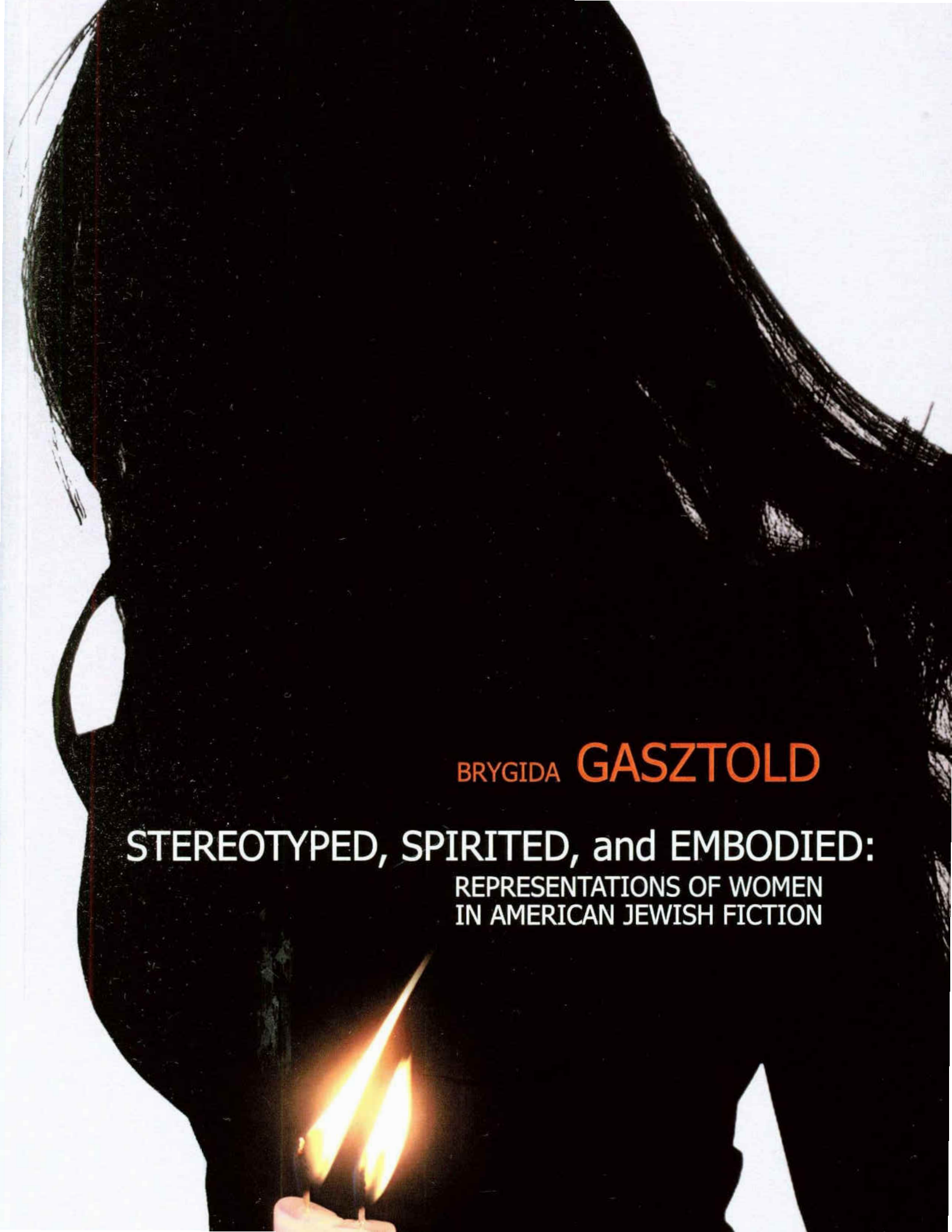

BRYGIDA GASZTOLD

STEREOTYPED, SPIRITED, and EMBODIED:

REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN AMERICAN JEWISH FICTION

POLITECHNIKA KOSZALIŃSKA

Brygida Gasztold

Stereotyped, Spirited, and Embodied: Representations of Women in American Jewish Fiction

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Contents

Introduction

Contemporary American Jewish writing is characterized by a diversity of voice, which has long departed from the topics of assimilation discussed in the works of fiction written, among others, by Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, and Bernard Malamud. The division between "us" (the Jews who wanted to be accepted) and "them" (the Christians who "own" America) is no longer a problem of duality, as the boundaries between "us" and is "them" have shifted. Literature has monitored the Jewish road into American culture, noting changes and losses on both sides of the dividing line between American and Jew. The broadly understood idea of cultural pluralism has not only altered the specificity of American culture but has also transformed discourse within contemporary American Jewish writing. Answering the changing cultural and social milieu, modern literature responds by offering an array of narrative explorations, such as the "negotiations of orthodoxy, [...] representations of a post-Holocaust world, [...] reassertion of folkloric tradition, [...] engagements with postmodernism, [...] reevaluation of Jewishness, and [...] alternative delineations of ethnic identity" (Royal 3). What contemporary American Jewish literature seems to be dealing with is the post-ethnic construct of identity that eschews binary configurations, leaning towards ethnic and racial hybridity. Literature offers one of many discourses, and it not only reflects, but also comments on contemporary cultural life in the United States. Fictional narratives are valuable, because they provide direct insight into the character of cultural changes, as they happen around us. In the case of the following discussion, literary fiction provides a mirror to Jewish mores and attitudes, showing how they have communicated the understanding of what is now called American Jewish literature.

A discussion of American Jewish authors must specify its criteria of inclusion, a task that proves quite demanding after further consideration. Steven J. Whitfield describes the halakhic definition of a Jew as "anyone whose mother is Jewish, even if Judaism is not practiced, so long as he or she has not been converted to another faith" (6). The necessity to embrace the immigrant diversity of contemporary Israel helped to broaden the definition of a Jew, which, according to Ben Siegel, extends to "anyone who identifies himself or herself as such, anyone, in short, who affirms a Jewish heritage" (18). According to rabbinic law, a Jew is someone either born to a Jewish mother or a convert to Judaism. Reform Judaism further extended the definition by adding

the children of Jewish fathers, who have been raised Jewish. Inclusive and exclusive at the same time, the definition of a Jew has been changing so that it may accommodate the varying political and cultural circumstances. Those alterations are not only ethnic-specific, as they also reflect different stages in the American Jewish relationship.

A Jewish sociologist Sylvia Barack Fishman comments on the state of contemporary American Jewish society:

> Jewish Americans provide particularly interesting examples of the ways in which ethnic and religious minority groups negotiate conflicting behavioral prescriptions and belief systems from both sides of a hyphenated identity, coping with simultaneous pulls toward assimilating and maintaining a distinctive heritage. Jews have often been perceived by themselves and others as a singularly divided and fractious people. Despite the frequently articulated sentiment that all Jews comprise one people, American Jews at the end of the twentieth century have established five commonly recognized official branches of Judaism [...] and also include in their midst a substantial number who see themselves as secular, cultural, or unaffiliated Jews, altogether outside of the rubric of organized religion. Moreover, not only are American Jews divided externally into different religious groupings, many of them feel that they are divided personally and internally as well [...] as Philip Roth puts it 'Inside every Jew there is a mob of Jews.' (*Jewish Life* 4)

David Brauner also points at the idea of diversity that infuses contemporary definitions of Jewishness:

> For some, then, Jewishness is an innate, inalienable property, for others a learned tradition; for some, a belief system, for others a cultural construct; for some a race, for others a religion; for some a nationality, for others a sensibility; for some a historical legacy, for others a metaphysical state. (3)

Both scholars avoid essentialist claims that locate Jewishness in a specific and confined milieu positioned within American racial, ethnic and cultural discourse. On the contrary, they stress the constructed and porous nature of modern Jewishness, signaling America as a ground, especially fertile for such hybridization.

The difficulties to define an American Jewish identity in unambiguous terms illuminate the complex nature of that process; thereby ethnic and religious minority groups try to cope with conflicting appeals between assimilation and the preservation of their distinctive ethnicity. The pull between essentialist and universalist tendencies continues to inform the discussions about the nature of the contemporary idea of Jewishness. For example, Harold Bloom criticized the "tendency to plead that the Jewish condition is a special case amidst the rest of humanity [...] when in fact it provides a paradigm for humanity" (32). George

Steiner, on the contrary, emphasizes the uniqueness of the Jewish experience: "the Jewish condition differs. Irreducibly, maddeningly, it embodies what modern physics calls a 'singularity,' a construct or happening outside the norms, extraterritorial to probability and the findings of common reason" (48). While Bloom promotes the idea of Jewishness as a paradigm for humanity, Steiner posits a sense of uniqueness of the Jewish experience against other ethnic groups. Gerard Shapiro, in turn, expresses a widespread view that "Jews aren't even thought of as an 'ethnic' group in our society anymore–they've moved so far into the power structure of contemporary mainstream America that in many ways they've become an indistinguishable part of it" (xiv). Nessa Rapoport seems to support his claim: "[h]aving won our place in American culture, we are beginning to be confident enough to reclaim Jewish culture" (xxx). Historically, in order to gain acceptance into the American mainstream, Jewish writers became less Jewish and more American. While confronting the mainstream American ethos, members of the Jewish ethnic minority group faced expectations to marry the idea of Americanness with Judaism. Whether one sees the post-war sense of "Jewishness" as diluted into "universality" or as exhibiting the features of a modern and postmodern consciousness remains a matter of debate. Nowadays, American Jewish fiction can freely draw from both traditions, without being accused of either promoting one type of ethnic particularism or sacrificing the value of one's ethnic heritage for the sake of a multi-ethnic sense of balance. All those diverse approaches to the modern idea of an American Jewish identity find their realizations in contemporary fiction, however inconclusive their narrative explorations might finally turn out to be.

When one looks at the history of American feminism, one is bound to notice a large number of names of Jewish scholars, such as: Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, Alix Kates Shulman, Shulamith Firestone, Susan Brownmiller, Andrea Dworkin, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Erica Jong, Naomi Wolf, and Susannah Heschel, to name just a few. American Jewish activists and scholars have left an indelible mark on the shape of modern feminism while pursuing diverse paths. Some of them allied themselves with secularism, others benefited from the fruits of Jewish enlightenment, and still others were involved in socialist, labor, and civil rights movements as a means to improve women's social position. In Karen Brodkin's words, "the feminist movement opened up a conceptual and discursive space for Jewish women to critique the male dominance of post-World War II Jewishness, and from there, to rethink Jewish identity more generally" (8). The demand for changes in the women's status in Judaism was an important part of their feminist agenda. Feminist attention to gender resulted in female voices redefining and restructuring the components of social and patriarchal structures. In general, the ethnic origin of the authors and activists has not obstructed the importance of gender, even though at times it

added a thought-provoking twist to their discussions. Obviously, not all the problems that feminists have faced are representative of the experience of American Jewish women, but their large representation in the feminist movement cannot be overlooked. Neither does it mean that American Jewish feminist activists have more to say about the problems of women or know better, but a look at literature written by American Jewish authors is like a journey with a well-informed guide. The diverse facets of their ideological experience, often more enriched than exacerbated by the obligations of ethnicity, are expressed, if not explicitly, through their work, making it an enriching and inspiring reading across ethnic, cultural, and religious divides.

