village and its tribal values to heroic loneliness and alienation. When a character defies a village law or shows contempt for its values, it may be seen as a triumph to white readers, while Blacks may see it as an outrage.”²⁰ But the same may be said of other ethnic groups as well. Those who praise the honesty of the renegade, may actually be getting only part of the picture of that ethnic group’s experience.

DEVELOPMENT OF ETHNIC NEIGHBORHOODS

In the essay "Problems in Conveying the Meaning of Ethnicity," Peter I. Rose states his solution to the problem of gaining an insider's view of a particular group. He claims that sociologists should turn to the fiction and essays which provide informants usually more reliable than the ones used in surveys. In addition the fiction and essays are particularly suited for presenting the felt life.²¹ In our question of the neighborhood novel I think it is also necessary for literature people to have access to historical and sociological studies about ethnic groups. The information found there furnishes a context in which to judge the presentation of the stories, noting relationships and values supported by the group and manifested in the neighborhood. The following pages present some of that material as we build up to a definition of the American Neighborhood Novel.

When Morrison says that "the affection of Black writers (whenever displayed) for the city seems to be for the village within it: the neighborhoods and the population of those neighborhoods,"²² she presents the factor which made the city so attractive to millions of immigrants during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When the Black writer finds something good in the city or the countryside, it is because of the presence of the ancestor.²³ When the Irish and the Germans (especially 1840s--1860s), the Polish and Russians (1880s), Italians (1890s), and many other nationalities settled in America, they formed groups, lived in close association with each other in their difficult days of adjustment and kept ties with the homeland. Despite the rural, village background of most immigrants, they all became highly urban in the United States.²⁴ Ironically, as Caroline Golab explicitly states: "In thus forming clusters, 'ghettoes' or ethnic neighborhoods, southern and eastern Europeans were attempting to recreate the network pattern of the village."²⁵

But why didn't these villagers and rural people migrate to the farmlands of the United States? Both Edward Wakin and Lawrence McCaffrey point to the lack of money and skills which did not allow the Irish to carry on large-scale farming in America. Also, as a gregarious people, they were not psychologically suited for the loneliness of the isolated farmsteads.²⁶ Loneliness, likewise, was the factor which prevented the Polish and Italians

from engaging in farming except in the few instances when they were able to farm as a group.²⁷

Apart from the negative aspects of the rural life, the city offered many advantages for the poor and unskilled. The large urban areas were ports of entry and it was natural for the newcomers to stay there until they could gather enough finances to move on. As supply and export centers, as centers of manufacturing, the large cities provided jobs.²⁸ Although scholars using Chicago as a model have portrayed the movements of newcomers as pushing the older immigrants out and up from the poorer and less desirable central ghettos, opportunities for work as well as links with the homelands could establish different patterns as Caroline Golab has shown for Philadelphia, and Jane Alexander for Pittsburgh.²⁹

In general the immigrants were concentrated in the New England, the Middle Atlantic and East North Central States. Specifically, according to Andrew Greeley's tabulations, more than half of the Irish and over seventy percent of the Italians are to be found in the northeast and in the Middle Atlantic areas; large concentrations of Germans, half of the Polish and forty percent of other Slavic groups are in the north central region.³¹ As a general rule the immigrants settled where they had relatives or friends and where they could find the food stores, churches, and other institutions familiar to them.

