

The Poet and the Tycoon: The Relationship Between A. M. Klein and Samuel Bronfman*

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Résumé

Adam G. Fuerstenberg fait dans ce document une étude très approfondie des rapports qui ont uni A. M. Klein et Samuel Bronfman: Par le titre même du document, l'auteur semble déjà nous poser une question et soulever notre intérêt. En effet, de quelle manière un poète plaidant au nom d'un idéal peut-il arriver à s'entendre avec celui que l'auteur qualifie d'un être exceptionnel, d'un renard. Comment S. Bronfman a-t-il su s'allier ce qui lui faisait selon l'auteur de cette étude le plus défaut? C'est-à dire l'éloquence nécessaire afin de réaliser un idéal commun, l'unité de la communauté juive du Canada à une époque où toutes les portes semblaient devoir se fermer aux Juifs venant d'Europe Centrale et d'ailleurs.

Rarement, on a pu assister à une heureuse fusion entre un industriel par excellence pour qui toutes ses entreprises semblaient passer avant tout mais qui dans le fond avait une impulsion et un élan gauches ou plutôt peu adroits lorsqu'il s'agissait d'exprimer ses préoccupations pour la cause Juive, la Communauté Juive du Canada et Israël. A. M. Klein fut à cet égard son conseiller et son porte-parole en maintes occasions. Il fut celui qui alla jusqu'à rédiger de façon complète et détaillée les états financiers de la Seagram's C^o, S. Bronfman désireux de savoir par le menu détail tout ce qui se passait. Les heurts et les frictions ne manquèrent pas entre ces deux êtres *entiers* et c'est sur ce qualificatif qu'il y a tout lieu de s'arrêter.

S. Bronfman apprécia A. Klein non pour sa plume ou pour son talent d'écrivain, mais parce que ce dernier fut au même titre que lui, aussi fougueux et exigeant à sa façon. Et cette confrontation de deux tempéraments totalement opposés trouva un dénominateur commun dans la lutte commune qui les unit et permit de donner un essor au Congrès Juif Canadien, à la Communauté et

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enfin de défendre la position d'Israel.

Any relationship between two men who achieve eminence in widely disparate fields is worth exploring. When such a collaboration also has an effect on a whole community it not only becomes interesting history but may tell us something about the character and the development of that community and the direction in which it is heading.

The relationship between A. M. Klein, one of the greatest Canadian poets, and Samuel Bronfman, one of the most successful Canadian industrialists, provides a fascinating study of how the artist and the tycoon can collaborate when they feel that their community is seriously threatened. An examination of their relationship will also give us a fuller appreciation of the debt the Jewish community and the wider Canadian public owe these two exceptional men.

Of special interest to the literary historian, however, is the effect which Klein's involvement with Bronfman had on the poet. Thus Irving Layton, for example, could claim at the 1974 Klein Symposium at the University of Ottawa that the poet's work for Bronfman depressed Klein and taxed his spirit, eventually contributing to his mental breakdown and abandonment of literature and society while at the height of his powers and still only in his mid-forties, and that it added "a severe limitation to his final stature as a poet."¹ However, a history of their collaboration will show that the concerns which drew Klein to work with Bronfman – especially their "Yiddishkeit" and their Zionism – were also at the root of some of the poet's best work.

Although Klein began working for Bronfman in 1939, the two men must already have known each other from their earlier work on behalf of Zionist causes. While Klein was still at McGill University Saul Hayes arranged for Klein to be a summer tour guide on the Seagram sponsored Montreal Tourist Bureau Bus.² It is very likely that Bronfman, who tended to get involved in every detail of his business enterprises even when they grew huge and incredibly complex,³ met the young, even then impressively articulate Klein.

Temperament apart, the disparity was also great in their social status and achievement in public affairs when the two began their collaboration.⁴ Klein was still a struggling lawyer trying to support his mother, his wife and a recently arrived baby. In contrast, Bronfman had already established himself as a powerful industrialist. He had actively headed or substantially contributed to campaigns for the Jewish General Hospital, the Y.M.-Y.W.H.A. (in which his wife Saydie was also active from the early 1920's when the Bronfmans

had first settled in Montreal), various Jewish schools, B'nai Brith and, most notably, had led the Zionist Organization of Canada's United Palestine Appeal successfully for a number of years. He was also the President of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of Montreal.⁵ Early in 1938 he had taken control of the most important committee of a rapidly reviving Canadian Jewish Congress. This was the Co-ordinating Committee for Refugees, later – during the war – to become the more embracing United Jewish Refugees and War Relief Agencies. From its founding at the end of World War I until these increasingly alarming years preceding World War II, the Congress itself had not fulfilled the dream of its founders to serve as a Jewish parliament and the unified voice of Canadian Jewry. Now the gathering storm in Europe and its developing echoes in Canada stimulated a demand for the revival of the Congress. Klein certainly was aware of this revival and its implications and, as will be seen, deliberately decided to join it by working for Bronfman. In a hand-written notation on the margin of a typescript of a history of those years, written by Klein as the Congress' tribute to Bronfman, he notes that "1934 witnessed the rebirth of the Congress as a result of the advent of the Nazi Party to power."⁶ It was Bronfman's direct involvement in 1938 and accession to the Presidency in January, 1939 that turned Congress into an effective and powerful organization by attracting to its ranks a younger "native born, English-speaking generation." Bronfman realized that the shifting of power to the younger generation of leaders without creating divisive conflict could only be accomplished by building a bridge to the older, more "Yiddish" leadership.⁷ Bronfman himself provided that bridge on the organizational side, as Klein did on the intellectual and cultural side. As one commentator observed, Klein "transferred the close rapport between the Yiddish writer and the community into the English-speaking world he addressed."⁸