Talking about a contemporary sense of American Jewish womanhood through a literary lens is especially valuable as the narratives tend to reflect not only the current trends, but they also illuminate vulnerable places across the multicultural quilt, where the potential conflicts might take place. Literature reflects social changes in a way that underlines an individual's involvement, no matter how representative this account might be for the whole sub-group or the entire generation. Letty Cottin Pogrebin, in her book *Deborah, Golda, and Me: Being Female and Jewish in America* (1991), points at one such instance, which she calls "double marginality." Pogrebin's study explores the relationship between Judaism and feminism, which is characterized by the idea of ambivalence. While defining a Jewish identity through the lenses of gender, she observes that "[w]ith other *women* she remains The Jew, and with male Jews she remains The Woman" (XVI). Allegra Goodman has her protagonist comment on the exclusion of Jewish women from worship: "I was a woman [...] so I might taint the atmosphere with ignorance and lust" (*Paradise* 183). Just like Jewish women used to be marginalized in mainstream American culture, they also suffered additional subordination in Orthodox Judaism. Paula Hyman offers an explanation for women's negative stereotyping:

> Faced with the need to establish their own identities in societies in which they were both fully acculturated and yet perceived as partially Other because they were Jews, Jewish men were eager to distinguish themselves from the women of their community, whom they saw as the guardians of Jewishness. The negative representations of women that they produced reflected their own ambivalence about assimilation and its limits. (*Gender and Assimilation* 169)

In consequence, a large group of Jewish women distanced themselves from Judaism and engaged in secular world, still others managed to find alternative ways to express their spirituality.

I begin my discussion with an analysis of gendered and stereotyped representations of women in selected texts that reflect different aspects of Jewish femaleness. To understand the changes in the role of Jewish women as

reflected in literature, it is helpful to survey the key representations of female stereotypes in the annals of American Jewish literature. The first two, i.e. the Exotic Jewess and the Effeminate Jew, do not derive directly from the body of American Jewish literary tradition, but a European one, however, their representations influence later realizations of this category of identity. Among the stereotypes which I have chosen to discuss are the ghetto mother, the ghetto girl, the Jewish mother, and the Jewish American Princess.[1] Their literary examinations based on such works as Abraham Cahan's *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (1896), Hutchins Hapgood's *The Spirit of the Ghetto. Studies of the Jewish Quarter in New York* (1902), Anzia Yezierska's "Fat of the Land" (1920), *Salome of the Tenements* (1923) and *Bread Givers* (1925), Michael Gold's *Jews Without Money* (1930), Herman Wouk's *Marjorie Morningstar* (1955), Philip Roth's *Goodbye Columbus* (1959) and *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969) aim at illuminating complexities inherent in the construction of Jewish womanhood, but also try to explain why Jewish men, who used to be characterized as either angst-ridden, highly intellectual, unsporty types, or as victims of antisemitism, have largely, one might remember the figure of schlemiel, managed to escape gender stereotyping. As it is difficult to coin a single and unifying definition of ethnic and gender stereotype, my discussion is hoped to reflect the main trends in its theorization, which depict the complex nature of the process of stereotyping. Stereotypes are often seen as simplified generalizations that assume an ethnocentric stance, at the same time, they are associated with, what Joshua Fishman calls, the "kernel of truth" (296), the implication being that stereotypes might have a basis in the lived experience. My discussion shows stereotypes that are mostly reflective of the group's social, political, and economic situation. A sociological stance shifts the focus from an individual account to a shared phenomenon that is taken as, more or less, representative of the whole group. The experiences of Jewish assimilation and acculturation to American mores and attitudes links the idea of stereotyping with the concept of social consensus. The costs of assimilative success were often borne by the least privileged members of the group. Hence, my discussion depicts the dynamics in the formation and execution of gender stereotypes that reflect the shifts in the social and power relationships among its members, and in connection to the outer world.

[1] Letty Pogrebin enumerates another category, which she calls the JMB (Jewish Man's Burden), making a reference to the poem, "A White Man's Burden" (1899), by Rudyard Kipling." Both titles do not only justify a white man's dominant role over other ethnic groups, but also pronounce women their titular "burdens." Put another way, Pogrebin draws attention to racism and patriarchy as oppressive to (wo)men.

Even though stereotyping provides facile abbreviations and, as constructs of fiction, stereotyped characters are not to be taken literally, one cannot fail to notice their cultural viability. To some extent those literary images merge into ethnic representations, and albeit often fairly inaccurate, they are still capable of shaping the reader's imagination. For example, when readers expect a typical Jewish mother to be portrayed as nagging, overbearing, and mostly interested in feeding her children, then one may say that her stereotyped characterization has been successfully learned and internalized. The readers' expectations only feed its constructed image and perpetuate its validity. Stereotyping exerts an influence not only on the dominant in-group, but also on the subordinate out-group, depicting the Other in derogatory terms and revealing the preferred relations of power. What the dominant group finds unacceptable within their own ranks often becomes the focus of in-group stereotyping, again directed at its most vulnerable members, such as women, children, the disabled, the aged, poor, obese, or mentally challenged. When the members of one group compete among themselves for the same resources, then the process of stereotyping helps to rationalize the feeling of anger against their own kind. Ideological stereotyping reproduces the structure of social hegemony by situating the Other within the dominant discourse. Despite its reductive and simplified nature, stereotyping is a useful category, which helps to make a connection between real-life social relationships and fictional representations. The ability to spot and deconstruct a textual stereotype is an important tool in the formation of self-, as well as group-image, especially that the self is partially defined through the Other. Through the medium of comparative identity, the study of stereotypes may help explain various forms of collective action.

The second chapter is devoted to the idea of Judaism as a significant element in the formation of an American Jewish identity. The selection of topics signals important problem areas, which are related to the issue of female religiosity in the context of American Jewish literature. The character's gender is another important prism through which I am going to observe how the change in Jewish behaviors and values is communicated in their relationship to spirituality. The choice of texts illustrates how the American Jewish approach to Judaism has changed over a course of time, illuminating its fluid nature. A degree of the character's religious identification is regarded to be reflective of both her personal world-view and of a socio-historical position of Jews in American society. The way Judaism is embraced or discarded reveals the degree of confidence, which the American Jews feel about their own position within the structure of American society. One of the mechanisms to battle insecurity is social mimicry, which requires the rejection of the visible attributes of one's ethnicity. The concept of religious observance, which involves both private and

public performance, allows to engage a range of modifiable measures to alleviate the stigma of Otherness.

The analyses included in this chapter focus on those cross-lines where Judaism functions as litmus paper in determining the degree of Jewish identity, regardless of the fact whether Judaic legacy is inherited, re/discovered, or adopted. The discussion of religiosity and cultural memory in more secularized, postmodern America involves literary explorations of Judaism, which may vary from its total rejection to unconditional embrace. Nora Rubel explains the scope of the process:

> Some Jews welcomed the freedom from religious obligations, choosing to secularize completely. Others chose to adapt their religious practices to their host culture rather than abandon them completely. And some chose to fiercely resist the seductions of modernity as best they could, resisting secularism and retaining a semblance of Jewish continuity. (3)

My selection of contemporary narratives of American Jewish imagination addresses the concept of Judaism: in the context of cultural conformity (Anne Roiphe's *1185 Park Avenue: A Memoir* (1999)); intermarriage (Rebecca Goldstein's "Rabbinical Eyes" (1993)); the return to Orthodoxy (Anne Roiphe's *Lovingkindness* (1987)); the porous border between the secular world and Orthodoxy (Tova Mirvis' *The Outside World* (2004)); and the confrontation of Judaism with the flexibility of postmodern piety (Allegra Goodman's *Paradise Park* (2001)). The sequence in which the works are presented shows a historically grounded shift in the social position of American Jews, ranging from their desire to assimilate and conform to the normative culture, to the freedom of choice, whether they want to pursue Judaism or discard it altogether.

Assimilationist narratives reflect Jewish cultural insecurity and illustrate their anxiety about the nature of power and authority, the anxiety which travels along gender lines. Judaism is then depicted as a burden to personal development, as invisible shackles from which a character attempts to liberate his or her soul. If not the total rejection, then conformity and inter-marriage become the common ways for the characters to take issue with their past. The narrative discussions reveal conflicts, which have become tantamount to modern literary attempts at harmonizing Jewishness and feminism. For example, Anne Roiphe's fictional memoir presents the selfish parents who are spoilt by excess of inherited wealth, and whose voracious consumption nullifies the validity of their ethnic heritage, at the same time perpetuating the blind pursuit of American acceptance. Their children, who are not provided with the positive role models other than materialism, look for answers shifting between Orthodoxy (brother) and secularism (sister). The limitations of religion, however, divide them, allowing only the brother to find solace in the teachings

of Judaism, whereas his sister is barred from its realm. One can see how the ambivalent treatment of women in Judaism makes the search for identity harder for female protagonists. The tension between "longing for the comfort of ritual and religious custom, for the serenity of faith, but also intellectual acceptance and self-fulfillment" (Levinson 68) are recurrent motifs in contemporary American Jewish oeuvre. The novels, which I am going to discuss, explore the Jewish woman's yearning for the reassuring confidence of religious rituals, even though she knows that its comfort comes at a price, which in her case is the curtailing of her personal freedom. My choice of narrative texts posits a question whether she has to make a choice involving any sort of religious commitment at all. Why can't she look for an alternative route to happiness and fulfillment, which avoids spirituality altogether, the narratives speculate. In other words, can a Jewish woman consciously eschew the idea of Jewishness, and if she does so, why does it ricochet her identity, one way or another? These questions inform the study of Roiphe's, Goldstein's, Mirvis', and Goodman's protagonists. Upon further reflection, the fact that the fictional texts at hand largely eschew conclusive answers to the above questions promotes the process of self-discovery over the questionable triumph of decisive statements.

The severing of ethnic and spiritual ties to the past might take different forms, but the protagonists whose characterization I will explore demonstrate that the gap, which is produced in its wake, results in their suffering from estrangement and alienation. One way to escape the past is to marry out of the faith, to start with a clean slate and shape not only one's own, but also the future generation's destiny. These characters that decide to intermarry experience Jewishness as a mark of difference, that no degree of assimilation is able to remove. Emily Brimberg, from Anne Roiphe's novel *Long Division* (1972), offers a solution for the anguished:

> Marry out–each little Jewish girl had an obligation to marry out. And only then the children might be safe and the terrible tale of Jewish history would be done. No large values, tradition, scholarship, holiness, would cover for me the basic craziness, stubbornness of a survival that imposed an unchosen suffering on the great-grandchildren to come. (57-58)

How unexpected circumstances might trigger the seemingly obliterated past is shown in Rebecca Goldstein's story "Rabbinical Eyes." Annie Johnson, the protagonist of *Lovingkindness* chooses a non-Jewish husband to rid herself of the disturbing memories of her family home, which had little to offer in terms of moral principles. However, the protagonists' escapism is only partially successful, as the next generation–the daughter, who was supposed to collect the fruit of her unbiased and unburdened upbringing–drifts back to her ethnic roots. The role of religion is an important element of an inter-generational

dispute that may reaffirm or unravel the character's connection to Judaism. The older generation's adherence to Judaism, or their lack thereof, might be followed by their children's opposite reaction. Hence, the parents' strict obedience to Judaism may trigger their children's rebellion against the hegemony of the religious rule. Or, on the contrary, the parents' embrace of secularism might push their children in the direction of a more spiritual path of life.