Sometimes religion was the unifier, sometimes nationality, sometimes a combination of both. Irish Catholics, as noted above, are in the northeast, but Irish Protestants are concentrated in the South.³² Many of the Irish Protestants were part of the colonization process and have become "general" Americans, whereas the bulk of the Irish Catholics came after the famines of the 1840s, forming a distinctive group.³³ Religion, not nationality, united the Irish Catholics. Likewise, just as in the popular imagination "Irish" is synonymous with "Catholic," in practice "Norwegian" is connected with "Lutheran." According to the findings of Peter Munch, "The exclusiveness of the Norwegian group on this point is revealed by the fact that Norwegians who have joined the Methodist or any other church are no more considered as Norwegians--which is simply a consequence of the fact that, by quitting the Lutheran Church, they have cut themselves off from a very important part of the social life of the Norwegian group."³⁴

In the case of German Catholics, however, ethnicity has greater influence

upon their values and behavior than their religion does. Thus German Catholics in America are closer to German Protestants than they are to Irish Catholics.³⁵ In Pittsburgh, Slovak Lutherans would be united throughout the city by their religion, but they would also be part of their Slovak Catholic neighborhoods. Furthermore, when both Slovak Catholics and Lutherans migrated, they tried to settle with people from their home regions.³⁶ Even in the case of Polish Catholics and Polish Jews, religion is a strong unifying factor, but people from the same areas in Poland tended to live near each other in America as well: "By maintaining separate social networks and institutions, Poles and Jews were able to share the same neighborhoods quite peacefully; in these early years structural collision between the two groups was slight, if it occurred at all."³⁷

Despite the fact that large concentrations of particular groups migrated to certain urban regions, one has to beware of considering the neighborhoods as homogenous (the Black migrations to the North provide exceptions). Also one has to realize that not all members of a group are necessarily in one neighborhood. There may be several concentrations of a particular ethnic group, with some of the differences due to economic or social status. As families move up the economic scale, they move out of old neighborhoods into new ones where they find people and institutions congenial to them. In many cases this means a gradual building up of a new ethnic neighborhood.³⁸

Thomas Philpott, in making his case against an almost exclusive concentration of one ethnic group in a certain area, has shown that "people of twenty-six or more nationalities could be found living within three blocks of Hull-House," that "the average block had residents of eight ethnicities," and that "only one lot out of five had residents of a single ethnic stock."³⁹ Nevertheless, even in the midst of such a mixture, each area had its distinctive characteristics by which it was known and by which people could identify themselves as either part of it or not part of it. After Philpott has stated his case, he concludes with this balanced appraisal: "An ethnic enclave was not a district in which all the inhabitants were of the same ethnic stock and in which all of the people of that ethnic group lived. It was a place where the members of one nationality set the tone, because they outnumbered everybody else, or had been there the longest, or were simply the most visible and voluble."⁴⁰

Another reason for clustering in groups was self-defense in the face of the antagonisms of the larger society. The Irish found themselves unwelcome and under suspicion as Catholics, but at least they knew English. Later groups from East and Southern Europe lacked the language and usually differed religiously from the majority of Americans. Add these differences to poverty, illiteracy, and want of skills, and it is easy to see how many groups were relegated to the fringes of society.

In view of the immigrants' position in society, the ghettos offered the newcomers many advantages. They provided an atmosphere where traditions and values could be preserved in the midst of much that was new and different. As the immigrants tried to adapt to the new society, the ghettos became a kind of factory in which the old world way of life was gradually transformed into the new. The situation was not without its tensions as some found many things worth preserving, and others, especially the younger generation, felt anything "foreign" had to be discarded in the process of becoming American. The melting-pot ideal was strong. For many the ethnic neighborhoods kept the closeness of the village as they introduced the newcomers to urban life. Friends and ethnic institutions could give assistance in finding housing, jobs, and places to shop. In the ethnic neighborhoods, besides economic assistance, there were also institutions for religious and social purposes. For some groups, particularly in the early stages, the ethnic neighborhood was a self-contained world which provided support for the skills of the group and promoted the rise of the talented.⁴¹

Most of the studies consulted deal with the neighborhoods and the first generations who settled there. Some studies suggest that the importance of neighborhoods lessened as the groups became assimilated. Others, however, show the persistence of ethnic groups and neighborhoods to the present. The following quotation from Andrew Greeley sums up the role of the neighborhoods for the various ethnic groups in the past and states that the same purposes exist today.

