

IBRI: January 11, 1983

TRADITIONAL VALUES AND PRAGMATIC CHANGE AS SEEN IN THE NOVELS OF CHAIM POTOK

I. Some introductory ideas and such:

- A. The author of the novels...a few brief notes
 - B. The interest of TVT in such things
 - C. A word about novels...and novel reading:
 - 1. The value of the novel:
 - a. offers an alter ego for the writer
 - b. provides a field of empathy for the reader
 - c. affords a protective idealizing under a sympathetic umbrella
 - d. enables the exploration of sociological issues on theoretical lines...and so avoids the catastrophe of blunders and error planned or otherwise.
 - 2. Novel qualities:
 - a. relation of a saga, not the telling of an experience in abstract.
 - b. conveyance of life setting even if the novelar setting is surreal.
 - c. portrayal of characters who are culturally believable, with whom the reader may identify and whom the reader may recognize objectively the next day on the street!
- These qualities (not a totality of the subject) account for greatness and explain mediocrity with regard to the novels and the literature.

II. The Potok novels

A. A brief sketch of each:

- 1. The Chosen (1967)...the early years of two young men as they mature and form life direction....
- 2. The Promise (1969)...the continuing account of our earlier heroes, now on the threshold of adult life, and the steps that lead them into somewhat non-traditional roles.
(Both of these books depict the struggles within the culture of Jewish community life as the older ideas clash with the newer.)
- 3. Asher Lev (My Name Is) (1972)...the account of a gifted Hasidic youth whose ability in art moves him away from the community spectrum.
(The struggle in this book is the adaptation of one's skills and abilities in a foreign cultural medium.)