Allegra Goodman's novel *Paradise Park* (2001) serves to illustrate the problem of religious self-definition in the contemporary American context. The author is one of the most highly acclaimed American Jewish writers today; her work has appeared in various magazines, such as *The New Yorker*, *Slate*, *Commentary*, and *Allure*. She has published two short story collections: *Total Immersion* (1989) and *The Family Markowitz* (1996), as well as novels: *Kaaterskill Falls* (1998), *Intuition* (2006), *The Other Side of the Island* (2008), and *The Cookbook Collector* (2010). Victoria Aarons comments on her work:

> Much of her fiction revolves around the preoccupations of middle-class, post-war American Jews and the attendant anxieties about constructing an ethos that balances what for Goodman are the two often-competing identities of 'American' and 'Jewish'. [The problems arising at the junctions between] Orthodoxy and reform, piety and secularism, ancient narratives and modernity, and tradition and change. ("Anxieties" 199-200)

Goodman uses Judaism as a key element in the construction of the protagonist's identity, even though, or, rather because it offers more of a challenge than stability to her portrayal. Her narratives explore how ethnic, religious, historical, and emotional demands of being Jewish are juggled by contemporary female protagonists.

The third chapter of my study is devoted to representations of the female body in the works of American Jewish authors. The sociology of the body has experienced renewed academic recognition as recently as the 1990s, with the publication of the journal *Body and Society* (1995), and its popularity testifies to the growing importance of the concept of the body in contemporary culture. Body image is a subjective concept, and an outside observer might have an entirely different perception than the person who actually experiences his or her body. That is why the cultural milieu in which the person operates is an important societal factor that complements individual perception of the body. Notably, social experience, which is also communicated by works of fiction, is largely responsible for the image one has of his or her body. Our society, and especially its female component, is encouraged to deal with body image concerns, real and imaginary, disregarding the means and costs. Popular culture offers many examples of slender models, various diets, and TV "makeover"

programs, which promote cosmetic surgery as a means to a slim figure, and, consequently, to a happier life, whatever the two might have in common. The internalization of the culturally constructed body ideal, as will be shown in my discussion, may result in a variety of aberrant behaviors, which attempt to harness the body to one's desires.

Feminism has reformulated the significance of the female body in many respects. Laurence Goldstein explains:

> It is because the female body has for so long been identified as an erotic object, canonized in the nudes of high art and the sex symbols of popular culture, that efforts to locate and describe alternative images became a paramount goal of the feminist movement and of the culture at large. (vii-viii)

The general claim that women are the "guardians of tradition" is rooted in patriarchy and aims directly at the desire to control female sexuality and fertility. As traditions are often ahistoricised, i.e. presented as timeless and totalizing, they become dominant ideologies. Cultural traditions are the products of specific historical and political frameworks, which promote the socially desired model. They are also gendered, which means that their diverse elements are enforced differently for males and females. Ketu Katrak emphasizes the connection between culture and the female body, arguing that "[a] struggle over what is tradition is a battle over the female body–how to control it and keep it familiar within recognizable and legitimized patriarchal codes" (159).

The history of American Jews is closely connected with the changing perceptions of the Jewish, and especially female, body. Drawing from novels such as Abraham Cahan's, *Yekl and the Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories of Yiddish New York* (1896), Anzia Yezierska's, *Salome of the Tenements* (1923) and *Bread Givers* (1925), Michael Gold's, *Jews Without Money* (1930), Alix Kates Shulman's, *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen* (1972), Gail Parent's, *Sheila Levine is Dead and Living in New York* (1972), and Louise Blecher Rose's, *The Launching Of Barbara Fabrikant* (1974), my discussion seeks to illustrate how American Jewish women negotiated their looks as a means for mainstream acceptance. Whether by means of sartorial transformations or actual alteration of undesirable bodily features, such as the aquiline nose, frizzy hair, or excessive weight, Jewish women mediated their position not only vis-à-vis the Anglo-American norm, but also against the prejudices expressed by the members of their own group. Once the Jewish female body had been demystified and domesticated, it neutralized the danger posed by an alien Other. This part of my discussion of the narrative accounts explores how bodily rituals focalize and reveal the ways in which the body becomes a tool to communicate about cultural norms and taboos.

Orthodoxy, which insists on the authoritarian control of the woman's body, provides an especially fruitful background for Jewish heroines to explore the boundaries between the private and public. As the body is located at the intersection of both spheres, its practices and rituals communicate those problems that accrue around its vulnerable position. Tova Mirvis' novel, *The Outside World* (2004), and Pearl Abraham's, *Giving Up America* (1998) and *The Romance Reader* (1985), illustrate a complex relationship between the female body and traditional Orthodoxy. My discussion investigates the ways in which the limitations imposed on the body are related to the idea of power, be it religious, social, economic, or gender-related. Central to my analysis is the question of how both authors fashion narrative accounts, which employ the protagonists' bodies to react to and resist expressions of power.

The last part of my book, which involves the mind-body problem, is not specifically ethnic or religious, even though it also grapples with the idea of Judaism. The critical exploration of such novels as Rebecca Goldstein's *The Mind-Body Problem: A Novel* (1983) and *The Late-Summer Passion of a Woman of Mind* (1989), and Cynthia Ozick's *The Cannibal Galaxy* (1983), raises questions about the nature of American Jewish female identities through the prism of the mind-body relationship. Negating the otherness of Jews is the fact that the problems presented in these fictional works might apply equally to both American and Jewish protagonists. Placed in the feminist context, the mind-body phenomenon informs contemporary discourse, highlighting its unsettling effects for the protagonists. The examination of bodily practices, as expressed through works of fiction, reveals the changing meaning of the female body in different historical and social contexts. The complexity of the mind-body transitions, as well as the lack of clear resolutions, demonstrates the unstable nature of identity. In my discussion, I show how culturally gendered distinctions tend to reduce the woman's existence to the corporeal realm and how the female body, susceptible to desires, habits and disciplines, is reflective of power dynamics that render knowledge and agency possible.

In this study, I strive to better understand those works of fiction that purport to explore complex fates of their characters, identifying what it means to be a postmodern and post-secular American Jewish heroine. Such examination could not be complete without references to earlier characterizations, which provide both context and contrast to their later realizations. My discussion is grounded in a feminist approach to literature, which challenges male-centered master narratives of American Jewish identity. The critical analysis of gender roles is an important factor in the construction of contemporary American Jewish ethnicity, and female experience, I argue, complements and enriches the research, which has addressed the issue of

American Jewish identity largely from a male perspective. For the purposes of the present study, my analysis investigates how different realizations of femaleness inform the formation of the protagonists' identity, how those narratives help to dismantle the culturally-encoded notions of womanhood, and, finally, how the female experience bears influence on the protagonists' cultural reception. By looking at female protagonists who are culturally stereotyped, those who seek spiritual fulfillment, and those who struggle with their bodily confines, my study provides a sense of how female characters are constructed in the literary imagination of authors of American Jewish origin.

Chapter I Stereotyped Representations of American Jewish Female Characters[1]

1.1 Gender Stereotypes and Gender Roles

My discussion of female representations in American Jewish literature starts with the clarification of the concept of the gender stereotype. The Greek origin of the word "stereotype"–"solid" and "type"–signals a mechanical repetition, which is characteristic of perceptions that are "automatic, preordained 'by our culture'" (Freadman 108). Zaleznik and Moment provide the following definition of the concept of stereotype:

> stereotyping consists of classifying all new experiences, and especially persons, using symbols learned in the past. These symbols consist of significant cues for classification. Important in this list of cues are race, ethnic background, socioeconomic status and others. (35)

Obviously these cues do not exhaust the gamut of possible identities and situations, as individuals are more complex than a set image would suggest; hence, the stereotype is always reductive in nature. Yet, in spite of its potentially simplistic effect, this kind of perceptual cataloging helps to draw meaning from the confusion of everyday life, making our lives more comprehensible by means of tags and labels. In Freadman's words, "[t]he positive function of stereotypes resides in the fact that they help us to negotiate the otherwise unmanageable and disorientating plurality of experience" (108).

Stereotypes require a social context for the elements of their characteristics to come into play, allowing one group of people to be categorized against another. Mapping stereotypes may help to address such issues as ethnocentrism, discrimination, prejudice, and alienation. Stereotypes are the lens through which members of the dominant group can identify their relationship to race, ethnicity, religion, social standing, gender, and age. Although stereotypes are often biased and ignore diversity within a group, they still reveal a lot of information about the society in question:

> Stereotyping is complicit in the dynamics of social power; that it is caricaturing of certain social groups, especially of those in subordinate social positions, serves to reinforce both the subordinate positions themselves and the social mythologies that rationalize such acts of social subordination. (Freadman 109)

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[1] The section dealing with the stereotype of the Jewish mother appeared in an earlier version in *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia* 11 (2013) : 161-173.

Moreover, they reflect the system of values and beliefs the society holds as normative and which pertain to those in power.

Gender is a social label whose power comes from the universality of its categorization, the division between men and women being the fundamental one. The term "gender" refers to a simplified and standardized conception that communicates assumptions about male and female roles (both social and domestic), images, and individual or group attributes. Feminists adopted the term "gender stereotype" in the 1970's in order to distinguish between biological and cultural aspects of "maleness" and "femaleness." In 1979, R. K. Unger introduced a definition of gender to the psychological sciences as "those characteristics and traits socio-culturally considered appropriate to males and females" (1085). Gender stereotypes refer to a set of beliefs, which affect conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity, whereas gender roles are recognized by certain behaviors, which, in turn, furnish the material for stereotypes.

Theorists approach gender roles from various perspectives and with different tools. Some of them locate the concept of gender either in biological differences between the sexes, or within the social construct, and others draw its characteristics from both areas of knowledge. Psychological theories imply the existence of psychological mechanisms, which are responsible for specific behaviors. The evolution-based theory (Buss 1995) claims that gender roles may be attributed to different evolutionary paths of men and women, which aimed at finding the best reproductive methods for each sex. Evolutionary psychologists reject such dichotomies as "nature versus nurture," "genetic versus environmental," "cultural versus biological," and "innate versus learned," claiming that

> [a]ll humans have a nature [...]. That nature requires particular forms of environmental input for its development. Once developed, all mechanisms require particular forms of input to be activated and to function properly. The mechanisms of learning that make humans responsive to immediate and developmental contingencies owe their existence to evolution by natural selection. (Buss 5)

The social role theory furthered, for example, by Alice H. Eagly in *Sex Differences in Social Behavior: A Social Role Interpretation* (1987) assumes that the sexual division of labor and societal expectations based on stereotypes constructs differing gender roles. Eagly argues that "the gender roles and stereotypes held in a society at one point in time are rooted, not primarily in the society's cultural traditions, but more importantly in the society's contemporaneous division of labor between the sexes" (21). Thus, social roles are seen as determinants of differences between sexes: "the specific roles

occupied by men tend to be higher in hierarchies of status and authority than the roles occupied by women. The domestic role itself has lower status than the role of breadwinner" (Eagly 23). Eagly also distinguishes between dimensions of gender-stereotyped features: the communal–pertaining to women, and the agentic–pertaining to men.