The ethnic group became one of the avenues to political power for immigrants. It provided a special market in which the emerging business and professional class within the immigrant community could build its own economic base. It

offered a social mobility pyramid that the more ambitious immigrants could ascend ; if the social pyramid of the host culture was inaccessible, they could at least move to the social apex within their own collectivity. Psychologically it also provided continuity between the Old World and the New and made possible the preservation of a minimum of family values that were thought to be essential. To say that any of these functions has diminished importance for the children and grandchildren of the immigrants is to advance a hypothesis that has not been supported by research evidence. ⁴²

NEIGHBORHOOD AS PLACE

In the last few pages, the terms "ethnic neighborhood," "ethnic group," and "ghetto" have been used loosely and interchangeably. A term much more vague is "neighborhood," which even sociologists are at a loss to define in terms of their research. What emerges, however, in all the studies, is that the people themselves have a very definite concept of their area and their relationship to it. Thomas Philpott gives the example of a lady who claimed she was raised in an Irish neighborhood, and as is often the case, gave the name of the parish as the location where she lived instead of the official city-designated name. Even though the area was not actually Irish, nor even Catholic, still the presence of the parish and of enough Irish leaders in her social world enabled the woman to perceive the area as "Irish."⁴³ In his study of New York, Jay Dolan lists social class and ethnic heritage as the elements which help distinguish the different neighborhoods. Furthermore as the different language groups "began to group together in new urban villages," the Catholic parish in those places corresponded to the image of the neighborhood : "Little Ireland was unlike Little Italy, and to a similar degree St. Patrick's was different from the Church of St. Anthony of Padua."⁴⁴

It is from such clusters of ethnics that districts get their popular names. Natural boundaries, such as rivers, parks, train tracks, or heavy traffic thoroughfares, mark off areas which may then be further distinguished by the arrangement of buildings, the convenience of services, and reputation. ⁴⁵ H. Laurence Ross discovered that people know their own places by name, can give its boundaries, recognize certain social classifications, and know by boundary, name, and social status, other districts in the city. ⁴⁶ According

to Ross, "accurate characterizations of class and ethnicity of the residents are among the salient connotations of area names."⁴⁷ He also found a strong correspondence between the recognized status level of the neighborhood and the residents' perception of their own social status.⁴⁸

The study by Ross centered on larger local areas. But people are also aware of smaller divisions, of areas that are theirs though the extent of the boundaries may vary according to the particular purposes the residents may have in mind when they are asked to name the boundaries. David Morris and Karl Hess state that "people know when they are in their neighborhood and they know when they are out of it," and suggest that "the homeliest tests for neighborhood would include the fact that a person can easily walk its boundaries."⁴⁹ Greeley picks out several possible meanings "neighborhood" may have for people such as "my block," "the couple of blocks around us," "my parish," "the whole general area around here," and concludes :

It is not true to say that because "neighborhood" means many things it means nothing to people. Its core meaning is "the area where I live," and the definition of that area expands and contracts depending upon what aspect of life one is talking about.⁵⁰

NEIGHBORHOOD AND IDENTITY

From the neighborhood, its people, institutions, and image, individuals find a center for their identity. Perhaps this important role has already been noticed in the discussions about the advantages of the neighborhood and the clear sense people have of the territory they inhabit, but the point warrants further comment. People have had positive reactions to the old neighborhoods (neighborhoods of attachment or sentiment, as some sociologists call them),⁵¹ and people have had negative reactions to them, only wanting to escape. However repressive the writers may have found their neighborhoods of origin, the fact remains that for many people, especially East and Southern Europeans, "Their identity, security, self-control, and stimulation derived not just from their membership in a group but in a group that they could see, hear, touch, and smell at all times. They could not function

without the constant presence of the group because a person became an individual only by belonging to and interacting within a group."⁵²