However, for Klein involvement with Bronfman raised some questions. The industrialist, while now an eminent and powerful Jewish communal figure, was still controversial as a result of his alleged activities during the time of Prohibition. Furthermore, he was a capitalist, the epitome of a free enterprise businessman, while Klein was ideologically a committed socialist whose writing in the years immediately preceding their meeting increasingly reflected the influence of the intellectual left. In a series of satires such as "Diary of Abraham Segal, Poet", and "Barricade Smith: His Speeches", he momentarily drew away from the Jewish-inspired poems which had first drawn attention to him, to attack the traditional targets of Marxists – the banks, the bosses and the police. Miriam Waddington has characterized these radical poems as inspired by Marxian economics and the songs of such revolutionary Yiddish poets as Abraham Reisen and Morris Rosenfield whose

works were “militant and revolutionary ballads which urged the Jewish worker to struggle for better conditions”.⁹ The depression and his precarious law practice made him particularly sensitive to the deprivation around him and in these satires he lashed out at the perceived causes. For instance, in “Diary of Abraham Segal, Poet” he describes the educated white collar proletariat struggling to survive, its cultural pretensions shattered by abject poverty and the drudgery of waking each day to the noise of a “dollar clock” and going to work for a “swag-bellied boss” who

Gloats o’er his shillings, byzants, ducats, smiles
At gaunt clerks, their nockandros flat on stools,
With borrowed quills in hired tomes accounting
His profits . . .¹⁰

The disillusionment even extends to Zionist ideology when Klein has his character exclaim, after discussing his brother’s communism,

. . . my uncle says
Herzl will turn the Jews, now moles, to larks;
My cousin, amiable, believes them both,
Serving a beard of Herzlian-Marxian growth.
And as for me, unlike the ancient bards,
My idols have been shattered into shards. (*C.P.*, p. 87)

The outburst is especially revealing because of the autobiographical echoes in the poem’s title. The Montreal poet J. I. Segal was an important mentor and friend who was indeed eking out a precarious living and Klein may have identified strongly with him. The immediacy of Depression poverty may also have led Klein to momentarily despair at the Zionist and ideological divisions in the community.

Again the companion poem, “The Soirée of Velvel Kleinberger” also from 1932, details the hunger and poverty of a labourer in the clothing factories, presumably of Montreal, who

. . . after days in dusty factories
Among machines that manufacture madness (*C.P.*, P. 90)

finds only momentary relief in gambling and “French whores”. Even in “Barricade Smith: His Speeches”, “The most revolutionary of all Klein’s radical poems”¹¹ published as late as 1938 (although likely written earlier) when Klein was about to revive his Jewish communal activities under Bronfman’s leadership, he stridently calls on the victims to recognize their exploitation:

The maestros have you, have you on the hip!
They gloat: they hold you ready for the take:
.
Sucker, you stand no choice; the cars are nicked,
The factory, believe you me, is one clip joint;
The sadness is you know not you are licked,

Comes from the cleaners, you have missed the point. (*C.P.*, P. 104)

So much, then, for the differences between these two men. And yet at the end of 1938, Klein was suddenly offered the editorship of the weekly *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* and he immediately accepted the post. Thus began his service as editor and as Bronfman's advisor and the earnest collaboration of the poet and the tycoon. What made Klein dramatically shift his allegiance from intellectual radicalism back to Jewish concerns and a willingness to work with Bronfman, the mighty capitalist? The answer can be found in Klein's perception of the world-wide threat to Jewry and his personal encounter with a local version of Nazism. As a consequence, by 1939, contacts with his marxist fellow writers became strained and he stopped writing radical literature because "concern over the fate of European Jewry was beginning to dominate all of his political thinking".¹² We can see this already in a poem, "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage", almost contemporary with "Barricade Smith: His Speeches", whose protagonist, the universal Jewish refugee everywhere refused asylum, cries out in weary anguish.

For they have all been shut and barred, and triple-locked
The gates of refuge, the asylum doors;
And in no place beneath the sun may I –
On pilgrimage towards my own wide tomb –
Sit down to rest my bones, and count my sores. (*C.P.*, 114)

Exactly at this time Bronfman's Co-ordinating Committee for Refugees was beginning the ten year struggle to open those "gates of refuge" in Canada against almost insurmountable obstacles. An army of unemployed, fearful of competition for scarce jobs, and a rising tide of Nazi-inspired anti-Semitic propaganda which successfully equated Jews with communism, made it almost impossible to change the immigration policy of an unsympathetic, perhaps mildly anti-Semitic, government.¹³ It was a time in Canada when Henri Bourassa in a respected newspaper like *Le Devoir* could justify Nazi aggression in Czechoslovakia while condemning the feeble attempts at the Evian Conference to help the victims,¹⁴ or when a Jewish tennis club felt it was necessary to accept the visible anti-Semitism of exclusion from the Toronto Tennis League to avoid "stirring up a backlash that could endanger their own security".¹⁵ No wonder Klein was ready to accept Bronfman's vigorous leadership; whatever their differences they were united in their concern for the Jewish people.

When Klein began working for Bronfman, he had already achieved a certain prominence as a talented public speaker in his capacity of student president of the Canadian Young Judea Federation and editor of its publication, the *Judean*. Also, even as he was achieving wide recognition for his early poetry in Jewish and non-Jewish periodicals "his prose writing (on Jewish concerns)

was being appreciated by the Jewish community and its institutions.”¹⁶

Then, after graduation from law school at the University of Montreal he had further national prominence as Educational Director of the Zionist Organization of Canada and as editor of its monthly magazine the *Canadian Zionist*. It is very likely that he first came to Bronfman’s serious attention as a result of these activities.

However, early in 1937 he had given up these peripheral positions and moved to Rouyn, in Northern Quebec, to set up a law practice with his friend and fellow student Max Garmaise. Only a year later, just as the practice was beginning to develop, Klein suddenly returned to Montreal. The ostensible reason was devotion to his elderly mother, who had remained in Montreal and was suffering from the separation, but a more likely reason was the political situation as it was developing in Europe and in Canada, particularly Quebec. Klein was becoming increasingly alarmed at the plight of Jewry in Europe, especially the Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria, and at the rising tide of anti-Semitism in Canada.¹⁷ He had watched with increasing trepidation the early successes of the Nazis, because he was more aware of the potential danger than those around him busy trying to survive the depression. As early as the summer of 1934 his best friend and former fellow student at Baron Byng High School and McGill, David Lewis, touring through Germany as a Rhodes Scholar, described to him in a long letter the effects the Nazis were already having.¹⁸ Closer to home, right in Rouyn, Klein and Garmaise had had a minor legal skirmish with Jean Tissot,¹⁹ the recently appointed police chief, who had earlier been a sort of “gauleiter” for Adrien Arcand in the Hull-Ottawa area. Tissot had recently lost a celebrated slander suit brought against him by the Zionist leader and prominent Ottawa merchant, A. J. Frieman, whom he had scurrilously attacked in Arcand’s anti-Semitic *Le Patriote*.²⁰ Suddenly Klein found himself, a lawyer in a small town, in frequent confrontation with one of the most prominent leaders of the growing fascist menace in Canada.