Social constructionists proceed on the assumption that behavioral differences result from cultural expectations. Cultural endorsement of gender stereotypes creates certain expectations of male and female behavior. "These stereotypes in fact constitute gender roles–prescriptions for appropriate male and female qualities," claims Eagly (21). The prescribed sex roles serve as a mode of social control over socially constructed differences between the sexes. According to Dina L. Anselmi and Anne L. Law (1998) stereotypes are "overgeneralized beliefs about people based on their membership in one of many social categories" (195). Kay Deaux and Laurie L. Lewis (1983) provide four categories that enable sex differentiation and show where gender stereotypes vary: physical characteristics, role behaviors, traits, and occupations. Feminists focus on gender hierarchies as responsible for the kind of world order which privileges "male/ masculine [as] standard, universal, [as] the measure by which everything *other* is judged" (Jones 410, italics in the original). Therefore, "[s]evering the connection between gender and social function, the opening up of societal roles to all, irrespective of gender" (Hyman, "Jewish Feminism" 223) became one of the main goals of the feminist agenda.

Gender permeates human life, and since gender stereotypes cannot be treated in isolation, they need to be ensconced in a specific cultural milieu. Gender stereotypes are not innate but culturally conditioned; they are learned, internalized, and perpetuated by normative societal structures. Being the products of social activity, they are subject to change alongside the changes in the social structure. Since the texts I am going to discuss belong to an American literary tradition, my discussion is restricted to the context of Western culture. Two theories seem to be especially useful in my discussion: the Doctrine of Two Spheres (Lewin, 1984, in R. Brannon 154), which claims that men and women inhabit two, almost mutually exclusive, areas of activity: domestic and social, and the Cult of True Womanhood, which appeared between 1820 and 1860, delineating female spheres:

> The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors, and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues–piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Put them all together and that spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife–woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement, or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power. (Welter 152)

Both doctrines rely on stereotypical representations of women, which were dominant in earlier American Jewish literature.

The application of these two theories results in the formation of a pattern of distinctly male and female behavior. The gender-inflected roles prevalent in Western society prescribe that men should be domineering, aggressive, active, creative, self-confident, and authoritarian. Feminine characteristics, on the contrary, signal a passive, reproductive, dependent, submissive, nurturing, gentle, and emotional subordinate. A man is a provider, whereas, a female is a caregiver. Masculinity is regarded as rational and cultured; femininity as sensitive, corporeal, and natural. Intellectual creativity is associated with maleness and "contrasted with woman's merely physical capacity for childbirth" (Cheyette, Marcus 27). Although the binary characteristics are opposite, they also complement each other by virtue of their mutual exclusivity; "stereotypes simplify and concretize difference," claims Prell (*Rage* 249). What they demonstrate is an idealization of femininity and its subordination to the construction of masculinity. Even though gender stereotypes represent differences in male and female social behavior, they also maintain and justify the existing social order. For example, the extent to which female behavior is socially approved and therefore deemed appropriate depends on how much it conforms to gender-role expectations. In other words, "[g]ender stereotypes are symbolic representations of the sexes, underpinning formal relations of authority or power" (Prell, *Rage* 251). A gender-sensitive approach to analyzing literary texts enables the examination of how representations of female characters reflect gender asymmetry and power hierarchies.

1.2 The Exotic Jewess and the Effeminate Jew

Employing different sexual traits, two of the most common 19th-to-20th century representations of Jews are: "the exotic Jewess" and "the effeminate Jew." During the *fin de siècle*, Harrowitz claims, "[t]he contrasting portraits of 'ugly' Jew and 'beautiful' Jewess were standard images in the racial folklore" (141). The concept of an "exotic Jewess" emerged in the 19th century in "art, literature, and theatrical performance as an Orientalized figure who combined stereotypes about Jewish difference and degeneracy with Victorian fears about female sexuality" (Rossen 339). Characterized by dark hair, eyes, and complexion, her beauty rests entirely on her physiognomy, which has also come to be recognized as a distinguished trait of her Jewishness. "The image of a "dark" woman, while echoing the Western trope of the "blackness" of the Jews, is at the same time a sign of the *femme fatale*" (Gilman 108; italics in the original). According to Sander L. Gilman, the two images of Jewish femaleness, which result from this representation, are located in different contexts: the *belle*

juive is constructed in terms of an antisemitic rhetoric, whereas the *femme fatale* functions in the misogynist one.

The exotic image of *la belle juive*, "the sensuous, oriental, and beautiful Jewess, is linked to the women of the Old Testament, the Bathshebas, Salomes, and Susannas who have fed the erotic fantasies of generations of male artists and writers" (Garb 26-27). For example, Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres used this imagery to construct an artistic opposition to "the modest abstinence of chaste Christian women" (Garb 27). In an article "Two Large Eyebrows A L'Orientale" Ingres's Portrait of the Baronne de Rothschild" (1992), Carol Ockman observes that understanding the stereotypes around Jewish women helps to explain the contradictory discourses of sexuality and respectability in Ingres's portrait. The conflation of the Baroness's Jewishness, Ockman claims, "with all that it implied in contemporary consciousness, enabled Ingres to push sensuality further than he could in any other society portrait" (15). In the characteristics of *la belle juive*, there is an inherent warning, which posits that such seemingly positive traits as tenderness and beauty, may easily "spill over into excess" (Garb 27). Hence, "[i]n the Christian imagination, the sexuality of the Jewess is both dangerous and desirable" (Garb 27). Gilman observes that "[d]ark hair, black eyes are the salient markers of the beautiful Jewess in European, but especially 19th century German-language drama" (108). Best personified by a dancer Ida Rubenstein, who "became an icon of decadence and Jewish perversity both onstage and offstage in the early 1900's" (Rossen 339), this disturbing image challenged the existing models of Western womanhood. A young, exotic, Jewish girl appears in a story entitled "Jewess of Cairo" by S.B. Beckett, which was published in the *Ladies Home Companion* (1840-1841). Another young and beautiful Jewess appears in Sylvanus Cobb's, *The Mameluke* (1852), which Harap found "trashily melodramatic" (67). Interestingly, both young Jewish heroines are motherless and in desperate need of male protection.[2] Edgar Rosenberg explains the introduction of the character of a young Jewish girl to be a

> foil to the wicked father. Where the Jew had all along been an object of hate, the Jewess, within the context of the myth, became an object of lust, who could be stolen from under her father's nose all the more readily because her seduction by the Gentile automatically conferred upon her the patent of salvation. (34)

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[2] To read more about early representations of Jewish characters see Louise Harap, *The Image of the Jew in American Literature: From Early Republic to Mass Immigration* (66-68).

Such a pair, a beautiful and good Jewess and a money-grabbing Jew, can be found in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*; Shylock and his daughter Jessica have become the archetype for this dichotomy in modern European literature. George Eliot also introduces a beautiful Jewish heroine, Mirah, and her father, a bad Jew, in the novel *Daniel Deronda* (1876).

At the beginning of the 20th century, Gilman claims, "the discourse about the destructive Jewish female as the epitome of the modern woman becomes a commonplace" (115). In *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1948), Jean-Paul Sartre elaborates on the European cultural conception of Jewish womanhood:

> There is in the words 'a beautiful Jewess' a very special sexual signification [...] this phrase carries an aura of rape and massacre. [...] the Jewess has a well-defined function in even the most serious novels. Frequently violated or beaten, she sometimes succeeds in escaping dishonor by means of death, but that is a form of justice. (48)

In an article " 'La Belle Juive' 'Cunning in the Men and Beauty in the Women'" (1992), Florian Krobb discusses representations of female Jewishness in French, German and English literatures, concluding that "a combination of erotic stimulus and pogrom, employed by the authors either to create a sensual atmosphere, or to warn against cruelty towards innocent victims, or to achieve both, is a twentieth-century interpretation of the figure of the 'beautiful Jewess'" (6). A young Jewish heroine in love with a Christian implied conversion as an alternative to stigmatization until the shift from religious issues to political ones occurred. Then, an instance of inter-marriage became "a means to promote political changes which were to supersede all differences in religion and culture when total emancipation as well as complete assimilation was achieved" (Krobb 7-8). Simultaneously being an object of admiration and a victim of a brutal body violation, the representations of Jewish femaleness illustrate how perverted her image in Western cultural imagination was. Her excessive beauty was signaled as responsible for her fatal destiny; had she been physically unattractive, she might not have been noticed at all, or spared. On the other hand, Garb notices that

> the sexualization of the female Jew involves an idealization that confers upon her an exotic otherness, a sensuality, and beauty, which make her an object of erotic fascination and protect her from some of the more virulent and overt animosity suffered by her male coreligionists. (20)

By absorbing the brunt of criticism, the Jewish woman's degrading reduction to a biological and sexual being may serve as a protective shield against antisemitic attacks. In other words, she is chastised for being a sexual object,

not for being Jewish, however inseparable the two parts of her identity might be.

The figure of an exotic Jewess acquired a social dimension as a menace to American values. Harley Erdman comments on turn-of-the-century American theatre, which "was replete with images of the Jew as 'Oriental exotic.'" "The immigrants," he wrote, "were often constructed as exotic Others, foreigners living in the modern industrial west yet somehow not of it" (25-26). The exotic Jewess is attractive to Western men because of an aura of peril, which surrounds her; her "exotic" sexuality promises a mysterious experience, other than the familiar one, which is sanctioned by the existing social norms. The Jewish woman is perceived uniquely through her corporeality–she is the creature of senses and untamed nature, completely devoid of rationality. Her emotional expressiveness, which is usually contrasted with the Anglo emotional restraint, establishes and maintains her ethnic inferiority. As long as men are fascinated by her magnetism, women see her as a rival who willfully manipulates her sexuality in order to reach her goals. By exerting sexual power over men, the exotic Jewess is a threat to domestic values, as the survival of the institution of family largely depended on its male members. The Western stereotype of the exotic Jewess is indebted to a Romantic interest in the exotic and projects a simplified and one-sided vision. The viability of this stereotype may be later seen in Anzia Yezierska's novel *Salome of the Tenements* (1923), where the association of the protagonist–Sonia Vrunsky with the biblical story of Salome renders a complex image of the immigrant heroine "hungry for cultural sophistication, social advancement, economic power, and sexual freedom" (Coklin 136). According to Coklin, she is viewed both as "a pristine, self-sacrificial, exoticized pre-modern ingénue and a scheming, dishonest and corrupt woman, whose sexuality threatens to destabilize the power structure of gender relations in turn-of-the-century America (137). All these representations, Krobb claims, "have, intentionally or otherwise, served one common purpose: the perpetuation of an image of someone inherently 'different'" (10).

The "effeminate male Jew" was another 19th century representation of the Jewish difference. Described as "scholarly, passive, physically weak–[this representation, Rossen argues,] stood in counterpoint to normative gentile virility and served as a primary trope for anti-Semitic configurations of Jewishness" (339). We can trace how the male representation of a Jew is conflated with the female in an attempt to subvert both. "In the mid-nineteenth century, the femininity of the Jewish woman comes to be ascribed to the male Jew, whose deficient manliness is measured against more than one implied model of masculinity" (Cheyette, Marcus 26). Jews were generally perceived as not as tall as non-Jews, and their physical build was believed to be frailer. It was

generally believed that their narrow chests made them unfit for military service, just as allegedly having "flat feet" made them unfit for long marches. Therefore, unsuitable to be warriors or soldiers, the Jewish men were absent from warfare. Pronounced to be "[l]ess sexually potent than the Aryan man" (Cheyette 24), the Jewish males were deemed unmanly. The myth of Jewish male menstruation and their alleged drinking of Christian blood are among the most strident examples of the antisemitic rhetoric, whose origins go back to the cry of the Jews before Pilate: "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matt. 27.25). The ritual of circumcision ignited Christian fears of castration, just as attempts to establish a link between Jewish effeminacy and homosexuality added up to their perceived womanlike semblance. As the pious shtetl Jews devoted time to religious study, they stayed at home not seeking employment outside the household. Therefore, roles assigned to women in other cultures were bestowed on Jewish males, rendering them emasculated in the eyes of other groups. The image of a powerless Jewish man may also be derived from the experience of pogroms, during which they had to watch passively as their mothers, wives, and daughters were raped and murdered. The fact that Jewish men could not defend their families resulted in the adoption of a defense mechanism, namely, the deliberate dwarfing of their masculinity: a degraded and humiliated Jewish male protected his masculinity using the disguise of irony and humor.