The local food stores and taverns, and similar informal gathering places were sources of information and image-reinforcement, providing the sights, smells, tastes, and sounds of the neighborhood. The Italians, it seems, did not identify so much with church and school, relying instead on the home, festivals, and self-help organizations which had their origins in the rural areas and villages in Italy. Orthodox Jews, however, strengthened their identity through participation in the synagogue and Hebrew school. The Irish, French-Canadians, Catholic Germans and the Polish rallied around their Catholic parishes with their religious services, organizations, and school system.⁵³ In the words of Andrew Greeley :

For many of us, it is no exaggeration to say that the parish was the center of our lives ; it provided us with education, recreation, entertainment, friendships, and potential spouses. It was the place to belong. When asked where we came from, we named the parish rather than the street or neighborhood.⁵⁴

Paul Wrobel found a similar attitude among the Polish people he studied. They considered their neighborhood and parish as one unit, and the parish school as important for holding the neighborhood together.⁵⁵ Concerning the relationships among the families in the neighborhood, Wrobel states : "These bonds have been sustained in this subject community largely because a Roman Catholic parish serves as a source of social organization in an urban neighborhood."⁵⁶

CONCEPT OF NEIGHBORHOOD

Much has already been said about the characteristics of neighborhoods as we looked at the uses of ethnic neighborhoods for the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century immigrants. Now we turn to the concept of neighborhood itself.

Although Suzanne Keller, in contrast to sociologists writing in the 70s, reduces the present function of neighborhoods stating that : "their leading positions as providers of information, identity, and social relations have been displaced by social change,"⁵⁷ her division of neighborhoods into their physical and social components is helpful for understanding the

complexities of neighborhood life. The physical components are those elements which visibly distinguish the area from other areas. Streets or other boundary markers can be joined with historical or social traditions to give it special qualities. Morris gives the examples of Brooklyn and Georgetown which existed as independent towns before they became part of New York and Washington respectively.⁵⁸ Also part of the physical component are the types of buildings, space, arrangement of streets and houses and other such resources which contribute to human inhabitation.⁵⁹ On the other hand, social components are those symbolic and cultural values which people find in or attribute to certain areas. Parents with small children would value areas that are considered safe. People of Polish or German extraction value cleanliness.

Keller finds that the physical and social components produce dimensions of neighborhoods that may not always fall into place in one area. She gives four aspects: 1) a geographic area, 2) an area with the necessary facilities for daily life, 3) an area which has particular social or aesthetic values, 4) an area with a special atmosphere.⁶⁰ F. Lancaster Jones, however, in speaking of the classic definition of a natural area, combines the physical and social elements as he explains: "A natural area had a specific location in the city and its residents were distinguished by their distinctive culture and social organization."⁶¹

According to Keller the use of the neighborhood depends upon the needs of the inhabitants in relation to the resources of the area. People of low income need shops and services near their home. As people rise in economic status they can shop outside the area and they will tend to do so especially if they also find work outside their local area. Nevertheless, grocery shopping, medical and religious services generally remain local. Also, whatever the economic bracket, those whose activities are restricted to the neighborhood by old age, sickness, or family responsibilities depend upon the neighborhood for information and socialization.⁶² Some groups, even after the early stages of immigration, prefer the self-contained ethnic neighborhoods. Fallows writes of the Irish:

Many an Irish American went from the cradle to the grave without ever venturing outside the ethnic community, bounded by its familiar network of activities with relatives and friends, served by the parish church, the parochial

school, the neighborhood saloon, and the Irish social clubs.⁶³

Golab reports the same of the Polish: "From the Poles' perspective, the neighborhood was a self-contained entity able to satisfy all the community's needs, physical, spiritual, social, economic and emotional; its members walked to work, to church, to school, to shops and services; they were born at home, and in some neighborhoods they were even carried to the cemetery."⁶⁴

