

## 80. Identity and alienation in *Coming From Behind*: a Jewish intellectual in academy<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This study analyzes Howard Jacobson's campus novel, *Coming From Behind* (1983) in terms of its protagonist's struggle in academic life and the reasons and outcomes of that struggle. The protagonist, Sefton Goldberg is a Jewish British academic of English literature. His disappointments in his career and his relationships with other academics and his students, when evaluated through an existentialist point of view, as this study suggests, reveal much about a Jewish intellectual's psychology and his position in academic world, as well as the condition of humanities and literature departments and how they are viewed in the contemporary university life. As a Jewish scholar and an intellectual, Goldberg is sure that his identity plays an important role in his academic career, personal relationships and psychology. Goldberg believes that his identity is the main reason behind his supposed alienation in the academic world. This study examines whether Goldberg has the standards that an intellectual should have according to philosophers and authors like Antonio Gramsci, J.P. Sartre and Edward Said. Secondly, the study focuses on how this intellectuality of Goldberg helps him to cope with the supposed alienation he faces because of his identity. Finally, this study sheds light on the problematic academic life of a Jewish British scholar through the lens of an existentialist view and argues that Goldberg's identity can only be a hindrance on his path to success and happiness, not an absolute obstacle.

**Keywords:** Campus Novel, Identity, Alienation, Howard Jacobson, Existentialism

## *Coming From Behind*'da kimlik ve yabancılaşma: Akademide Yahudi bir entelektüel

### Öz

Bu çalışma, Howard Jacobson'ın kampüs romanı, *Coming From Behind* (1983)'i baş karakterinin akademik hayattaki mücadelesi ve bu mücadelenin sebep ve sonuçları üzerinden incelemektedir. Baş karakter Sefton Goldberg İngiliz Edebiyatı alanında çalışan, Yahudi bir İngiliz akademisyendir. Kariyerinde yaşadığı hayal kırıklıkları ve diğer akademisyenler ve öğrencileri ile ilişkileri, bu çalışmada olduğu gibi varoluşçu bir bakış açısı ile değerlendirildiğinde, beşeri bilimler ve edebiyat bölümlerinin durumu ve çağdaş üniversite hayatında nasıl görüldüklerinin yanı sıra, Yahudi bir entelektüelin psikolojisi ve akademik dünyadaki yeri hakkında da pek çok gerçeği açığa

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çıkarmaktadır. Yahudi bir akademisyen ve entelektüel olarak, Goldberg kimliğinin akademik kariyerinde, kişisel ilişkilerinde ve psikolojisinde önemli bir rol oynadığından emindir. Goldberg akademik dünyada kendini yabancılaştırılmış olarak görmekte ve bu durumun ardında yatan ana sebebin kimliği ve kökeni olduğuna inanmaktadır. Bu çalışma Goldberg'ün Antonio Gramsci, J.P. Sartre ve Edward Said gibi düşünür ve yazarlara göre bir entelektüelin sahip olması gereken standart değerlere ve özelliklere sahip olup olmadığını incelemektedir. Buna ilaveten, çalışma Goldberg'ün bahsi geçen bu entelektüelliğinin kimliği nedeniyle maruz kaldığını düşündüğü yabancılaştırma ve ötekileştirme ile baş etmede ne ölçüde yardımcı olduğuna odaklanmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma Yahudi bir İngiliz akademisyenin problemleri akademik hayatına varoluşçu bir bakış açısıyla ışık tutmakta ve Goldberg'ün kimliğinin başarıya ve mutluluğa giden yolda aşılabilir bir engel olmaktan ziyade küçük bir zorluk olduğunu öne sürmektedir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Kampüs Romanı, Kimlik, Yabancılaşma, Howard Jacobson, Varoluşçuluk

## Introduction

Howard Jacobson's campus novel, *Coming From Behind* (1983), tells the story of Sefton Goldberg, a Jewish British academic of English Literature. Goldberg is a very complicated character because he both wants to be successful and unsuccessful. In a way, he wants to escape from achievements of any kind. His relationship with one of his old friends, Godfrey Jelley, also reveals much about Goldberg's character. Although close friends since high school, Goldberg had always seen Jelley as his opponent. He is envious of Godfrey Jelley's achievements. For their university education, Goldberg went to Cambridge and Jelley went to Oxford. Even though they were separated they remained friends and the competition did not stop. Early in the novel he discovers that Jelley had become a successful and a well-known journalist and he had published two books, one of which is a novel.