Otto Weininger, a Jew who converted to Catholicism, forwarded an analogy between a woman and a male Jew in *Sex and Character* (1903). "In Weininger's study the male gender represents exclusively positive character traits, agency, control, and potential for genius, whereas the female pole functions as the negative antipode" (Cooke, Silberman 174). The Christian male tries to maintain superiority over a male Jew by constructing degrading, antisemitic images, which illustrate the polarized nature of such representations. These realizations of Jewish manhood vary from that of an evil monster and a hypermasculine male to the effeminate Jew. Since early texts associate Jewishness with masculinity and Christianity with femininity, Biberman argues that "Christianity's cultural need to realign itself with masculinity leads to a reversal in which the Jew-Devil morphs into the Jew-Sissy" (4). A negative image of the Jew is used either as a threat to Christian values and society, or a model against which the proper image of a Christian male is constructed. Cooke and Silberman conclude, "[m]isogynist and anti-Semitic thinking converge as 'the eternal Jew' is conflated with 'the eternal feminine' in the attempt to articulate the male Jew's 'racial difference' from his Aryan counterpart through and as sexual difference" (174).

Letty Pogrebin traces the Jewish "manhood problem" to the biblical representations of a younger and weaker son–Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon,

who is also mother's and God's favorite. The turn-of-the-century image of an anemic and feeble shtetl scholar, who spends all his life in a dimly lit study room accompanied by ancient volumes, perpetuated the image of an effeminate Jew, especially since having a son who was a Talmud scholar was every shtetl mother's dream. The Holocaust produced photographs of emaciated Jewish men behind the concentration camp wires, or those going to meet their death "like lambs to the slaughter." Finally, contemporary "American-Jewish men who are called henpecked, eggheads, nerds, or bleeding-heart liberals" (Pogrebin 280) maintain the image of a weak Jewish male. The early Zionist movement recognized the need to revise this unfavorable image of an effeminate Jew by stressing Jewish masculinity and physicality. A portrayal of a strong and virile Israeli soldier as a victorious fighter in the Six-Day War answered this demand. Pogrebin, however, points out that this image has recently been tarnished, as he "sometimes seems to be a savior gone mad, a military Golem who is helping to destroy the moral system he was created to defend" (280).

1.3 The Ghetto Mother

Jewish immigrants, who in large numbers populated urban ghettos of American cities, created a unique milieu, which produced a powerful stereotype of the ghetto mother. Not so pejorative as that of the ghetto girl, the image of the ghetto mother became an indelible element of the Jewish ghetto. Closely connected to the experience of immigration, the image of the ghetto mother became a link between the Old and the New World, between shtetl Orthodoxy and American modernity. This duality of representation: as both a guardian of traditional Judaism, whose reliability and piousness ensures the prolongation of the Jewish race, and an inassimilable alien, who falls easy prey to nativist campaigns, presents how complicated her role was and how it chimed with American social history of the period.

As the new immigrants settled according to the patterns reflecting Old World geography, and their ghetto enclaves remained ethnically distinct, the idea of cultural cross-fertilization needed some time to take roots. Deborah Dash Moore argues that the immigrants viewed their New World communities as a distinctively Jewish milieu, which was connected through history with the earlier patterns of urban Jewish residence. The uniqueness of the Jewish experience created a link between the shtetl past and the ghetto present, between the immigrant geography and inner identity (*The Construction* 105-117). Similarly, Moses Rischin describes the distinctive patterns of the immigrant ghetto settlement, which suggest "the cultural, if not the physical, geography of the Old World" (77). The Jewish ghetto became a space where conflicting immigrant desires began to emerge: the older generation of immigrant

grandparents and parents wanted to recreate the familiar world of the shtetl, whereas their children were drawn by the lure of Americanization. Depending on the current position and future prospects, the ghetto was seen either as an immigrant safe haven, or as a suffocating and limiting ethnic prison. In Konzett's words,

> [t]he Lower East Side thus functioned not simply as a transnational space, allowing the immigrant to assimilate gradually to America, but as a cultural vortex in which the habits of the Old World could be recast to suit the cultural topography of contemporary America. ("Administered" 599)

The ghetto mother, through nurturing and piousness, was the person who sought to maintain the traditional habits, providing a sense of continuity to the experience of dislocation. By replanting the shtetl ways in the ghetto, the ghetto mother created for her family a recognizable and safe environment, albeit often deprived and impoverished. It was the place from which her children could venture into the labyrinth of American customs and practices, and where they could always come back if the process of assimilation proved too painful. The Lower East Side was a cultural sanctuary, which preserved Yiddish language and culture, as well as a temporary station on the way to Americanization.

A look at the role of Ashkenazi women in Central and Eastern Europe reveals a pattern, which is different from the stereotypical representations of the ghetto mother: "the image of the yidishe mame spending all her time and energy tsittering over her children, cooking, scrubbing her home, and mothering her husband as well as her children, is only part of her historical role" (Heschel 22). In her work, *On Being a Jewish Feminist* (1995), Susannah Heschel discusses the halakhic tradition, which lifted the ban on Jewish women to be alone with any other man than her husband. A legal change enabled Jewish women to become peddlers, run a stand at a local market, barter with peasants for their produce, run shops, and sew clothes for sale. In the Eastern European shtetl culture, Jewish wives could engage in various breadwinning roles and provide for the families, so that their work could enable their Talmud reader husbands not to worry about mundane problems. As her own character was shaped by religion and tradition, and being a woman excluded her from active participation in Jewish observance, it was a great honor for a wife to be of service to her scholarly husband. Moshe Rosman, however, questions the institution of *Eshet Hayil*–"married women who supported their families and enabled their husbands to be full-time Talmud scholars" (411), which was not a norm but exception in Eastern European communities, as Jewish women were generally dependent on their husbands. Once a Jewish woman becomes a widow, her standard of living declines, so she is "forced to take urgent measures to maintain economic viability–selling her home, finding a new husband to

support her, giving up the family business" (Rosman 412). Widows are left with "low-status and low-paying trades and commerce" (Rosman 412), or seek help from charitable organizations. Jewish women often worked alongside their husbands, but merely as "junior partners," and only after the husband's death could they act independently. Rosman concludes, "[b]ut generally in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in [the 17-18th century] *Eshet Hayil* was a marginal phenomenon" (412; italics and capital letters in the original).

In America, however, the gender division of labor was different, so once the family got its footing and was no longer on the brink of survival, Jewish women resigned from paid jobs and stayed at home doing housework and bringing up the children. As married women did not engage in factory work, they still could augment the family finances by taking in boarders, doing piecework at home for subcontractors, or helping husbands in business. American society did not encourage married women to seek employment outside the family, so the sole burden to support the family was shifted to husbands, sons, and unmarried daughters. Hence, emigration to America, in fact, limited women's role in society. Jewish success at Americanization is also reflected by how diligently they emulated the cultural norms and the lifestyle of the American middle classes to which they aspired.

Chapter Three of Hutchins Hapgood's *The Spirit of the Ghetto: Studies of the Jewish Quarter in New York* (1902), entitled "The Old and New Woman," offers an outsider's look at Jewish ghetto women. The observer, however, focuses mainly on the undesirable differences between Jewish and gentile women. "The [Jewish] women present a marked contrast to their American sisters" (71)[3], observes Hapgood and goes on to enumerate the particulars. Physical appearance comes as the first item on his list, as Jewish women were generally recognizable by being "poor in physical estate" (71); they "are undernourished and lack the physical well-being and consequent temperamental buoyancy which are comforting qualities of the well-bred American woman" (71). A meager physical condition is attributed both to their lower social status and, consequently, to lesser means at their disposal, as well as to racial factors, which deem Jews genetically frail. The Jewish female body is under constant scrutiny while it is measured against American standards. Hapgood observes a heavy physical build as a characteristic feature of Jewish females. Jewish actresses, who should be particularly sensitive to the canons of beauty, he

[3] Hutchins Hapgood. *The Spirit of the Ghetto: Studies of the Jewish Quarter in New York* [1902]. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1967. All references are to this edition and are cited by page within the text.

remarks, must be "of very generous build" (84), which to him becomes synonymous with plainness and crudeness. American tastes are shocked, he claims, when the preference is given to "a very fat, heavy, pompous hero who would provoke only a smile from the trim American girl" (88). He concludes that "the slim form and the indefinite charm to which the Ghetto is being educated" (84) are viable landmarks during the process of assimilation.

Another difference involves the features of character, which define the Jewish woman as "lack[ing] the subtle charm of the American woman, who is full of feminine devices" (71). Jewish women are seen as loud, garish, and crude. A failure to match an Anglo-American paragon of womanhood deems them less feminine in general. Another distinction arises from the way their men treat them, with the gentile men being kind and well-mannered in contacts with the opposite sex, and the Jewish men who "do not treat [their women] with the scrupulous deference given their American sisters" (72). Notably, a failure to live up to the image of an American lady results in the intra-ethnic chasm: Jewish women are criticized for failing to match the American standards of womanhood not only by Americans, but also by their own kin.

To support his claim that Jewish women "lack variety and grace" (72), Hapgood distinguishes between two distinct female types: a young Jewish woman who is eager to assimilate and an older, the Old World Orthodox one, who clings to the traditional lifestyle. A young Jewish woman is presented as the one who rejects the shtetl life and is more than ready to assimilate. She neglects Judaism, does not observe a kosher kitchen, casts away her wig, and follows American fashion in order to emulate American ladies. Her characteristics lead to the construction of the ghetto girl stereotype. Hapgood's depiction of an elder Jewish woman, in turn, channels most stereotypical assumptions about the backwardness of the shtetl life, while juxtaposed with American modernity. She is presented as "ignorant, she has no language but Yiddish, no learning but the Talmudic law, no practical authority but that of her husband and her rabbi" (72). Her appearance is the contradiction of an American canon of beauty: "[s]he is drab and plain in appearance, with a thick waist, a wig and [...] contempt for ornament (72). The whole world of the ghetto mother is delineated by patriarchal and religious markers. Her social position is disadvantaged due to the double authority of her husband and the Talmud; "[s]he can own no property [and] her life is absorbed in observing the religious law and in taking care of her numerous children" (72). The experience of immigration does not seem to affect her much since she endorses the same way of life, which she brought from the Eastern European shtetl.