Rise in income and possession of a car has changed the dependence upon local areas, but some people still prefer the neighborhood. M. Mark Stolarik stresses that the Slovaks did not feel the need to move out of their neighborhood and up into a "better" one. They were satisfied to make their living as blue-collar workers and to stay in the same area all their lives. Stolarik concludes his study with a statement and a question which we need to keep in mind as we deal with the American neighborhood novels: "Finally, the American concept of social mobility needs closer scrutiny. Should the majority of scholars continue to accept without question the ideal that everyone should constantly strive to move 'up and out'?"⁶⁵

No doubt the descendants of those who inhabited the classic "ghettoes" of the East and Southern Europeans live in different circumstances than their parents or grandparents did. Neighborhoods have changed and people have moved on, but neighborhoods continue and new generations grow up in areas whose character and distinctiveness feed the imaginations and emotions of the young while they provide support for the older. Neighborhoods today are breeding the writers of the future. In offering a corrective to social analysts who overlook the persistence of neighborhoods, Andrew Greeley writes:

Considerable numbers of human beings continue to live in neighborhoods and continue to be deeply attached to their social turf, to view the geography and the interaction network of their local communities as an extension of themselves and to take any threat to the neighborhood as a threat to the very core of their being. When neighborhood loyalty, already something quite primordial, is reinforced by a common religion and a sense of common ethnic origins, the commitment to the neighborhood can become fierce and passionate indeed.⁶⁶

DEFINITION OF THE AMERICAN NEIGHBORHOOD NOVEL

Taking this more positive stance toward the neighborhood, we can use Peter Mann's loose definition as a basis for describing the "American (urban) neighborhood novel." Mann says: "The neighborhood then is really a small group of people. . . , and it is a group which recognises its bonds and acknowledges the social controls operating over the members."⁶⁷ Here the stress is not so much on the physical aspects of the locality but upon the sense of identity which a portion of the people have because of their group values and relationships among each other through such formal and informal institutions as exist in the local area. Consequently I would define an "American neighborhood novel" as a work of fiction which the author derived from his or her childhood experiences as a member of a people characterized by common values, goals, and accepted modes of behavior. These people, often referred to as an ethnic group, find personal value in identification with the ideals of their group and commonly celebrate that identity in secular and/or religious rituals which tend to make their group distinctive in the eyes of outsiders and may sometimes give rise to a popular name for their residential area. In short, the "American neighborhood novel" is a work of fiction which either celebrates or criticizes the values and relationships of an urban group closely knit by their common identity and physical presence.

The body which gives stability and at the same time by its insistence may induce rigidity is a group within a larger group. The controls of the small group differ from the controls of a small town which are all pervasive. Furthermore, in the city it is easier, though at a cost of rupture, to break away from the group's controls entirely or, less severely, to find escape from time to time in other areas of the city. As DeFleur points out, the small town has "widely accepted guidelines governing many routine activities," whereas in the city with many groups, "People expect their families, friends, and business associates to behave in a particular way, but they tend to accept or at least tolerate some nonconformity in the behavior of others."⁶⁸

This tolerance for "deviant" behavior and much less contact with known people in one's outside-the-home activities give the city an appearance of cold anonymity to those coming from a small town or rural atmosphere.

hence the city novels of displacement, of alienation. But if there is alienation in the neighborhood novel it is alienation from one's group, not an alienation arising from the shock of city life. Likewise, the neighborhood novel differs from those city novels which invoke a pastoral vision to laud the countryside's wholesomeness and disparage the city's wickedness. The neighborhood is home, and if there are problems and evils, these problems and evils will be solved in the city and with its peoples--the writers do not look to a rural life.⁶⁹