After the university, Goldberg moves to Australia to teach for a time and is certain of himself to return and have a reputable career by working for a university that is among the top ten. Yet, a far from significant spot at a Polytechnic in Wrotesley, a kind of minor technical school, was what he could get when he returned. Therefore, due to this discontent and his jealousy towards the increasing recognition of his old friend, he turns into a miserable man. Goldberg also has had plans of writing books for years but these plans have never been realized because of his melancholic and lazy character. In time, he accepted failure as a part of his nature to an extent that he would almost praise it,

For many years now he had been planning a sort of history and vindication of the will to failure in art. He had always hated the determination that makes men finish things and deemed it a fanatical and essentially gentile quality. His book was to be a defence of spoiled canvasses and unfinished symphonies and abandoned novels. It occurred to him that the highest tribute his book might pay to failure was not to get itself written at all. (Jacobson, 1983/1993a, p. 19)

He sees and wants failure, as it is understood from the above quotation, not only in his life but also in other people's lives. During his lectures, he does not like to teach canonical novels and now and then rips them in front of the class, as he does not think that the students can understand them. Besides, he is so selective about authors and decent literature that according to him, "In a world where reputation was evanescent and human passions were transient, only the book was stable and permanent. Even to be remaindered was to be remembered" (Jacobson, 1983/1993a, p. 17). Hence, as someone who rips books and praises them in the classroom, Sefton is a difficult scholar. Besides, another vital feature of him is his Jewish identity. It is presented in the novel almost as a justification for many of Goldberg's strange and neurotic behaviors.

The deeply self-doubting Jewish central character of the novel, David Brauner (2001) argues, attempts to define Jewishness with regards to things that are considered to be, according to him, in contrast with it (p. 78). For instance, if he was to list the most unfamiliar things to Jews, Goldberg would choose, “Nature – that’s to say birds, trees, flowers and country walks – and football – that’s to say beer, bikies, mud, and physical pain” (Jacobson, 1983/1993a, p. 58). Thus, Goldberg keeps projecting a negative understanding of himself and of his origins. Here, it is evident that he defines Jews as people who are entirely isolated from nature, abnormal in other words. The sarcastic narration of the writer can partially explain this but the fact that these kinds of statements of Goldberg are all over the novel, steals from the supposed sarcastic result. In a sense, he mirrors what the society makes him feel like.

In terms of this kind of narration and style, Stavans (1998) claims that Jacobson targets English readers for their disregard of serious literature and intellectuals while he applauds American readers who at least do not turn a blind eye on them (p. 21). In this respect, Sefton Goldberg’s efforts for hindering his own achievements can be interpreted as a response of the writer to society’s disrespect for them. According to Goldberg, the society he breathes in is not advanced enough to value intellectual capabilities, and therefore, he undoubtedly does not think that it is meaningful to publish any fiction or scholarly essays. The general Jewish appreciation of intellect, Stephen Brook (1989) states, is completely contrary to the British disapproval of it, “The English language must be one of the few in the world to possess a phrase such as ‘too clever by half’. The Jew relishes cleverness ... but in Britain ... it must have been very tempting to play down such leanings” (p. 320). Jacobson also believes that this essential aggression towards intellectuals is also reinforced with antisemitism, and therefore, he states, “the English don’t like Jewish intellectuals. They don’t like intellectuals either. But they really don’t like clever Jewish boys” (Jacobson, 1999, p. 68). Hence, this situation can be observed in the way Goldberg feels like an outsider in the university.