Immigrant Jews took advantage of American opportunities and eagerly followed the assimilative path. The pursuit of education within the Jewish

immigrant community was unrivaled, and "in the 1920's immigrant Jewish daughters were more likely to attend high school and college than daughters of other ethnic groups" (Hyman, *Gender* 105). In Hapgood's opinion, however, Jewish ghetto women are generally uneducated. The author further measures the degree of a Jewish woman's sophistication either by whether she is married to a professional man, such as a "socialist, doctor, lawyer, or literary man" (83), or by her involvement in socialist propaganda. Jewish women could take part in strike agitation, or distribute socialist pamphlets, until they stay unmarried, as marriage usually meant the end of their public career. Although they do not conform to American ideals of femininity, female socialist activists are praised by Hapgood for exhibiting virtues, which are masculine in nature: simplicity, directness, seriousness, and not taking advantage of their femininity. They would feel offended, Hapgood asserts, by men's politeness and gentlemanly behavior as they live "for the cause" and tend to treat the opposite sex in terms of comradeship, not courtship. This is why they hold jobs, which make them independent and allow them "the means by which they may support themselves" (81). In Hapgood's eyes, all Jewish women, educated and not alike, share a conviction that "woman should stand on the same social basis as man, and should be weighed in the same scales" (85). But this conviction, he argues, is viable only in socialist circles. Hapgood's account is devoid of anti-immigrant fears about the foreign dangers, such as socialism and communism, which Jews have brought to America. He finds the Jewish character emotional, passionate, poetic, and essentially serious, which is revealed by the fact that they read books not only for amusement, but for the higher truth. Moreover, Hapgood's Jews tend to be interested in great principles and exhibit devotion to persons and to "movements." The female, socialist activists that he portrays, however, do not fall in the same category as young American women, which explains why the criteria of beauty do not apply to them, and why they can be praised for exhibiting masculine features. Undoubtedly, Hapgood was enchanted by his vision of the Jewish ghetto as a vibrant place where fresh and original ideas, which could enrich American minds, germinate.

The stereotypical portrayal of the ghetto mother is also to be found in the insider's accounts such as, for example, Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers* (1920), where Mrs. Smolinsky is presented as a typical ghetto mother. Written in crude immigrant idiom, the story describes Jewish immigrants at the time when immigration was seen as one of the biggest threats to American social organization and economy. Yezierska's endorsement of assimilationist ideas is seen in the corresponding representations of her characters: the sympathy and appreciation evoked by Sara's struggle to assimilate is juxtaposed with the pity and contempt induced by her mother's Old World traditional and inassimilable

ways. Mrs. Smolinsky does not exist as a separate character, but is defined in relation to her husband: "at father's touch Mother's sad face turned into smiles. His kind look was like the sun shining on her" (11)[4]. When he recites the Torah, she "licked up Father's every little word, like honey. Her eyes followed his shining eyes as he talked" (12); her gaze embodies "undying worship" (248), revering him as if "he were the king of the world" (12). The unconditional admiration and trust in her husband's decisions, as well as the devotion with which she serves her family, makes her the paragon of female Jewish virtues. Within the limits of her world, which is adumbrated by Judaism, she fulfills her duty and does not question its purpose. Ludwig Lewisohn in *Upstream: An American Chronicle* (1922) similarly describes his aunt as a "Jewess of the Eastern tradition, narrow-minded, given over to the clattering ritual of pots and pans–'meaty' and 'milky'–and very ignorant" (41). Such reductive images, which American Jewish literature perpetuated, sank deep in the minds of the reading audience, not only that of Jewish origin, and grew to become an essential part of the Jewish ghetto culture.

Although Yezierska comes directly from the Jewish ghetto and Hapgood is a guest to the Lower East Side, their accounts share a large dose of criticism aimed at the ghetto mother. Both authors assume a similar authorial position, which adopts the American mainstream perspective: Hapgood because he came to comment on Jewish ghetto life from the outside, and Yezierska because she was a writer whose literary work testified to her successful assimilation. Looking at the Jewish ghetto through an American lens limits the scope of their undertaking and renders a similarly reductive account. Yet, the stance they adopt is conditioned by the fact that both accounts are directed to the same audience–the native-born Americans, who had little prior knowledge about life in the ethnic ghetto. Both narratives are informative in nature and allow a glimpse into a strange but exotic neighborhood. The familiarization of the American public with life in the ghetto helped ethnic writers to dispel mutual distrust and alleviate the feeling of skepticism towards the immigrants' attempts to become an acceptable part of American society.

The first part of the ghetto mother stereotype highlights the validity of ghetto culture, which has become an enduring part of her image. She represents everything connected to the Old World: the Yiddish language, the kosher kitchen, the shtetl tradition, religious piety, and the preservation of the social and family structure based on Orthodox Judaism and patriarchy. The ghetto

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[4] Anzia Yezierska. *Bread Givers*. New York: Persea Books, 2003. All references are to this edition and are cited by page within the text.

mother fails at assimilation because she speaks in immigrant idiolect and will not master the English language the way her children may. Yiddish was the mother-tongue (*mamaloshen*), the language spoken at home, whereas Hebrew, "the holy tongue," was spoken by fathers and sons during their religious studies. Konzett comments on the importance of English: "[p]roperly spoken English became the touchstone of modern American identity, creating a rift between assimilated immigrants and unassimilable or un-American immigrants" (599). Yiddish sufficed to perform the activities of daily life in the ghetto, where the English language was not necessary. The ghetto mother used Yiddish bargaining in shops, quarrelling over the cost of rent, and gossiping with the neighbors. As her image is closely linked with life inside the ethnic community, and there was no need for her to leave the limits of the ghetto, Yiddish was adequate enough to serve her needs. Consequently, that is why English was chosen by immigrant authors, such as Mary Antin and Anzia Yezierska, over Yiddish as a language of literary communication. Writing in English was the first step away from the world of their mothers and into American assimilation and acceptance.

The second part of the ghetto mother stereotype signals motherhood as an important part of a Jewish woman's life. Ghetto fathers and children learned their lessons of assimilation at work and school respectively, whereas, ghetto mothers stayed outside the sphere of assimilation. While the mother's scope of activity diminished, her daughters could go out to work in factories, socialize, and taste the world outside the confines of their households. The generation gap was widening as "[f]ew mothers could offer advice on how to speak properly or how to wear the cosmetics, fashions, and the accessories of the 'American ladies'" (Schreier 32), so their daughters turned to peers for advice. The ghetto mother ceases to be a role-model for her daughters as their desires part. In Yezierska's story "Fat of the Land" (1920), a daughter laments of her mother: "God knows how hard I tried to civilize her so as not to have to blush with shame when I take her anywhere. I dressed her in the most stylish Paris models, but Delancy Street sticks out from every inch of her" (475). The sartorial stereotype of the Orthodox ghetto mother soon became the most apparent aspect of her characterization, albeit not the only one. Since she found no willing listeners in her Americanized children, the question arose to whom she should pass down family traditions. Various degrees of assimilation exhibited by family members and their conflicting desires exacerbated family divisions. Joyce Antler stresses the duality of the ghetto mother representations: "Increasingly comfortable with American landscapes of opportunity, the second generation cast off the older, anachronistic familial supports–particularly the embrace of mother love–all the while mythologizing it" (*You Never Call* 16).

The ghetto mother bears the costs of assimilation knowing that her own children love her but, at the same time, patronize and pity her. Despite the fact that she suffers from deprivation, she must encourage her daughter's social advancement, which will only result in the greater rift between her experiences and her daughter's changing needs. As far as assimilation is concerned, the ghetto mother is lagging behind, and that is why she becomes the common focus of critique, which unites the Jewish men and her children, who are both anxious to shed the immigrant odium and become Americans.

Assimilation means the negation of Old World values, for which the ghetto mother stands, so, by proxy, she stands in the way of assimilation. That is why the Old World wife from Abraham Cahan's *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (1896) is the source of the protagonist's embarrassment and shame. In Pogrebin's words, "[s]he is an unwanted 'too Jewish' reminder of Yekl's/Jake's origins and an unendurable obstacle to his advancement" (260). A Jewish home under maternal authority was seen as an obstacle in the assimilative process. Simultaneously honored for the preservation of Judaism and criticized for clinging to the Old World ways, her position reflected a complexity of the immigrant identity. Straddled between the two worlds and feeling at home in neither, the ghetto mother had to negotiate her position vis-à-vis patriarchy, Judaism, and American modernity. Although immigrant families centered on their, especially male, children's future, the problems that the mother faced were more complex, as she was conventionally appointed as the guardian of traditional values. If she supports the Americanization of her children, she is accused by the Orthodox members of her community of bringing the demise of Judaism. If she continues to cultivate shtetl traditions, she is criticized for being unrefined, both by her more-acculturated relatives and native-born Americans, who doubt her ability to assimilate at all. Her unfavorable position reflects immigrant anxiety towards the central points of authority, with which the Jewish immigrants were confronted on their assimilative path. No matter how hard the ghetto mother tries, it is clear that it is impossible for her to satisfy all the parties and still retain her inner integrity.

The growing influence of the ghetto mother was made possible by the authoritative void, which resulted from the simultaneous decrease of the father's status in the immigrant family. Unable to cope with the New World's modernity and powerless against the unfamiliar economic forces, immigrant Jewish fathers began to lose their families' respect, especially since in the Old World they had held the honored position of Talmud scholar, an activity largely ignored in the new one. That is why their literary representations, such as Reb Smolinsky or Cantor Rabinowitz, are usually portrayed as strict, stubborn, impractical, and emotionally alienated from their children. While traditional patriarchy was

losing its authoritative grip, both familial and religious, it was the ghetto mother who gained authority within the family, by, for example, supplementing the family income. In parallel with her husband's diminishing role, the ghetto matriarch managed the family and struggled to balance its economic and religious demands. However, the qualities that enabled her to run an efficient home for her rapidly Americanizing children, such as toughness and strength, will later be seen as undesirable for evoking her immigrant origins.

Apart from its derogatory connotations, there are also romantic and nostalgic versions of the image of the ghetto mother. The romanticized view of the ghetto mother was popularized by a song sung in the 1920's by Sophie Tucker "My Yiddishe Mama"[5]. The lyrics evoke an image of an old lady who has devoted her whole life to her family, and now her greatest pleasure and reward comes from the happiness of her children. This sentimental song

> creates a distance from the mythical mother of 'days gone by'; sitting 'in the comfort of the cozy chair,' the singer/daughter rejects the previous generation's version of femininity and thus must beg for forgiveness for actions that went against filial expectations. (Harrison-Kahan 54)

The feeling of nostalgia, which pervades the song, results from the realization that such an image of Jewish motherhood is becoming a thing of the past. Joyce Antler draws attention to the differences between Yiddish and English adaptations of the song: the Yiddish version, "symbolic of the second generation tensions, bridges the Yiddish and American worlds through sorrow" (*You Never* 18), whereas the English version, "dwelling on the offspring's feelings and acculturation even more than the mother's sacrifices, stretches out less ambiguously to establish an identity acceptable within American culture" (*You Never* 20). Similarly, in Al Jolson's film "The Jazz Singer" (1927), the ghetto mother is presented as a loving and embracing figure, which is juxtaposed against the father's severe tyranny. Devoted to her son, she supports his assimilation, in other words, "she serves as an intermediary between the rejecting father and the assimilating son" (Antler, *You Never* 21). Leftist writers, such as Michael Gold in *Jews Without Money* (1930), depicted rich Jewish women as the representatives of capitalist excess–Mrs. Cohen, or as idealized and heroic figures such as the protagonist's mother–Katie Gold, who "becomes the symbol of the sins of capitalism and the inspiration for his commitment to social justice and compassion for the poor" (Hyman, *Gender* 127). Sholem Aleichem, in his stories about Tevye the Dairyman, presents a compelling

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[5] The song was written by Jack Yellen and Lew Pollack in 1925 and recorded by Sophie Tucker both in English and Yiddish versions on two sides of a single record.

vision of life in the shtetl, which has later been recreated in musicals and movie theatres. Other Jewish authors of the theatrical performances which dramatized immigrant dreams and worries, such as Jacob Gordin, Leon Kobrin, and David Pinsky, present ghetto mothers with irony, but also with sympathy, appreciating their devotedness to family.