This, then, was the situation at the end of 1938 when Klein was suddenly offered the editorship of the weekly *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, the most important Jewish publication in English in Canada. He responded immediately and we can see why. His first signed editorial was a rousing condemnation of the recent “Kristallnacht.” Clearly he accepted the editorship of the *Chronicle* for the same reason he – an avowed socialist – was prepared to work so closely with an arch-capitalist like Bronfman.

The gathering storm around his people and the urgent need for Jewish unity took precedence for Klein over his socialism or any ideological or political divisions that had pre-occupied the different Zionist and non-Zionist factions in

the community.²¹ The *Chronicle* gave him a valuable and prominent platform from which to sound the warning and the call for unity, and as Bronfman's speech writer and adviser, he hoped to share the latter's "immense influence on social and political affairs."²²

It is quite possible that Bronfman, through either Saul Hayes, at the time director of Bronfman's Refugee Committee, or H. M. Caiserman, one of the founders and longtime secretary of Canadian Jewish Congress, had something to do with Klein's appointment. Both these men knew and admired the poet. In fact, five years earlier Caiserman had devoted an ecstatic chapter to the young Klein in his book on Yiddish poets even though Klein was not writing in Yiddish, calling him so permeated with "Yiddishkeit" that he was the most Yiddish of Jewish-English poets in Canada ("er is mer eider alle andere Yiddish-englishe dichter in Canada der Yiddishter dichter zwishen zei").²³ As we shall see this "Yiddishkeit" was probably an important bond between the poet and Bronfman. In any case Caiserman, working intensely with Bronfman at the end of 1938 in preparation for the latter's accession to the presidency of Canadian Jewish Congress, had close ties to the *Kanader Adler* (*The Canadian Eagle*), the influential Montreal Yiddish daily, and to its publisher, H. Wolofsky, who was also the publisher of the *Chronicle*. Bronfman was a substantial supporter of both as he was of Jewish periodicals in other Canadian centers, realizing their importance in unifying the Jewish community.²⁴ Moreover, Klein had already written for both papers and thus a suggestion from Bronfman to Caiserman or to the publisher directly, or on Caiserman's own initiative, would have made eminent sense to Wolofsky. Whatever the reasons behind Klein's appointment, in the poet's mind his two functions, as Bronfman's adviser and editor, were intimately connected in the service of the goal he shared with Bronfman – the unity of Canadian Jewry – for as one critic has observed "Klein made his journal an effective unifying agent in the cultural life of the Jewish community, constantly helping to keep alive the past and to improve knowledge of contemporary endeavours."²⁵

These, then, were the external conditions which, in a sense, brought the two together just as Canadian Jewry was to face its most challenging decade as a maturing community. Externally there were already masses of Jewish refugees, "the tragically unwanted people everywhere, including Canada",²⁶ clamouring for succour, while internally an ideologically divided Jewish community, still reeling from the effects of the Depression, seemed powerless to act. And hanging over everything, like a storm about to break, was the imminence of an impending World War. In his history of that period Klein recalled the fearfully agitated convention at the end of January, 1939 at which Bronfman took command of the Canadian Jewish Congress. As the delegates

gathered "that fateful January weekend", he wrote, there was a sense of premonition that the accumulated challenges of the past decade, "like time bombs, were waiting, buzzing to explode."²⁷ What was needed was "a man endowed at once with vision to see the ultimate, and practicality to undertake the immediate."²⁸ Such a man in Klein's view was Bronfman who "from the very first day of his assumption of office, set himself the task of achieving Canadian Jewish unity."²⁹

But Bronfman was not an easy man to work for, or with. An impatient, abrasive personality, he had the self-made man's mix of absolute assertiveness and aggressive insecurity. A classic workaholic, he was a hard taskmaster who was often so unpredictable that he could terrify his assistants. Once set in a certain direction he was stubborn and, if thwarted, would unleash a violent temper and a stream of shocking profanity.³⁰ It is hard to imagine a personality more different from that of the usually gentle, almost prim, and always articulate Klein. Yet Klein was one of the few people, other than Bronfman's wife Saidye, who was never exposed to or the target of any such outburst. Quite the contrary, the poet elicited an unusual gentleness and consideration from the industrialist so that other collaborators sometimes benefited from Bronfman's control of his temper in the presence of Klein.³¹

What "chemistry" produced this result? The answer, if there is one, probably lies in some fundamental things the two men shared rather than their obvious differences. Firstly, the two men shared an admiration for and a commitment to excellence in their respective fields. Both in his business and in his communal enterprises Bronfman had a genius for recognizing and harnessing talent and even eliciting fierce loyalty from his lieutenants.³² It unquestionably helps to explain his spectacular success. He obviously recognized something superior in Klein and responded to it and not just on the level which some observers have characterized as a kind of ignorant admiration for Klein's ability to use "big words."³³ How well he actually knew Klein's work it is hard to establish, but it would be wrong to think of him as completely unlearned. Although Bronfman had no formal schooling after the age of 15 because he had to help his father, he had a good religious and Yiddish education from the Rabbi-teacher his father had brought along to Canada from Bessarabia. Moreover, he was insatiably curious and he appears to have had the ability, almost by a kind of osmosis, to absorb a great deal from around him,³⁴ and this provided a kind of alternative to formal education. For instance, he liked Victorian poetry and was able to apparently quote "endless quatrains from Tennyson's *In Memoriam*."³⁵

Secondly, he shared with the poet a very strict Orthodox upbringing and although, like Klein, he had lapsed from its observance, still maintained a

fierce loyalty to its traditions and an instinctive commitment to the Jewish nationalism it engendered.³⁶ In fact, both men frequently credited their upbringing and parental influence, especially their stubbornly pious fathers, for their own commitments to communal service. Thus Bronfman recalled at the 25th anniversary tribute to his brother Allan's work for the Jewish General Hospital that the roots of the brothers' philanthropy was their parents' teaching "by example." No matter how difficult their early years in Canada, he remembered, "my parents never forgot their relatives overseas, but ever came to their aid." Perhaps this explains Bronfman's special concern for Jewish refugees.