According to Joseph Cohen (1986), the fact that, in the United States, there are more than sixty thousand Jewish scholars, mostly in the humanities departments, is the reason of the success of the novel in the American market. He argues that Sefton Goldberg, an English professor at Wrottesley Polytechnic, is an academic that these scholars are familiar with. He is a lifelike figure. Cohen asserts that as someone who had not written a book, Goldberg would rather perish than publish, which is a suicidal act in academy (pp. 42-3). In spite of this suicidal approach of him, Goldberg’s life is very exciting and entertaining to read. With his frank Jewish details as emphasized in the novel, he sometimes seems to assist or incite antisemitic ideas in other people to accomplish the character of a victim and sometimes the character of an anti-hero. In this sense, Cohen says: “we are treated to a peculiarly Anglo-Jewish dimension of satire that is half music hall farce and half Yiddish jokes” (p. 43). Still, the overall tone of the novel cannot be considered as farce. Several literary references could mostly be understood by scholars in English departments. Such as, “Eliot, Pound, Melville, Hawthorne, Conrad, Dickens, Hardy, and frequently D.H. Lawrence” (43), and Cohen remarks,

strut and fret across Jacobson’s pages. Some of the characters are given the actual names of literary figures. At one point, where Goldberg is under consideration for a post as Disraeli Fellow at a Cambridge college, Holy Christ Hall, he is introduced at High Table to a number of clerics whose names are Mr. Collins (from Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*), Parson Adams (from Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews*), and Arthur Dimmesdale (from Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*) among others. (p. 43)

The references are not only limited to literary characters. Gerald Sidewinder, whose surname is the name of a North American rattle snake, is the administrator of the Twentieth Century Studies. He is depicted as a mean man whose “eyes on the lookout for flies” and “he would flick out his tongue as if he were

taking moisture to the dry corners of his Mexican moustaches” (Jacobson, 1983/1993a, p. 39). Besides, Cora Peck, a colleague of Goldberg arrives at a department party “in an old black silk dress which might have been Katherine’s and long net gloves which might have been Edith’s and a string of pearls which might have been Virginia’s and a black woolen cloak which was almost certainly Sylvia’s” (Jacobson, 1983/1993a, p. 155). These allusions to Katherine Mansfield, Edith Sitwell, Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath, amid several others, are understandable for academics and for those who are employed in literary studies. Thus, they provide a literary worth and complexity for the novel (Cohen, 1986, p. 43). However, its content of certain literary names and characters or its stress on Jewish identity are not the only aspects of the novel which make it valuable.

Similar to *Lucky Jim*, Cohen (1986) claims, *Coming From Behind* is not just a comic novel but must be considered highly as a novel of social reflection. Jacobson reacts to the unfair state of Anglo-Jewish community as well as society’s insolent understanding of intellectuals. The portrayal of Jews by Jacobson, Cohen argues, is both disturbing and sad. They give the impression of materialistic people who are absorbed in self-centered love. For instance, Goldberg’s father and mother in Manchester are very representative of this kind of depiction. His father is a rude person who is also an unskilled illusionist. Goldberg is ashamed of him during his graduation ceremony at Cambridge when his father generates an egg from the ear of F.R. Leavis. His mother, again, is engaged in a widows and orphans community which consists almost only of mad people. Therefore, when Goldberg thinks that he does not belong to this Jewish society, it is not a surprise. As an intellectual and a scholar, he does not want to go back to his people anymore as he does not feel like a part of their indifferent value system. As a Jew, on the other hand, he feels like his qualities fall short for an esteemed spot in academic world (p. 44). Unable to integrate himself to either side, Goldberg is confused and unhappy. It seems, this condition of Goldberg also reflects the condition of the novel’s author as he had detailed in an interview, “We were free of the ghetto and we weren’t. We were philosophers now and not pedlars, and we weren’t. If we had any identity at all, that was it: we countermanded ourselves, we faced in opposite directions, we were our own antithesis” (Jacobson, 1983/1993b, p. 3). Most probably, this was also the reason that Jacobson tried to free himself from the influence of his Cambridge professor, F.R Leavis, when writing his first novel *Coming From Behind* (Oral, 2011, p. 10). Hence, as it reflects the real state of the British-Jewish academics as experienced by the writer himself, one can argue that the novel is undeniably a social observation and criticism.

### **Identity and intellectuality in academic life**

When reading campus novels like *Coming From Behind*, Andrew Monnickendam (1989) argues, one must try to understand whether there is an anxiety or concern that lies beneath the satire or not. In today’s academy, Monnickendam asserts, humanities departments are increasingly underfunded and this question is irrefutable and vital (p. 153). Besides the fact that it is set in a polytechnic, what differentiates *Coming From Behind* from other academic novels like *Lucky Jim* or *The History Man*, Monnickendam claims, is that it portrays a significantly wider portion of life in Britain, with a larger number of characters (p. 154). Contrary to the campus in Malcolm Bradbury’s *The History Man*, for example, the polytechnic of Goldberg is located in an unsympathetic place in the Midlands where everything appears unpleasant. Various times in the novel, the campus is sketched as unpleasant, blank and unfriendly. Hence, the depiction of the setting coincides with the inner world of Sefton Goldberg, reflecting dead ends, reluctance and purposelessness of a Jewish scholar.