In relation to the group solidarity, some people and some writers find meaning and a sense of belonging in that relationship. They acknowledge and celebrate the support, the customs, the characters, the festivities. Others react more negatively to the group, finding the relationships cloying, the customs stultifying, the support restrictive. They criticize the narrowness and provinciality, the selfishness of the group. Nevertheless, even this disagreeable neighborhood experience proved to be grist for the writers' mill. Irving Howe is saddened at the prospect that the Jewish tradition (the Jewish neighborhoods?) is ending because "it is hard to see what new sources of value are likely to replace the Yiddish tradition and the American Jewish *milieu* at its best, against which many of us rebelled but which, by shaping the nature of our rebellion, helped to give meaning to our lives."⁷⁰

The childhood experience is another important factor. When Peter Mann describes the various stages of a person's life in relation to neighborhood life, he devotes most space to the child's experience from early years through secondary school.⁷¹ This is the time for personality development in which sense of self and of the other is supported and expanded through gradually widening spheres of contact. The neighborhood is a source of lifelong memories and associations. The stress is upon the childhood experience also because children seem to have the best feel for the neighborhood. Mattles remarks: "Because they are so restricted to their neighborhood or its immediate vicinity, children may be the major producers and carriers of neighborhood life: its local stereotypes, its named boundaries, its known angouts, its assumed dangers, and its informal groupings."⁷²

It is this remembered childhood experience that becomes such a creative force. Irving Howe recalls a remark of Graham Greene to the effect that "an unhappy childhood is a writer's goldmine" and reflects that though not all

Jewish writers had an unhappy childhood exactly, "They brought to bear the overflow of memories of childhood and youth, memories both more fulfilled and deprived than those, perhaps, of other, mainstream Americans."⁷³

Surprisingly not much stress has been put upon this effect of early neighborhood experience, surprising because Southern writers have long insisted on a sense of place. Flannery O'Connor, for instance, writes: "But you don't write fiction with assumptions. The things we see, hear, smell, and touch affect us long before we believe anything at all, and the South impresses its image on us from the moment we are able to distinguish one sound from another."⁷⁴ About a writer's need for experience, she says: "The fact is that anybody who has survived his childhood has enough information about life to last him the rest of his days."⁷⁵ Eudora Welty's influential essay, "Place in Fiction," provides Irving Howe with a phrase to indicate the deep and necessary relationship between writers and their childhood neighborhoods: "For many American Jewish writers, 'the heart's field' will forever be those gray packed streets, turbulent and smelly, which they have kept from childhood, holding them in memory long after the actuality has been transformed or erased."⁷⁶ The words which David Morris and Karl Hess use at the beginning of their book sum up the effects of neighborhoods on writers: "The neighborhood of childhood, whether a place to flee in rage or a place to remember in mellowness, is the location of heroic deeds, of epic villains, of home."⁷⁷

Fittingly, they have titled that chapter: "Neighborhoods: The Space to Be." As we apply the concepts of neighborhood to various American novels of the twentieth century, we notice that the characters may also consider their home grounds as the space to be, but, more often than not, they reject it as the space not to be.

NOTES

1. "Introduction," *Jewish-American Stories* (New York: New American Library, 1977), p. 3
2. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
3. "The Experience of Difference: Southerners and Jews," in *The Curious Death of the Novel* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), pp. 280-281.