Literary representations of the ghetto mother, which appeared mostly in the 1920's and 1930's, reveal a complex portrait of a figure, both elevated and criticized. On the one hand, the ghetto mother is praised for her practical mind and home-making prowess. Her food, nurture, and strength successfully sustained the immigrant family throughout a difficult period of adaptation to the New World. Whether confined to the limits of domesticity or, less commonly, venturing into the labor market, the ghetto mother was the mainstay of her family. In doing so, she did not hesitate to challenge her less capable husband's position, or, conforming to the traditional patriarchal order, she continued to maintain his authority in the eyes of their children. Joyce Antler stresses the duality of her representation: "paradoxically materialistic but selfless, backward but modern, lovingly protective but coldly aggressive" (*You Never* 34), which renders an interesting mixture of desired and unwanted features from the assimilationist's point of view. This diversity of representation reflects the shifts experienced by the first-generation immigrants in family and communal patterns under the pressures to acculturate, shifts illuminating gender as a major component in the process. Soon her ambitions and self-sacrifice are turned against her, as her children proceed on the road to social assimilation: a warm and sentimental image of the ghetto mother is transformed into the overbearing and irritating Jewish mother.

1.4 The Ghetto Girl

The stereotype of the ghetto girl emerged in American Jewish literature as a consequence of the influx of Jewish immigrants who began arriving in America in the 19th century to escape European intolerance and economic poverty: between 1880 and 1914 "about 2 million Jews from Eastern Europe settled in the USA, among them 43% [were] women" (Hyman, *Gender* 93). Most of the newcomers settled in ethnic ghettos in big cities, such as New York's Lower East Side, where they joined the working class. Because of their distinct ethnicity, religion, language, culture and outer appearance, up to the 1920's the ghetto Jews were seen as alien. Since the American main-stream society, i.e. of WASP origin, knew very little about life in the ghetto, the resulting image of the Jew was one-sided. Jews were generally portrayed as shrewd, greedy, obsessed with money, inassimilable, and, therefore, unworthy of American citizenship.

The early 20th century, i.e., the period when the stereotype of the ghetto girl was most prominent, coincided with a very important time in American social history. The normative WASP bourgeois customs were challenged by ethnically diversified immigrant cohorts, giving rise to nativist rhetoric. Rapid industrialization and urbanization altered the social canvas of American society, creating the world-leading economy of manufactured goods. Suffragettes were struggling to introduce female voices into social and political debates, demanding women's rights. Their campaign culminated with the ratification of the 19th amendment in 1920. And finally, hazardous working conditions and capitalist exploitation were challenged by the working-class labor movement. Female participation in the labor market, both immigrant and native-born, grew, making women workers an important part of the socialist and proletariat movements. Changes were happening not only along gender and social lines, but also along the intra-ethnic class groups, as middle-class women, mostly of German Jewish descent, actively participated in the settlement-house movement and other philanthropic activities, which helped new immigrants adjust to American life.

Subjected to a painful process of acculturation, immigrant Jews, especially from Eastern Europe, faced disapproval from their German brethren, who had already been well ensconced on American soil. "They saw what they feared American culture saw whenever they looked at Jews–the uncivil and acquisitive newcomer who did not fit in–rather than Jews who had succeeded in entering American society through education, wealth, or business" (Prell, *The Begetting* 10). Fears about successful assimilation were thus projected from one immigrant group to another, reflecting the chronological order in which the Jewish cohorts arrived, with the more assimilated and acculturated group criticizing the newcomers. Even though old-stock Americans looked judgmentally at the first wave of German Jews (those who came between 1840 and 1880), they allowed them uninhibited economic and social progress, which resulted in the emergence of the Jewish upper-middle class, the so-called "Our Crowd." When Jewish mass immigration began in the 1880's, German Jews began to fear that their hard-earned social position and material affluence would be undermined by uncultivated and uncouth Eastern-European newcomers, especially since they were coming in unexpectedly large numbers, which, to American eyes, posed a threat to the preservation of the Anglo-American dominance. A delicate balance of mutual relations elaborately woven between German Jews and Americans was jeopardized by the sheer number and cultural obtuseness of the greenhorns. What the upper-class Jews feared was the potential damage done to their carefully constructed image: whether of German origin and assimilated or of Eastern-European descent and alien, the American

perception of a Jew would conflate into one collective image, which would be a reductive compromise of both.

The authors of *The Jewish Woman in America* (1976) enumerate three reasons for which German Jews opposed Eastern European mass immigration: firstly, it enabled Eastern European governments to get rid of the Jewish population in a way that presupposed Jewish willingness to depart; secondly, the massive scale on which Jews left the host countries suggested their readiness to change their nationality at whim, and consequently marked them as unpatriotic and inassimilable; and thirdly, a large-scale immigration may have fed antisemitic policies. German Jews initially were "convinced that providing for the needs of impoverished immigrants would bankrupt their institutions, they would be identified with the lower-class uncultured immigrants, and blamed for the latter's social lapses" (Baum, Hyman, and Michel 164). The overwhelming feeling of anxiety illuminated how vulnerable the American Jewish group really felt, in spite of having lived in America for generations and having enjoyed material affluence together with a high degree of social acceptance. It also showed how cautious they still were to convey the "proper" image of an American Jew: neither too eager to assimilate, nor too distinctively foreign.

Intra-ethnic stereotyping resulted in the distinction made between German and Russian Jewish women (the uptown lady and the downtown woman), with the former serving as a paragon of Americanization, and the latter equated with failed assimilation. Often portrayed as a destructive and uncaring seductress, who "traps her object–whether Jew or non-Jew–without shame" (Gilman 117), a Russian Jewish female epitomizes all what might hinder successful assimilation. In this way, an emancipated and acculturated German Jewish woman "places the originally negative images outside of her own self-definition [...] in the East, among Eastern Jewish women" (Gilman 117). The common claim held that once the Russian Jewess "abandons the confines of the ghetto, she is given no alternative in her culture but to revert to a more primitive and intuitive sexuality" (Gilman 117). The German Jewess, on the other hand, "too, abandons the religious stricture of the ghetto, but she replaces the rules of religion with the 'intellect' which governs her sexual life" (Gilman 117)–a testimony to her affinity for a model American lady. Moreover, her sexual restraint manifests itself in the reserved and dignified manner, in which she carries herself. Another common feature degrading Russian Jews, this time male and female alike, in the American eyes and setting them off the German cohort is said to be their excessive use of bodily gestures, which tends to accompany their conversations.

A scornful image of the Jewish ghetto girl, aiming directly at the more vulnerable part of the society–women, was constructed in order to balance the costs of assimilation, as the immigrants believed that they must shed some aspects of Jewishness, often associated with Yiddish, in order to be fully admitted to American society. The ghetto girl–a common point of reference to Jews of varying degrees of assimilation–proved an effective tool in facing their own anxieties. The term "ghetto girl" was used by progressive, middle-class German Jews to signal their detachment from the new immigrants. Prell provides her characteristic: "[t]he Ghetto Girl was primarily a young Jewish working woman, an immigrant bent on Americanizing rapidly. She was always associated with excess" (*The Begetting* 8). The "ghetto girl" is not one of their own, but a stranger who threatens the established *status quo*, someone who is not afraid to transgress the prescribed public roles and challenge the existing social norms. She does so by raising communal fears, as well as mimicking the ways of American middle-classes, even though her gender, class status, and Jewishness impose on her roles other than the ones she wants to pursue. Her refusal to fit into the accepted mould entails criticism expressed by her own people, and its manifestation is divulged in the derisory phrase "ghetto girl." Riv-Ellen Prell draws attention to an important comment made by historian Rudolph Glanz (1976) that "the barrage of Jewish male criticism of Jewish women's dress habits, above all, preoccupied Jewish men who were apparently expressing their anxiety about the opinions of non-Jews" (*The Begetting* 10). It is Jewish men who pass judgment on Jewish women, revealing gender to be an important factor in the process of acculturation. Jewish men negotiate their relationship to, or rather their anxiety and uncertainty, about the target culture through the lens of cultural representations of Jewish women. Such intra-ethnic criticism enables them to adopt the privileged position of a social critic, at the same time asserting their own righteousness and putting them on par with the mainstream American society.

The overall image of the ghetto girl found in American Jewish literature is derisive. The ghetto girl is someone who is fashion crazy, even though the means at her disposal are very limited because her factory wages are modest. Still, she is eager to spend all her money on clothes and fashionable accessories. In doing so, she shows a selfish disregard of her family's needs, putting her own extravagant pleasures above the basic needs of her parents and siblings. Although she ardently follows the latest fashion, her clothes defy the good taste and sophistication characteristic of a lady, whom the ghetto girl so desperately wants to become. Lacking in refinement, she dons garish and vulgar outfits, which reek of her uncouth character and lack of cultured taste. The ghetto girl is loud, cheap, and immodest; in fact, her appearance is quite the opposite of the

19th-century bourgeois ideal of womanhood, which came to be known as the "Cult of True Womanhood." The "True Woman's" symbolic role was to protect high moral standards within and outside the family, as womanhood, it was believed, naturally endowed her with superior and unique virtues, which were unattainable to men.

The fact that the ghetto girl is a spender is seen against the acceptable routes of assimilation. She was generally expected to work hard and save every cent in accordance with, for example, the teachings by Horace Alger in *Ragged Dick* (1868). Even though Alger's stories provide a list of socially desirable positive behaviors mostly for boys and young men, some of their instructions may be seen as crossing the gender lines. Choosing to use her womanly charm and sexual appeal to assist her assimilation, the stereotype of the ghetto girl challenged the moral tone of Alger's narratives and the Puritan ethic of work, otherwise used to secure a rise to middle-class respectability and a character strengthened by adversity. Her drive to possess and display did not only defy American values of hard work, frugality, and moderation, but also posed a threat to the immigrant family's finances. During the early immigrant years, the economic situation of an average ghetto family was usually unstable, and all contributions were greatly appreciated. The moment the parents could no longer count on the working girl's earnings posed a danger to the survival of the whole family: "A Bureau of Labor study of wages from 1900 to 1910 indicated that in Jewish families working daughters produced almost 40 percent of the family's total yearly earnings on average" (Prell, *Fighting* 37). The money, which she spent on clothes, might have supported the education of her younger siblings, or secured a proper diet for her large and usually undernourished family.

The passion to accumulate material goods such as clothes, gloves, shoes, hats, and jewelry manifests itself in her obsessive interest in her looks. Exposed to the American ideals of beauty and fashion, she wanted to emulate American ladies, seemingly guaranteeing her success in the Promised Land. Her excessive consumption is both a sign of her assimilation, as she succumbs to the rules of American economy, and a trap, which might lead to her failure. When her consumer desire outgrows the means available to her, she might be tempted to satisfy her wants in other, not necessarily moral or socially acceptable ways. This was especially troubling, because Jewish women were seen as biologically maturing earlier than gentile women. "In the ghetto, this maturity was recognized and controlled through the institution of early marriage," observes Gilman (116). The absence of parental or marital control, in turn, enables a young woman a degree of emancipation, which is not necessarily socially desired. Hence, the community fears that such a desperate young woman may view prostitution as a way to supplement her earnings and achieve her goals.