Along with being totally aware of his Jewishness, Sefton Goldberg is not only evading from success but also from failure. When you do not do anything, he believes, you will not fail. He, as he boldly writes on an application file, has not published anything, at least not a thing his potential employers would find appropriate. However, he thinks that this criterion of publication is wrong and academics should also be evaluated for their other merits,

if I have lectured. have I not (in that fullest sense) published? if I have enlightened a few have I not contributed to the knowledge (knowledge *felt* rather than merely acquired) of the many? and if I have at all times distinguished and discriminated, have I not *lived* those articles which I have only by the most literal interpretation of the word writing not written? (Jacobson, 1983/1993a, p. 149)

Not very successful in his academic career, Sefton's relationships with women are also not an embodiment of triumph. His sole sexual bond is with a woman named Jacqueline who is a former student of him. She pays him irregular visits occasionally and she also has a long-term partner. Sefton is concerned about his manhood and his obvious lack of confidence does not seem to help (Monnickendam, 1989, p. 164). The function of his body has always been unknown for him, "Sefton had never in his life, not even in his dreams, been physically comfortable; had never been certain, from one moment to the next, that any particular part of his body was going to function" (Jacobson, 1993a, p. 176). Thus, being sure of his incompetency, it can be understood that his insecurity not only harms his career but also his private affairs.

Moreover, like Goldberg's sex life, the university administration also seems to malfunction and work against him. Anxieties about the aim of university education, since Bradbury, have not lost its validity in Jacobson's narrative. English Studies in Goldberg's Polytechnic, in Wrottesley, has disappeared. Though the disappearance is mainly in title and not in the matter, the new name of the department of English Literature is now the Twentieth-Century Studies. The name of the department is changed in order to make it sound more useful or precise just like the name of the English, EFL; The Department of Modern Languages for Business (Monnickendam, 1989, p. 165). Similarly, the name of the faculty of Arts has been changed to the "Faculty of Purposeful Art and Design" (Jacobson, 1983/1993a 122), again, to make it sound more scientific and practical. This is a clear criticism of the ongoing popular view of university structure. Especially, fields of humanities and social sciences are seen as departments whose presence must be defensible in order to keep them operating. Troubles like these, directly or indirectly, are often mentioned in many works of university fiction.

Goldberg spends much time applying for any kind of jobs anywhere just to be able to get away from Wrottesley. His desire to travel and get away exists since the moment he hired a small flat in Wrottesley when he came back from Australia to work in this polytechnic. His flat and all his belongings, luggage and clothes are scattered around the place and it looks as if he is going to move out any time,

he kept his suits in cases and his socks in laundry bags and his books in bundles of string and himself on the edge of his chair. Perched, on the top floor of a wet Victorian house, ready for flight. He had been perched for five years. Some of his books were now out of their string but there was still no quilt and no fridge and no telephone. (Jacobson, 1983/1993a, p. 107)

As much as he felt out of his place at home, he felt it at his campus too. Once, when he parked his car in the language department's area of parking, he finds himself in a furious discussion with the faculty of the language department. Goldberg's fault has been to park his car in their segment of the car park. Being a violation of territory, this can be seen as a metaphor for his rejection by the society. His windscreen is full of notes and labels telling him his offence. Goldberg is even cursed at and blamed for

being a “fucking clever cunt!” (Jacobson, 1983/1993a, p. 72). In a sense, and as this metaphor suggests, Goldberg clearly has no place in the parking lot of the university, just as literary studies have no place in the changing academic world (Monnickendam, 1989, p. 165-6). This message can be observed throughout the novel via different examples set forward. Hence, the incident clearly underlines Goldberg’s alienation in the institution he is working for.