4. Rubin, p. 278.
5. "Writing a First Novel," *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 24 (1974), 262.
6. *The American City Novel* (Norman : University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), p. 13.
7. Gelfant, p. 23.
8. Cf. Maxine Seller, *To Seek America : A History of Ethnic Life in the United States* Englewood, N.J. : Ozer, 1977), pp. 170-171; and Jerre Mangione, "A Double Life : The Fate of the Urban Ethnic" in *Literature and the American Urban Experience*, ed. Michael C. Jaye and Ann Chalmers Watts (Manchester : Manchester University Press, 1981), p. 174.
9. Cf. Chaim Potok, *The Jew Confronts Himself in American Literature*. Leo Dehon Lecture Series (Hales Corners, Wisc. : Sacred Heart School of Theology, 1975), p. 3.
10. Cf. Mangione, pp. 173-174.
11. Andrew M. Greeley, *Why Can't They Be Like Us?* (New York : Dutton, 1971), p. 101.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.
14. Peter H. Mann, "The Neighborhood" in *Neighborhood, City, and Metropolis : An Integrated Reader in Sociology*, ed. Robert Gutman and David Popenoe (New York : Random House, 1970), p. 575. Also Mann, pp. 568-582 and Suzanne Keller, "The Neighborhood," from *The Urban Neighborhood* (New York : Random House, 1968) reprinted in *Neighborhoods in Urban America*, ed. Ronald Bayor (Port Washington, N.Y. : Kennikat Press, 1982), pp. 20 and 24. Although Mann's article is based on British material, the general descriptions of the various phases of life in the neighborhood fit the findings of Suzanne Keller.
15. Marcus Klein, *Foreigners : The Making of American Literature 1900-1940* (Chicago : University of Chicago, 1981), p. 20.
16. Paul Wrobel, *Our Way : Family, Parish, and Neighborhood in a Polish-American Community* (Notre Dame, Ind. : University of Notre Dame, 1979), p. 6.
17. Andrew M. Greeley, *That Most Distressful Nation : The Taming of the American Irish* (Chicago : Quadrangle Books, 1972), pp. 124-125. Cf. Chaim Potok, *The Chosen* (1967) ; *The Promise* (1969) ; *My Name Is Asher Lev* (1972) ; *In The Beginning* (1975) ; *The Book of Lights* (1981).
18. Joseph Sobran, "Why Be Proud of Abandoning Your Faith?" *The Evening Sun* (Baltimore), 12 March 1980, Sec. A, p. 11.
19. Toni Morrison, "City Limits, Village Values : Concepts of the Neighborhood in Black Fiction" in *Literature and The American Urban Experience*, p. 37.
20. Morrison, p. 38.
21. Peter I. Rose, *Mainstream and Margins : Jews, Blacks, and Other Americans* (New Brunswick, N.J. : Transaction Books, 1983), pp. 222-223.

22. Morrison, p. 37.
23. Morrison, p. 39.
24. Cf. Stanley Lieberson, *Ethnic Patterns in American Cities* (New York : The Free Press, 1963), pp. 64-65.
25. Caroline Golab, "The Geography of Neighborhood," from *Immigrant Destinations* (Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 1977), reprinted in *Neighborhoods in Urban America*, p. 78.
26. Cf. Edward Wakin, *Enter the Irish-American* (New York : Crowell, 1976), pp. 47 and 62 ; Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *The Irish Diaspora in America* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1976), pp. 63-65.
27. Cf. Golab, p. 78.
28. Cf. David Ward, *Cities and Immigrants : A Geography of Change in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York : Oxford, 1971), pp. 75-76.
29. Cf. Golab, pp. 74-78 and Jane Granatir Alexander, "Staying Together : Chain Migration and Patterns of Slovak Settlement in Pittsburg Prior to World War I," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 1 (1981), 57-58.
30. Cf. Ward, p. 81.
31. Cf. Andrew Greeley, *Ethnicity in the United States : A Preliminary Reconnaissance* (New York : John Wiley, 1974), p. 50 ; Ward, pp. 79-80.
32. Cf. *Ethnicity in the United States*, pp. 35 and 50.
33. Cf. Marjorie R. Fallows, *Irish Americans : Identity and Assimilation* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice-Hall, 1979), pp. 6, 64, 66, and 67 ; Greeley, *Ethnicity in the United States*, pp. 162-163.
34. Peter A. Munch, "Social Adjustment Among Wisconsin Norwegians," *American Sociological Review*, 14 (1949), 780-787, reprinted in *Neighborhood and Ghetto : The Local Area in Large-Scale Society*, ed. Scott Greer and Ann Lennarson Greer (New York : Basic Books, 1974), pp. 154-155.
35. Cf. *Ethnicity in the United States*, p. 118.
36. Alexander, pp. 76 and 73.
37. Golab, p. 84.
38. For the information in this paragraph see Golab, pp. 70-74 ; Andrew Greeley, *Neighborhood* (New York : Seabury, 1977), pp. 82-89 ; and Ward, p. 142.
39. Thomas Lee Philpott, *The Slum and The Ghetto : Neighborhood Deterioration and Middle-Class Reform, Chicago, 1880--1930* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 67.
40. Philpott, p. 131.
41. For the information in this paragraph see McCaffrey, p. 66 ; Greeley, *Why Can't They Be Like Us?*, pp. 43-44 ; and Seller, pp. 169-170.
42. *The American Catholic : A Social Portrait* (New York : Harper, 1977), p. 20.
43. Cf. Philpott, pp. 131 and 135.