Klein's debt to his mother and father, whose passing when Klein was still in college affected the poet profoundly, is lovingly expressed in much of his poetry, especially in his poem, "Autobiographical":

My mother, blessing candles, Sabbath-flamed
Queenly in her Warsovian perruque;
My father pickabacking me to bed
To tell tall tales about the Baal Shem Tov—
Letting me curl his beard.
Oh memory of unsurpassing love
Love leading a brave child
Through childhood's ogred corridors unfear'd: (*C.P.*, 272)

or in the more tradition indebted "Psalm XXXVI: A Psalm Touching Genealogy" where he describes how his father and ancestors dwell in his veins and eavesdrop at his ear:

They circle, as with Torahs, round my skull,
In exit and in entrance all day pull
The latches of my heart, descent and rise —
And there look generations through my eyes. (*C.P.*, 234)

Thirdly, on a personal level, both men derived from large, warm and loyal, even though at times quarrelsome, families. They shared an idyllic domesticity with a deep commitment to family life, and both had a certain severe, magisterial, even authoritarian manner in dealing with people.³⁸

Finally, perhaps the most important quality they shared in their work for the Jewish community was their "Yiddishkeit". Bronfman, who, like Klein, had a deep feeling for his roots and — unlike many first generation Canadians — retained them, was fluent in and loved Yiddish as did Klein. J. B. Salsberg, no friend of Bronfman's in those days, recalls that Bronfman in spite of his wealth even then, "was nevertheless closer to the people, the Yiddish-speaking masses, than were his predecessors in the presidency of Congress."³⁹ It was obviously part of his effectiveness in uniting the Jewish community for he was, in spite of his money — a "folksmensh" who, as one observer expressed it, knew instinctively how to deal with a "Yiddishen Oilim" (a

Jewish gathering) and it was this same quality in Klein, this “folkishness while retaining his vast scholarship” that likely appealed to Bronfman and made it possible for these different men to work together.⁴⁰

What was the nature of their collaboration? There is no question that the two men liked and respected each other as individuals⁴¹ and it appears they worked very well together. In spite of the popular impression that Klein was simply Bronfman’s speech and letter writer, with the poet composing and Bronfman simply mouthing the results publicly, in reality his work for the industrialist was much more varied and extensive.

From the start Klein advised Bronfman on political developments in Canada and the world as they affected Canadian Jews, world Jewry, and the Yishuv and later, Israel. As early as August, 1939 the poet could write to a friend that “one of the things which I am doing for Mr. Bronfman is keeping him *au courant* with press reactions to all things Jewish, particularly as it impinges upon Congress work in all its ramifications.”⁴² Bronfman considered Klein’s help, although it was not a full-time job, important enough to install Klein in an office at Seagram’s headquarters even though the poet’s law office was only a few blocks south.⁴³ Klein apparently had ready access to Bronfman’s office so that the latter could instantly draw on his talents rather than, as at first, having Saul Hayes “contract” tasks, although this procedure continued concurrently with the more direct one. Bronfman greatly admired Klein’s ability to communicate both as public speaker and writer and he also valued his advice on Jewish matters.⁴⁴ Klein’s heightened awareness and concern, and sensitivity, to what was happening during those momentous years and his ability to draw on his knowledge of history and his store of Latin, English, French, Hebrew and Yiddish literature provided Bronfman with the perspective and depth he knew he lacked.

Professor Ben Lappin, a professional with the Canadian Jewish Congress in Toronto during those years and executive director of Central Region from 1948 to 1958, who had frequent occasion to observe the close collaboration, explains that the industrialist had such “*derech erez*”, such respect, and was so “uncritically appreciative” of the speeches the poet composed for him, because he “loved to read manuscripts prepared by a great artist like Klein.”⁴⁵ Occasionally this would lead to awkward or even humorous moments when Bronfman, unable to sustain the flights of eloquence prepared for him by Klein, would falter in the delivery.⁴⁶ But he didn’t resent Klein for it and treated him with consideration and respect.

Advice and speechwriting were not the only tasks. Frequently Klein himself would be the eloquent speaker on behalf of causes dear to Bronfman, especially the plight of Jewish refugees and the survival of Israel which were

concerns they obviously shared. On some of these occasions Bronfman would proudly introduce Klein and would note with admiration that with speakers like Klein Canadians didn't need visiting fund-raising stars.⁴⁷ Particularly notable occasions were the North American speaking engagements Klein undertook for the U.J.A. as a result of his tour of Europe, North Africa and Israel on which he had been sent by Bronfman and the C.J.C. in 1949. Not only was Klein extremely effective on this particular fund-raising assignment, but as is well known the notes he made on his journey and used for his speeches became the basis for his critically acclaimed Zionist novel *The Second Scroll*.⁴⁸

Klein also did some direct public relations work for Seagram's – in fact, he was paid his retainer through the public relations department.⁴⁹ Often this meant editing or writing the annual report of the company because Bronfman took his public responsibilities as head of Seagram's very seriously and insisted that the report be far more than a balance sheet.⁵⁰ It would frequently feature a long essay on broad issues of the time such as the results of a prestigious Seagrams sponsored symposium on the future, or the history and significance of Canada's north written by Pierre Berton. In such cases Klein had the responsibility for editing this material and making certain that it fulfilled Bronfman's intentions.