With the news that the department of the Twentieth-Century Studies will be relocated, Goldberg’s longing for going away is amplified. Goldberg learns that all departments will be moved, and theirs will be moved to a floor in the nearby football stadium. Sidewinder, the director, as a response to complaints about this relocation, defends this absurdity by stating that,

good teachers could teach anywhere. But that if it was to be a question of insult, the football club might well consider itself to be the aggrieved party. It did, after all, boast an international reputation, whereas the department -he begged to be corrected if he was wrong- my department enjoyed a more modest fame. (Jacobson, 1983/1993a, p. 54)

Trying to adjust to the changing times, Goldberg plays an active role in the union of the Polytechnic with Wrotesley Rovers, the local soccer team. As his field is the novel, he is assigned the duty of reading and evaluating a novel named *Scoring*, written by the top player of the soccer team, Kevin Dainty. Once Goldberg has finished this pulp fiction, he puts it on his bookstand, where his books are placed in alphabetical order according to the authors’ surnames and Dainty comes right before Dante. He is also encouraged to write a positive review of the novel by Sidewinder who wants to get on well with their new host. According to Monnickendam (1989), it seems that Jacobson questions the role of literary studies and humanities in today’s academic world and how they are seen in Britain (pp. 166-7). Placing Dainty before Dante and forcing a scholar to praise a football player are surely precise metaphors for showing the declining values at the university level.

Initially, Goldberg’s colleagues in his department seem a somewhat unappealing group of dull people. The feminist scholar, Cora Peck, on the other hand, becomes a famous, best-selling poet, and another, a Nick Lee, is a rich scholar who always travels abroad, meeting celebrities like Kurt Vonnegut. These examples might suggest that Wrotesley is only a midway inn, indicating that polytechnics are lesser degree schools. As a contemporary director, the character of Sidewinder merely performs orders. The strategy, on the other hand, is determined by people who no longer believe in the legitimacy of intellectual quests and only focus on the financial benefits. The professors who can achieve any success, in this context, are those who find substitutes in the exterior world of the campus. Hence, Monnickendam (1989) argues, Goldberg’s biggest mistake in his academic life is that he devotes his time only to teaching (p. 168). In this respect, it is clear that the contemporary campus can kill one’s intellectual abilities if these abilities are only directed to teaching.

Goldberg still thinks of his undergraduate years in Cambridge and expects the current academic world to be like that. Desperate to return to these days and leave Wrotesley behind, he applies for a Disraeli Fellowship at Cambridge. Following a sequence of events, Goldberg finally receives the fellowship even though it is because their first choice could not take it and Goldberg was the only available candidate at hand. However, it is obvious that he would not meet his ideal academic world there too. Times have changed and the academic atmosphere of Cambridge or any other institution of higher education is no exception.

Being a Jewish intellectual character, Goldberg has some common and different features when compared with many other scholars in campus novel genre. Now, the question is how intellectual is Sefton Goldberg? Moreover, what kind of an intellectual is he? Does he experience any existential crisis, and does he have freedom and will to realize his existence and become a true self as an intellectual person? Is his identity as a Jewish person an obstacle in his academic career? It is time to discuss these issues and try to come up with some answers. Hence, it would be a good idea to have a look at some definitions of intellectuality to determine Sefton Goldberg's position.

Concerning the duties and the purpose of the intellectual, Antonio Gramsci (1947/1992), the Italian thinker and politician claims that "all men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals" (p. 9). This can sound confusing initially but then he clarifies his explanation with more examples. He tries to prove that one can divide people, who truly perform the mission of intellectuals in society, into two different groups. The first group of intellectuals is the "traditional" intellectuals, for example, teachers, priests, or administrators, who do more or less the same things for years, on and on. The second group is called the "organic" intellectuals, who are tools, according to Gramsci, that are strictly connected to classes or corporations that use intellectuals to create profits and gain extra power and control. Thus, Gramsci (1947/1992) describes the organic intellectual as "the capitalist entrepreneur creates alongside himself the industrial technician, the specialist in political economy, the organizers of a new culture, of a new legal system, etc." (p. 5). The academics or the students in institutions of higher education, as one can derive from this definition, can be considered as traditional intellectuals.