44. Jay P. Dolan, *The Immigrant Church : New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815--1865* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 20.
45. Cf. Keller, p. 9.
46. H. Laurence Ross, "The Local Community : A Survey Approach," *American Sociological Review*, 27 (1962), 75-84, reprinted in *Neighborhood and Ghetto*, p. 51.
47. Ross, p. 54.
48. Ross, p. 55.
49. David Morris and Karl Hess, *Neighborhood Power : The New Localism* (Boston : Beacon Press, 1975), pp. 7 and 6.
50. Greeley, *Neighborhood*, p. 91.
51. Keller, p. 21 and Morris, p. 1.
52. Golab, p. 78.
53. Cf Harold J. Abramson, *Ethnic Diversity in Catholic America* (New York : John Wiley, 1973), pp. 131-144 ; Seller, p. 161 ; and Jay P. Dolan, "Philadelphia and the German Catholic Community," in *Immigrants and Religion in America*, ed. Randall M. Miller and Thomas D. Marzik (Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 1977), p. 74.
54. *That Most Distressful Nation*, p. 87.
55. Cf. Wrobel, pp. 39 and 112.
56. Wrobel, p. 146.
57. Keller, p. 27.
58. Morris, p. 2.
59. Cf. Keller, p. 9.
60. Cf. Keller, p. 11.
61. F. Lancaster Jones, "Ecological Patterning of Cities," in *Sociology : A Text with Adapted Readings*, ed. Leonard Broom and Philip Selznick. 5th ed. (New York : Harper and Row, 1973), p. 525.
62. Cf. Keller, pp. 18-20.
63. Fallows, p. 45.
64. Golab, p. 73.
65. M. Mark Stolarik, "Immigration, Education, and Mobility of Slovaks, 1870--1930." in *Immigrants and Religion in America*, p. 113.
66. *Why Can't They Be Like Us?*, p. 100.
67. Mann, p. 571.
68. Melvin L. DeFleur, William V. Antonio, and Lois B. DeFleur, *Sociology : Human Society* (Glenview : Scott, Foresman, 1973), p. 81.
69. Cf. James M. Vardaman, Jr., "The City in the Novels of Saul Bellow," *Studies in American Literature*, 19 (1982), 1-12. Vardaman treats the image of the city itself, not its neighborhoods, but he shows Bellow's basic acceptance of the city despite the

problems people have there. The solution for Bellow is the hearts of the people as they live in the city: "It is in the city that the isolated protagonists become fully human--by becoming functioning members of the community." (p. 12)

70. Irving Howe, *Celebrations and Attacks* (1979; rpt. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1980), pp. 37-38.
71. Cf. Mann, pp. 572-575.
72. Gerald D. Suttles, "The Defended Neighborhood," in *New Perspectives on the American Community*, ed. Roland L. Warren (New York: Rand McNally, 1977), p. 248.
73. Howe, "Introduction," p. 6.
74. Flannery O'Connor, "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South," in *Mystery and Manners*, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), p. 197.
75. "The Nature and Aim of Fiction," in *Mystery and Manners*, p. 84.
76. "Introduction," p. 7.
77. Morris, p. 1.