Ordinarily this was a routine task, but Bronfman was extremely sensitive about his own image and that of his enterprises and this sometimes placed Klein in embarrassing positions. The most notable example occurred in 1941 when Bronfman decided, at the nadir of Allied and Canadian fortunes in the War, to boost morale by sponsoring a book length history of Canada with a strong emphasis on its glorious future. The writer approached was Stephen Leacock, then in his seventies, retired and – in spite of the humour of such works as *Nonsense Novels* and *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* – still a crotchety imperialist, a white supremacist, and not too fond of the Jewish immigrants clamouring to enter Canada. Only eleven years earlier on a widely circulated political tract, *Economic Prosperity in the British Empire*, he could argue for billion dollar subsidies to induce “white” immigration to Canada from the British Isles, but people from European “alien countries” were not under consideration and did not fit the scheme because when the British race were available these others were only “a second best choice” and in his view this second best choice had already “badly damaged” the Canadian West.⁵¹ For him their learning English and legally become British subjects did not make them truly British. “A few such people can easily be absorbed”, he wrote.

A little dose of them may even, by variation, do good, like a minute dose of poison on

a medicine. But if you get enough of them, you get absorbed yourself . . .

I am not saying that we should absolutely shut out and deter the European foreigner, as we should and do shut out the Oriental. But we should in no way facilitate his coming.⁵²

Whose idea it was to offer the task to Leacock it is difficult to determine. It couldn't have been Klein who, having been Leacock's student at McGill,⁵³ was certainly familiar with his views and their implication for the Congress' efforts to open the gates. In one drawn out effort by the Congress, after endless submissions, delegations, and presentations only a thousand Jewish war orphans were admitted.⁵⁴ Perhaps it was felt that Leacock had mellowed, but Klein found himself, late in 1941, in a nutcracker between Leacock and Bronfman (who spent a great deal of time on the project)⁵⁵ as he was forced to do a massive editing job so that the history would not offend most of the non-British descended Canadians, especially in Quebec. The book eventually came out under the title *Canada—The Foundations of its Future* and was distributed free to over 160,000 people including – under a special cover – every notable in Canada, the U.S. and Britain, even including – here is catholicity indeed – Jack Benny and Haile Selassie!⁵⁶ Klein not only composed Bronfman's preface for the book but also the many personal dedications that Bronfman included for the important recipients.⁵⁷

Among the many gems Klein deleted were critical references to Sir Wilfred Laurier, constant reminders of the defeat of the French Canadians, and to their being "priest-ridden", and the following admonition on immigration: "We dare not again adventure on calling in all the mongrels of unredeemed Europe."⁵⁸ Klein was not, however, successful in removing passages referring to the "Asiatic peril" although he tried to get them "toned down a little".⁵⁹ In fact, the offending passages remained essentially intact.⁶⁰

So delicate were the negotiations for the deletions that they took almost two months. Apparently it was too awkward or sensitive a mission for Klein so one of the Seagram lawyers – not Jewish of course – was saddled with the responsibility and after a series of meetings with the author got him to agree to most of the changes which Klein had suggested.⁶¹

Another area of strain in their relationship – especially when it related to Seagram public relations work rather than Jewish concerns – involved their different political ideologies. As a committed socialist and a member of the C.C.F. Klein was a nationalist and a protectionist. Quite understandably Bronfman was a continentalist on economic policy and while he was a proud Canadian, his business interests and his gratitude to the U.S. for its leadership in World War II and its subsequent support of Israel, made him a natural ally of C.D. Howe's continentalist policies and of the Liberal Party in Canada. Furthermore, under Taschereau in Quebec and federally, in contrast to R. B.

Bennett's flirtations with Adrien Arcand and other neo-fascist movements of the 1930's,⁶² the Liberal Party had a much better record on Jewish questions than the Conservatives.

Although he was cautious enough to contribute to the coffers of the Progressive Conservative Party in the time honoured fashion of all the major Canadian corporations, he and his lieutenants in his business and Jewish enterprises, men like Lazarus Phillips and Saul Hayes, were much more comfortable dealing with Mackenzie King's, St. Laurent's and Pearson's cabinet ministers and senior civil servants. It is thus not surprising that Bronfman felt betrayed by the lack of an appointment to the Senate.⁶³ As the recognized head of the Jewish community, a major business figure, and one of the most substantial backers of the Liberal Party he was entitled to this honour far more than most of the tired bag men and party hacks who were regularly appointed.

Nevertheless when in 1944 Klein accepted the C.C.F nomination in the predominantly Jewish riding of Cartier in Montreal for the expected 1945 election Bronfman couldn't have been pleased. Particularly disturbing to him was the possibility that Klein would split the vote and allow Fred Rose, the communist, to win. Rose did win but Klein had withdrawn soon after his nomination. Perhaps Bronfman had prevailed on him to do so, sweetening the argument with the assurance of gaining for Klein a position in the English Department at McGill. In a diary entry during April, 1944, the month of his actual nomination, Klein notes that Bronfman:

Hypocritically expressed fear lest his Liberal association be marred by my running C.C.F. Assured me that I would prefer professorship at McGill to House of Commons seat.⁶⁴

Bronfman did secure for Klein a three-year Visiting Lectureship at McGill against some resistance. It is hard to believe that only Bronfman's importance as a donor, his personal negotiation with the Principal, and his offer to pay Klein's salary, secured the position for one of Canada's foremost poets. Such occasions must have reminded the two that their Jewishness was a bond that political differences could not destroy. It also illustrates in a particular instance one of Bronfman's services to the Canadian Jewish community, the opening up of the older Canadian universities – which maintained an unofficial quota against Jewish students, especially in medical schools – to Jewish faculty and students.

Klein did become a serious candidate for the C.C.F. in 1949 in the same riding and lost, in spite of his personal popularity, because of the earlier scandal surrounding Fred Rose and the Liberal's support of Israel. Klein's candidates didn't seem to strain the relationship since Bronfman sent him on the tour to Europe, North Africa and Israel soon afterwards, perhaps as a thoughtful consolation for Klein's disappointment at his defeat.

Probably the most fruitful part of their collaboration on behalf of Jewish causes involved Klein's editorship of the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*. In its weekly issues he editorialized on or highlighted in special features the Jewish efforts and concerns in which he was involved with Bronfman. David Rome has noted the importance of the close relationship between Klein's work for Bronfman and his editorship.