According to Gramsci (1947/1992), organic intellectuals are devotedly involved in matters concerning the society. They determinedly try to change views of the society and increase the number of their addressees. Their main task is always to make a change in people's minds. However, professors, instructors or teachers, the so-called traditional intellectuals, mostly keep carrying out a similar work every semester (p. 8). Thus, the intellectual, according to Gramsci, is someone who is active in any job related to the creation or flow of data. This is also relevant in contemporary society and the academia.

In this sense, Sefton Goldberg, as someone teaching at the university, is a traditional intellectual, who uses orthodox classroom tools like books. He is in compliance with Gramsci's definition of traditional intellectual. However, the way Goldberg acts when teaching, that is ripping books and insulting his students, does not conform to Edward Said's description of an intellectual who should educate and assist people in his environment, eventually making them better.

In *Representations of the Intellectual*, Edward Said (1994/1996) claims that various types of intellectuals are present in today's society. He states that "endless accounts of intellectuals and nationalism, and power, and tradition, and revolution, and on and on" (p. 10). For him, the chief aim of an intellectual must be "representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public" (p. 11). It is impossible for him to be a "private intellectual", for as soon as a person publishes a written document, that document, according to him, becomes public. He believes that intellectuals are "individuals with a vocation for the art of representing, whether that is talking, writing, teaching, appearing on television" (pp. 12-3). Hence, Said underlines the obligation of the intellectuals towards the community, waving aside their individual goals. In this sense, he gives a societal task for intellectuals to accomplish.

Besides, Said (1994/1996) perceives professionalism of intellectuals as dangerous for intellectuality. For today's intellectuals, whether in the West or the non-Western world, the threat, he says:

is not the academy, nor the suburbs, nor the appalling commercialism of journalism and publishing houses, but rather an attitude that I will call professionalism. By professionalism I mean thinking of your work as an intellectual as something you do for a living, between the hours of nine and five with one eye on the clock, and another cocked at what is considered to be proper, professional behavior— not rocking the boat, not straying outside the accepted paradigms or limits, making yourself marketable and above all presentable, hence uncontroversial and unpolitical and “objective.” (p. 74)

When considered according to Said's evaluations, Sefton Goldberg, again, fails to get into the category of the ideal intellectual, as he does not believe that the students at his institution deserve a good education and a diploma, and he deliberately misleads them, thinking they are already lost causes. Hence, he does not execute the proper function of an intellectual in society according to Edward Said's understanding.

Freedom is another important aspect in terms of intellectuality. Sartre (1948/1988) argues that man is basically free but a certain condition or a hindrance might stop him from executing such freedom. Yet, he states, it is not right to assume that environment and condition are the only factors which determine an intellectual's course of actions. He believes that there is a constant relation and interchange between environment, condition and free will (p. 77). Sartre expresses his opinion on the function of the intellectual in society in the following lines:

I am an author, first of all, by my free intention to write. But at one it follows that I become a man whom other men consider as a writer, that is, who has to respond to a certain demand and who has been invested with a certain social function. Whatever game he may want to play, he must play it on the basis of the representation, which others have of him. He may want to modify the character that one attributes to the man of letters (or intellectual) in a given society; but in order to change it; he must first slip into it. Hence, the public intervenes, with its customs, its vision of the world, and its conception of society and of literature within that society. It surrounds the writer, it hems him in, and its imperious or sly demands, its refusals and its flights, are the given facts on whose basis a work can be constructed. (pp. 77-8)

Sartre underlines that the intellectual should not be a person who lives and works alone outside the society. He is not also someone who the society should look-up to and adore. In contrast, the intellectual should always meet the demands of his/her society, and be aware of the changes in the position of intellectuals. Still, he believes, as much as the intellectuals are free, they should also be responsible. These are some of the aspects of intellectuality that the existentialists count as important. So, what does an intellectual experience when he/she accepts these views but cannot achieve the goal of building of the self and being a self-determining, independent person? Probably, a mental suffering or a crisis.

In this respect, existential crisis is experienced when one is not certain of his purpose in life and not in control of his direction. This happens to intellectual individuals in particular, and mostly at times when their intellectuality and knowledge do not help for defeat, sadness or other difficulties. The improved mindfulness of one's self and one's route in life and from time-to-time overthinking of the probable impending complications that are possible to arise, again, cause one to have these kinds of crises. Accordingly, it is not surprising to observe these circumstances in campus novels, where, practically on every page, the characters debate matters related to the meaning of life, their function in the society and other philosophical, psychological or religious subjects. In accordance with these explanations on the existentialist thought, there are parallel features in *Coming From Behind*.