It is not too much to say that in this capacity [of editor] as well as through his association with the Canadian Jewish Congress and its president, Mr. Samuel Bronfman, Klein became the eloquent spokesman of the Canadian Jewish Community during many eventful years.....

To a large extent they [the editorials] were devoted to the theme of those years – the growing menace of the Nazi idea and of Nazi power. Klein's response to each development was as eloquent, forceful and logical as any word can be against brutality. . . . Probably never in Canadian journalism was English poetry invoked so freely and so naturally in comment on current political events.⁶⁵

In highlighting these concerns he would often consult Bronfman, especially for those issues of the paper appearing before major Jewish holidays like Purim, Passover or Rosh Hashana, when the preacher in Klein would emerge and he would draw telling parallels between previous occasions of Jewish peril and current events.⁶⁶ Thus in one of his letters to Bronfman in 1941 Klein includes "a Passover message for the Anglo-Jewish press of Canada" for Bronfman's perusal and concludes:

I have confined myself to emphasizing the parallel between the events which gave rise to our Passover celebration and the events through which we are living today – and may these, too, have the same happy conclusion.⁶⁷

Clearly Klein respected Bronfman's judgements on such matters and was not averse to learning from Bronfman, just as the latter learned from him. For instance in a series of little epigrammatic pieces, some even attributable to Bronfman, which Klein collected or composed as a probable aid in Bronfman's or his own addresses, on such diverse topics as "of how to look at your fellowman", "of poverty", "of flexibility", "of the complete man", etc., the poet would often note Bronfman's comments on the subjects. Under one headed "of old age" the poet writes that "of the longevity of the tortoise, Mr. B. opines that it might be due to this creature's exemplary practice of moderation: he goes slow, but he gets there." Under another headed "of ambition" Klein notes Bronfman's comment on first seeing the Rockies, "These are very big mountains. But there must be bigger – Where?" by way of illustrating Bronfman's view that "it is not ambition which is to be avoided like a vice; it is low ambitions which are so to be shunned."⁶⁸ And in a letter to Bronfman in January, 1944 regarding a French translation of Leacock's book he writes:

I still recall how concerned you were during the editing of the English version, that noth-

ing should appear in the book which might offend anybody's feelings; it is a tribute to your influence and a sense of human relations that when the book was finally published, it elicited unanimous approval.⁶⁹

Evidently their collaboration was not only fruitful but not nearly as one-sided as public perception would have it. They were useful to each other, not just in the narrowest sense, and this helps explain their bond.

What effects did their association have on the community and the men themselves? As was seen Klein helped Bronfman, through his poetry and his polemics in the *Chronicle*, to fashion and maintain that Canadian unity so necessary during those difficult years. Bronfman achieved that unity by providing for the Jews of Canada an organizational bridge between the religious and social cohesion they knew from the old country – its “Yiddishkeit” – and the necessity to adapt rapidly and efficiently to the changing demands of an English-speaking generation in Canada. Klein helped greatly in this process and for his particular niche in this effort as he may have been the ideal person.

But he was only one in a large group of talented associates who helped Bronfmann realize these goals during a period which, because of Bronfman's success in attracting younger leaders, one observer has characterized as “a kind of golden age of Canadian Jewish Congress.”⁷⁰ Very likely then Bronfman, who operated on many levels in pursuit of his aims, would have succeeded even without Klein. Nevertheless Klein's contribution was certainly not minimal and he may have been correct in feeling, towards the end of the period especially, that his contribution was not being adequately appreciated or properly recognized. In his own way Klein, like Bronfman, was ambitious and craved recognition and power and thus suffered from this perceived slight. His relationship with Bronfman both fed and aggravated this feeling and may have contributed to his sense that his was a buried voice, the drowned poet of “Portrait of the Poet as Landscape”, who

makes of his status as zero a rich garland,
a halo of his anonymity,
and lives alone, and in his secret shines
like phosphorus. At the bottom of the sea. (*C.P.*, p. 335)

On the one hand his close association with the industrialist gave him a kind of indirect power and even a kind of “vulgar fame”, but his too close identification with Bronfman may have exaggerated his increasing sense of personal failure when he would come to realize that he was, after all, not Bronfman.⁷¹

There is no doubt that at times Klein chafed in his role as Bronfman's assistant. In a diary entry referring to the final banquet of the U.J.A. campaign of 1942 at which one of his sonnets was featured on the souvenir program, he refers to himself as a “poet parsleyate to a menu” and bitterly adds:

Actually the sonnet was written only to avoid the sickening prose called for . . . But

that I should write it at all. It is a humiliation only a philanthropic world makes possible.⁷²

Perhaps more significantly revealing of his state of mind are some lines in Section III of an early version of “Portrait of the Poet as Landscape” which Klein omitted in *The Rocking Chair and Other Poems*. After characterizing the loneliness of the neglected poet as a “shelved Lycidas” who is “not dead, but only ignored” he writes:

However, for bread and the occasional show,
he finds him, *kindler of copy*, daily at desk.
For mongers and martment he swinks it, writing
their war-whoops, hailing their heroes, thrust
to his task: *Pirouette, pica; triumph, o’ twelve-point!*
Throw the sword to the scales, proud asterisk!
Scop of the sales-force, bard of their booty, he offers
to shoddy his shrilling, his gusto for gussets, to zippers his zest.
With housewives he’s homes, and pally with paters, a kingsman
A con man, he butters his bosses, he jumps at their jests.⁷³

He seems to be admonishing himself here for “selling out” the poet’s true inner voice for material security, a view he elaborated on a number of occasions in the *Chronicle*, most notably in an essay entitled “The Usurper” where he sarcastically explains that he has found the “mis-laid”, the vanished poet, “in an advertising agency, a copywriter!” whose skill “had degenerated among the easy ephemera he daily created.”⁷⁴

The fact is, however, that Klein’s sense of not having fulfilled his poetic talents had deeper roots than the occasional drudgery of working for Bronfman. Very early in his work Klein felt the traditional conflict between pursuing the public and the private voice, between writing poetry for his people and writing it for his own, or art’s sake. In an editorial about Picasso he summarized that conflict. If the artist caters, Klein wrote,

to what his audience expect from him, he is thereby deemed not to be an artist, but a *mere graphologist in public relations*; if he sticks to his bent and paints as his own mind conceives and his own eye sees, he is dubbed peculiar, erratic, even surrealist. When, moreover, the artist labours to please an audience that is itself divided in taste, he is well on the way to *developing a case of multiple fragmented schizophrenia*.⁷⁵ (Italics mine)

The tragically prophetic reference to mental illness as a consequence of the artist’s inability to reconcile contradictory ambitions may not be completely accidental here. Klein had long been obsessed with the biblical character of Joseph as a symbol of the persecuted artist or poet and he very early identified personally with that figure.⁷⁶ Somehow these two tendencies – fragmentation and persecution – seem to combine in the last part of his productive life. Klein referred to his dread of mental breakdown in a number of poems, most notably in the very personal “Psalm XXII: A Prayer of Abraham, Against Madness” dating well before any possible pressures that can be imputed to his re-

lationship with Bronfman, where he begs for physical disability or death rather than the loss of his mind's capacities:

O, I have seen these touched ones –
Their fallow looks, their barren eyes –
For whom have perished all the suns
And vanished all fertilities;
Who, docile, sit within their cells
Like weeds, within a stagnant pool.
Not these can serve Thee. Lord, if such
The stumbling that awaits my path –
Grant me Thy grace, thy mortal touch,
The full death – quiver of Thy wrath! (*C.P.*, p. 223)

It may be, as some suggest, that the lack of adequate recognition, his sense of disappointment in his public career – as lawyer, publicist, Joyce-scholar, politician, novelist, even the evanescence of his oratorical triumphs⁷⁷ – all contributed to a tendency already there. It may be his Joycean experiments with “the use of language as a means of discovery” of new realities in the last part of his poetic career,⁷⁸ or his possible awareness in the 1950's “that his entire literary enterprise (based on the poet as a public figure who unrolled our culture from his scroll) was going against the forces of change that had taken hold of his community and Canadian Jewry” in their shifts from the downtown ghettos to the “country club” suburbs,⁷⁹ also added to that tendency. However, to the extent that Klein's communal or artistic work may have contributed to his breakdown – always a risky speculation – it is more likely to have been his imagined perception of having failed “to have poetry effective in the world of affairs, and in this way to bring that empirical world into closer accord with his imaginary vision of it”⁸⁰ which produced his illness rather than the drudgery of work for Bronfman or any would be confusion of identities with the industrialist.

There is no doubt that the two men had more than just a working relationship and that Klein – whatever his hidden feelings about material poverty in comparison to Bronfman – enjoyed their friendship.⁸¹ Bronfman's view of that friendship may best be illustrated by a personal letter he wrote to Klein on March 18, 1941, immediately after Klein attended a 50th birthday dinner tendered Bronfman at the Montefiore Club. One need not doubt the honesty of the sentiments – even if the industrialist may have had help in its composition – since there was no reason other than genuine gratitude for its expression. “My Dear Abe,” he writes:

I am sure that you know how much I appreciate your ever readiness to be helpful from time to time when I seek your counsel and assistance on matters of mutual interest to us in relation to communal matters. It does not require a formal letter of acknowledgement from me to tell you how I feel, but on the occasion of my fiftieth birthday you have shown such a deep interest and been so cooperative throughout that I cannot refrain from writing

you this note which comes from the heart.

There were a number of close friends on the committee of arrangements who were active in connection with all that was involved . . . and they undoubtedly all contributed . . . whilst you were not officially a member of the committee I know of no one who contributed more than you to make the occasion one which I will live long in my memory. And so in saying thanks to you, I couple it with the warmest expression of friendship and deep regard, and want to say at the same time what a pleasure it has been for me to learn to know intimately a man of such depth of thought, intellect and character as I have found you."⁸²

Nor was Bronfman insensitive to Klein's anomalous position in their relationship – on one level an equal, but on another level an employee – and he tried to overcome its occasionally embarrassing effects. Thus, in a note dated several days later, Klein thanks Bronfman for his letter and the accompanying cheque ("overwhelmingly generous") which he notes Bronfman was thoughtful to separate from the letter so as not to embarrass Klein or to detract from the genuineness of the sentiments in the letter.⁸³

In retrospect it is amazing how right Bronfman was in his judgement and sentiment about Klein; the irony is that Klein somehow ignored, disbelieved, or forgot this admiration and regard when it might have helped him avoid the tragic slippage into his private hell. Certainly, Bronfman didn't fail him. As the first of Klein's biographers noted in 1959, "It is ironic that among the few friends who persistently stood by Abe Klein, was Samuel Bronfman, the tycoon. To this day," he wrote, "A. M. Klein, poet, socialist, and idealist is on the payroll of Distillers Limited."⁸⁴ Can many of his critics and former literary friends – suddenly re-discovering him now that it is too late – claim as much? What is not in doubt is that the collaboration between Bronfman and Klein contributed to the maturing unity of Canada's Jews.

The fact is that whatever the personal shortcomings of the two men, the Jewish community of Canada owes a substantial part of its present vitality and self-confident creativity to these exceptional individuals – to one for his industrial, philanthropic and communal leadership and to the other for the highest literary and poetic expression of the community's heritage and ideals.

NOTES

1. Gary Gaddes, "A. M. Klein—Restorer of Magic and Light," *The Globe and Mail*, (August 3, 1974) 29. See also Seymour Maine, ed., *The A. M. Klein Symposium*, (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press 1975).
2. Saul Hayes, "Notes for November 7th Meeting at the Jewish Public Library and Film Showing of A. M. Klein," Klein Folder, Canadian Jewish Congress Archives, Montreal, 1.
3. Peter C. Newman, *Bronfman Dynasty* (Toronto: Seal Books 1978), 29,
4. Klein was a part-time employee of Seagram's but was kept on an annual retainer until his death, perhaps receiving additional sums for special tasks. The exact amounts are part of the restricted information in the Klein Papers of the Public Archives of Canada, and thus Klein's financial dependence on Bronfman remains conjecture.