## Conclusion

Sefton Goldberg can be considered a traditional intellectual, as he is a lecturer, teaching at the university level, who uses common classroom materials and books. This profession of teaching, which, for him, is more important than publishing, places him within the category of traditional intellectual in accordance with Gramsci's definitions. Yet, the way Goldberg acts during teaching, that is tearing books, insulting authors or his students, does not follow to Said's description of an intellectual individual who is expected to instruct and aid people, assist in making them better. The students at his department, according to Goldberg, do not deserve a proper teaching and a diploma. Hence, he intentionally misinforms them, because he thinks that they are already lost causes. In this respect, he does not perform the appropriate role of an intellectual according to Edward Said's comprehension.

Moreover, Goldberg appears as if he entirely lives in existential crisis. He regrets living Wrottesley and desperately wants to get out of it. However, he accepts the situation and though he wants to change he does not do any considerable thing to do it. His resolution is to escape from his problems. Although he is not happy with what he has made of himself but he incorrectly puts the blame on fate or destiny, "If he went to the theatre he would sit sullen in the stalls, pondering the good fortune of the actors, the happy chance that had made the director the director (while something quite different had made Sefton Goldberg Sefton Goldberg)" (Jacobson, 1983/1993a, p. 23). He is constantly, "idle, frustrated and disappointed" (p. 28). Like these lines show, he does not have the confidence that he could help him to have control over his journey in life.

Furthermore, he is continuously in need of validation, support and applause from other people. In a dialog with Sidewinder, he thinks to himself,

why it was, if he was so disenchanted with the human race, that he still wanted its applause? And by applause, the applause Sidewinder didn't need or crave or seek and he, Sefton Goldberg, did, he meant not simply the general idea- recognition, approval, appreciation, perhaps even reward- no, he meant the vulgar, literal thing; the hum of a packed auditorium, the sound of hand against hand, cheers, roars, whistles, encores. (Jacobson, 1983/1993a, p. 43)

Suffering from his "isolated individuality", in fact, he wants to realize that "mystical connection between himself and the rest of the populous universe" (Jacobson, 1983/1993a, p. 61). As someone who had always been ashamed of himself, he wants to believe that "his present existence had nothing to do with him; it had simply attached itself to him accidentally" (p. 107). His lack of self-confidence and hope is apparent throughout the novel with examples like these. The bottom line is, Sefton Goldberg, according to Sartre's comments, does not exist. He just lives as an insignificant person among the masses. When he changes the institution that he works for, at the end of the novel, it is only a change of scene rather than a change of viewpoint or attitude.

This study claimed that, when evaluated from an existentialist point of view, Goldberg's Jewish identity was only a small factor in his failure and alienation. The existentialist philosophy believes that there is no pre-arranged, fixed human nature. Sartre states that, "not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also only what he wills himself to be after this thrust toward existence. Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" (1965, p. 36). According to Sartre this is the essence of existentialism (p. 36). Therefore, for Sartre, one has the ability of surpassing his/her condition and change it with his/her actions. So, Sartre emphasizes that it is futile for one to complain about himself/herself because what we feel, what we experience or become is our own choice. This idea, certainly forces the individual to take all the responsibility of life. Thus, it is the concerned person who should be in full control of

everything that happens to him/her. In this respect, although there may be certain difficulties of being a Jewish academic and a citizen, the protagonist of the novel, Sefton Goldberg uses his Jewishness as an excuse for escaping from his responsibilities both in his professional and personal life.

In conclusion, despite its humorous tone, *Coming From Behind* reveals a Jewish academic's personal troubles and indetermination in life. Goldberg scarcely performs his responsibilities as a lecturer and an intellectual. His loss of thrill is not just confined to his profession; it has spread to his whole life. Leaving everything in luck's hands, Goldberg accepts what fortune has to offer. His background or being Jewish are only his escapist explanations for his failure. Therefore, behind the satire and the narrative that is full of dark humor, the novel portrays a torn and desperate life of a once gifted intellectual who does not take enough responsibility and action for improvement and success.

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