5. A. M. Klein, *A History of Canadian Jewish Congress During the War Years*, (Public Archives of Canada, Klein Papers), vol 35, p. 7.
6. A. M. Klein, *The Decisive Years*, (Public Archives of Canada, Klein Papers), vol. 19, Ms. 9269.
7. J. B. Salsberg, "How Sam Bronfman brought Hayes into Congress," *Canadian Jewish News* (February 7, 198), 4.
8. Ben Lappin, "The Receding World of Abraham Klein," *Viewpoints*, II 4 (Spring, 1981), 19.
9. Miriam Waddington, *A. M. Klein: Studies in Canadian Literature* (Toronto: The Copp Clark Publishing Co. 1970), 51-52.
10. A. M. Klein, *The Collected Poems of A. M. Klein*, Ed. Miriam Waddington (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited 1974), 86. Except where noted otherwise all subsequent references to Klein's poetry are to this edition and marked *C.P.*
11. Waddington, p. 46.
12. Usher Caplan, "A. M. Klein: An Introduction," Unpublished PhD. Dissertation, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1976, p. 67.
13. Gerald E. Dirks, *Canada's Refugee Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 1977) p. 54 and p. 55.
14. Lita-Rose Betcherman, *The Swastika and the Maple Leaf* (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside 1975), 131.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
16. David Rome, *Jews in Canadian Literature: A Bibliography* (Montreal: Canadian Jewish Congress and the Jewish Public Library 1962), 40.
17. Caplan, p.66.
18. Letter from David Lewis to A. M. Klein, July 17, 1934, Klein Papers, Public Archives of Canada, vol. 1, Ms. 000135.
19. Letter from A. M. Klein to Max Klein to Max Garmaise, March 14, 1938, Klein Papers, Public Archives of Canada, vol. 3, Ms. 001794.
20. Betcherman, p. 91 and p. 142.
21. Salsberg, p. 4.
22. Caplan, p. 85.
23. H. M. Caiserman-Vital, *Yiddishe Dichter in Kanade* (Jewish Poets in Canada) (Montreal: The Eagle Publishing Co. 1934), 167.
24. Interview with Ben Lappin, Toronto, May 15, 1981, Cassette Tape, Central Region Archives, Toronto Canadian Jewish Congress.
25. G. K. Fisher, *In Search of Jerusalem* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 1975), 2.
26. Salsberg, p. 4.
27. Klein, *A History of Canadian Jewish Congress During the War Years*, Vol. 35, p. 5.
28. Klein, *The Decisive Years*, vol. 19, Ms. 9616.
29. *Ibid.*, Ms. 9454.
30. Newman, p. 19.
31. Lappin, "Interview"
32. Newman, p. 20.
33. Hayes, "Notes for November 7th Meeting at the Jewish Public Library and Film Showing of A. M. Klein", p. 2.
34. Newman, p. 29.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

37. Klein Papers, vol. 19, Ms. 9949.
38. Caplan, p. 259.
39. Salsberg, p. 4.
40. Lappin, "Interview".
41. Caplan, p. 259.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
44. Lappin, "Interview".
45. *Ibid.*
46. Lappin, "The Receding World of Abraham Klein," p. 19.
47. Lappin, "Interview".
48. Caplan, p. 214.
49. E. E. Palnick, *A. M. Klein: A Biographical Study*, Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, 1959, CH. V, p. 15.
50. Saul Hayes, "The Bronfman 'Dynasty': A Friend's Reminiscence," *Viewpoints*, X, 2 (Spring, 1979), 47.
51. Stephen Leacock, *Economic Prosperity in the British Empire* (Toronto: The MacMillan Co. 1930), p. 195.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
53. Klein Papers, vol. 1, Ms. 000157.
54. *Ibid.*, Vol. 19, Ms. 9276.
55. Hayes, "The Bronfman 'Dynasty': A Friend's Reminiscence," p. 47.
56. *Ibid.*, vol. 22, Ms. 20658 - Ms. 20700.
57. Caplan, p. 116.
58. Klein Papers, vol. 22, Ms. 20668 - Ms. 20679.
59. *Ibid.*
60. Stephen Leacock, *Canada: The Foundations of Its Future* (Montreal: Privately printed for the House of Seagram 1941), 209.
61. Memo from R. T. Ferguson to A. M. Klein, October 24, 1941, Klein Papers, vol. 22, Ms. 20689.
62. Betcherman, p. 42.
63. Newman, p. 52.
64. Caplan, p. 124.
65. Rome, pp. 43-44.
66. Caplan, p. 83.
67. Letter from A. M. Klein to Samuel Bronfman, March 24, 1941, Klein Papers, vol. 1, Ms. 000140.
68. Klein Papers, vol. 26, Ms. 23507 and Ms. 23509.
69. Letter from A. M. Klein to Samuel Bronfman, January 20, 1944, Klein Papers, Mg. 30, vol. 1, Ms. 0002525.
70. Lappin, "Interview".
71. Caplan, pp. 259-260. Caplan attributes part of this speculation to David Rome.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
73. Waddington p. 104. The writer is indebted to Professor Waddington for pointing to the possible connection between these lines and Klein's feelings about his work for Bronfman.
74. A. M. Klein, "The Usurper," *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* (January 14, 1949), 4. See also Caplan, p. 118.

75. A. M. Klein, "Poor Pablo Picasso," *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* (April 3, 1953), 3.
76. Caplan, p. 262.
77. Hayes, "Notes For November 7th Meeting At The Jewish Public Library and Film Showing of A. M. Klein," p. 4.
78. Waddington, p. 114.
79. Lappin, "The Receding World of Abraham Klein," pp. 19-20.
80. Waddington, p. 106.
81. Hayes, "Notes For November 7th Meeting At The Jewish Public Library and Film Showing of A. M. Klein," p. 5.
82. Letter from Samuel Bronfman to A. M. Klein, March 18, 1941. Klein Papers, vol. 1, Ms. 000139.
83. Letter from A. M. Klein to Samuel Bronfman, March 24, 1941. Klein Papers, vol. 1, Ms. 000140.
84. Palnick, CH. V, p. 15.