Americans had little trust in the moral integrity of the new immigrants, and they feared that a lure of ready-made goods might prove too strong for poor immigrant girls. Lack of experience, naivety, insufficient parental control, and questionable ethics were used as common examples in the nativist, anti-immigrant debate at that time.

The fact that the ghetto girl is an earner makes her independent from her family, who could no longer control her expenses. Placing herself beyond parental control, the ghetto girl constituted a threat to traditional Judaism and, according to the patriarchal discourse, to the Jewish diaspora. Therefore, the more observant Jews were against rapid Americanization and the adoption of American values, seeing in it a danger to the Jewish family, in which the generational gap had caused enough problems for its members. Young, working women, who tasted the world outside their mothers' kitchens, had higher expectations and would not want to marry their less ambitious tenement neighbors. Having their own money afforded them a certain degree of autonomy in decision-making, gave them self-confidence and, sometimes, enough courage to pursue their own goals. One of such goals might have been to leave the cozy but suffocating atmosphere of the ghetto and venture to see how the other half lives. The working girl, who decides to leave the Jewish ghetto in search for her American Dream, disrupts the traditional social hierarchy and endangers the survival of the patriarchal order of the diaspora, which has long been established as essential to the preservation of Judaism.

In *Salome of the Tenements* (1923), Anzia Yezierska introduces the stereotypical ghetto girl–Sonia Vrunsky, who is "a driven and aggressive achiever and compulsive consumer, aware of her sexuality and increasingly skeptical of the female American Dream: of matrimony as a vehicle for women's upward social mobility" (Coklin 136). A similar character, Mashah, appears in *Bread Givers* (1925). Mashah's appearance in the novel, accompanied by "laughter and light footsteps" (2), brings a new quality to the tenement. Her whole appearance is the contradiction of the ghetto penury: pinning the pink, paper roses to her hat, she "turned her head first on this side and then on the other side, laughing to herself with the pleasure of how grand her hat was" (2). When her sister, Fania, is queuing to get a job, Mashah prides herself on being clever, since "[a]ll the time that [Fania] [was] wasting [herself] waiting to get in, [she] walked [herself] through the stores, to look for a trimming for [her] hat (3). Mashah is in no way disturbed by the financial nadir in which her family has found itself; instead, she is planning to "hear the free music in the park" (3). Her family has a very low opinion of her: she "had no heart, no feelings, [and] millionaire things willed themselves in her empty head" (6). As "[w]orry or care of any kind could never get itself into Mashah's empty

head" (2), she is always in a good mood: "Father's preaching and Mother's cursing no more bothered her than the far-away noise from the outside street" (4). All she is concerned with are her looks: "these pink roses on my hat to match out my pink calico will make me look just like the picture on the magazine cover" (3). Mashah devotes all her time and energy to making herself look presentable; her ambition is to look like an American lady, not an immigrant working girl. She has become a model consumer who dutifully follows the latest trends displayed on magazine covers, which, in turn, fuel her insatiable want. She would rather spend her lunch money on "something pretty that [she had] to have" (3), than something that does not provide noticeable gratification, like food or the rent.

Mashah's whole life revolves around making appearances, and hers is particularly addressed not to her fellow co-workers, but to middle-class gentlemen. Ribbons and trimmings must suffice to disguise hunger and deprivation and make her worthy of Prince Charming's attention. Konzett explains that

> [f]or working-class women [...] consumerist styles and fashions–to the extent they could afford them–promised access to a modern, American world of freedom, romance, and upward mobility. At the same time, it was their cheap labor that enabled the mass manufacturing and sale of consumer goods. (29)

Fashionable accoutrements are to help her express her newly acquired Americanization, or rather her feeling of hope that she has successfully managed to secure the identification with such an image. They also help her pass as an American lady, a strategy explored by African-American characters, but also adopted by various immigrant groups. Her attempts to pass are the reaction against her growing realization of the fact that she is being shunned by American society. Mashah's route to passing is through appearance, not the desirable qualities of her character such as frugality and moderation. She has been led to believe that this disguise will facilitate an avenue to a middle-class life, that her good looks will attract a wealthy man who will ask for her hand. Since her dream is a life of leisure, a marriage to a successful businessman would make her own version of the American Dream come true: "Marriage was closely tied to Americanization, and a powerful stereotype of it was the eager Young Jewish Woman in Search of Marriage" (Prell, *Fighting* 59). The ghetto girl's independence manifested itself in exercising her own will as to the choice of husband, in her lack of worry about a dowry, and in her rejection of her father's patriarchal rule. Matrimony, which was induced by love, was regarded as a successful strategy for upward mobility. The fears of traditional Jews that such behavior would mark the demise of the Jewish diaspora were unfounded,

as it turned out that "Jews also resisted Americanization through marriage, by overwhelmingly rejecting non-Jews as spouses" (Prell, *Fighting* 60).

The way Mashah is described signals a shallow and silly young woman whose life interest boils down to meaningless pleasures and trifles: "her clothes were always so new and fresh, without the least little wrinkle, like the dressed-up doll lady from the show window of the grandest department store" (4). In a very clear way, her good looks are contrasted with her feeble mind. The fact that she is blonde and the prettiest of all the four sisters makes her most popular with men: "Everywhere Mashah went men followed her with melting looks" (2). Not that she is not aware, or pleased with it: "men's eyes were like something to eat and like something to drink to her" (4). Her appearance is what she really has at least some degree of influence on. Otherwise, her life would follow a dull path, similar to Bessie's fate. Bessie, the oldest of the sisters, is the one who worries about paying the rent and what to cook for dinner. That is why Mashah tries to capitalize on her youthful beauty, while there is still hope of marrying above her class. Her relentless optimism is taken as lack of seriousness and held in contempt. Within the limits of the traditional Jewish family, Mashah exhibits a budding independent will, something what America has taught her. Yet, the fact that she later yields to the pressure of tradition proves futile her attempts at personal autonomy. A dream of marrying for love is shattered by her father's decision to give her to a higher bidder. Yezierska shows that Mashah's future depends entirely on her father's decision, which forces her into an unwanted marriage: "so Mashah, weak, dumb, helpless with the first great sorrow of her life, gave in to Father's will" (64). Then, the control of her life is reduced to some trivial manifestations of her latent desire for more: paper flowers, a white table-cloth, or clean clothes, amidst daily misery and deprivation.

Mashah's interest in fashion and modern entertainment is contrasted with her sister Bessie's modesty and hard work. Bessie is the provider: "the whole family was hanging on Bessie's neck for her wages" (1). She is aware of the fact that the burden of her family's survival lies on her shoulders, and she acts accordingly: "Bessie would rush home the quicker to help Mother with the washing or ironing, or bring home another bundle of night work, and stay up till all hours to earn another dollar for the house" (36). Bessie's altruistic nature prevents her from thinking about her own good; instead, her main concern is the well-being of her parents and siblings. Bessie is the working ghetto girl who humbly accepts her fate and never complains; neither as a dutiful Jewish daughter–"Bessie gave every cent she earned to Father and had nothing left to buy herself something new" (36), nor as a reluctant wife of a widowed fish-peddler: "[w]hen the wedding day came, she went quietly from our house to

Zalmon's–the burden bearer had changed her burden" (110). Yezierska's narrative shows how two opposing strategies, Bessie's devoted care for family and the stifling of her own desires and Mashah's lighthearted and egoistic approach to life, are rendered ineffective by their father's tyrannical, patriarchal rule.

Although stereotypes are reductive and present a weighted representation, which highlights mostly its negative aspects, a different reading may also illuminate some positive traits. The same features, which make Mashah worthless in the eyes of her family, are also proofs of her acculturation: Mashah is an immigrant Jewish woman in transition. The fact that she pays attention to personal hygiene may be seen as a visible sign of her Americanization and a challenge to the image of ghetto poverty, which, to many Americans, was synonymous with dirt. An insistence on keeping her house clean refutes the fears voiced by the mainstream society that immigrants were not civilized enough to adapt to American modernity. Mashah defies the stereotype of an exhausted and shabby female worker who has no time or energy to take care of her appearance, and whose sole being rests on satisfying her basic needs. Her clothes are "wrapped around with newspapers to keep the dirt out" (5), she keeps her things in perfect order, and she is the first one in the family who buys "not only a toothbrush and a separate towel for herself, but even a separate piece of soap" (6). Good looks give her a feeling of self-confidence, "[t]he pride in her beautiful face, in her golden hair, lifted her head like a diamond crown" (4). In the world of the underprivileged, where little could be claimed as success, the desire to look clean and tidy could become a drive toward personal and social advancement. Consequently, the conflicting stereotype of the ghetto girl projects a formation of a socially acceptable figure of an assimilated and acculturated immigrant worker, who would be most welcome by American society.

The ghetto girl stereotype disappeared between 1910 and the 1920's when Jews started to leave the ghetto in pursuit of middle-class life. "By the 1920's, few Jews remained on the Lower East Side, preferring new housing and the rural atmosphere of Brooklyn in New York, and other nonurban areas in other cities" (Prell, *The Begetting* 13). Getting education and entering into professional employment meant that Jews were leaving the working class, together with its distinctive way of life. What followed was the emergence of a figure of the New Woman, who finds wage-earning labor, which enables her to leave home and get an education: "rejecting domesticity in favor of other forms of wage labor that allow [her] the freedom insisted upon the New Woman" (Batker, *Reforming* 111). Although the term "New Woman" appeared as early as the 1880's and encompassed first suffragettes and 1920's flappers, its general

connotation, related to the budding awareness of women's independence, was also attractive to ethnic women. First associated mainly with white, American-born, middle-class women, the idea of the New Woman found a different realization in Yezierska's immigrant context. Botshon argues that "it is her characters' immigrant and ethnic status (their very distance from American cultural norms) that helps them to liberate themselves from traditional women's roles" (234). Sander L. Gilman claims that "[a]fter the turn of the century, the discourse about the destructive Jewish female as the epitome of the modern woman becomes a commonplace" (115). Riv-Ellen Prell notices the similarities concerning the critique of both the ghetto girl and American working-class girls who "constituted the first group of autonomous urban women whose freedoms were continually attacked by the same array of journalists, moralists, and philanthropists" (*Fighting* 37-38). What worried the American public was their free will, independence, and sexuality, which "conflated into a single image of a dangerous and out-of-control woman" (Prell, *Fighting* 38).

The ghetto girl and the New Woman's representations of femaleness defy middle-class philanthropy represented, for example, by the Clara de Hirsh Home for Working Girls, the National Council of Jewish Women, the United Hebrew Charities, and other progressive reformers' actions aimed at Americanization of immigrants. Baum, Hyman, and Michel explicate that

> American Jews responded to the social problems created by immigration by engaging in large-scale philanthropic projects–as no other religio-ethnic group did–to aid the immigrants upon their arrival and to facilitate their rapid assimilation. (165)

What these settlement house ideologies advocated, however, was domesticity as a way of acculturating young Jewish immigrant women: the girls were taught hygiene, cooking, and everything a good domestic servant needs to know: "Reformers argued that immigrants could learn middle-class standards and values from domestic labor as they earned the wage" (Batker, *Literary* 82). Favoring domestic labor over other wage-earning forms of employment, especially factory employment, which paid better and gave workers more independence, middle-class philanthropy demagogically limited the working women's world and destined them to the realm of domesticity. Social philanthropy wanted to improve immigrant life in the ghetto in the ways that would not encourage them to leave the ghetto. "The extent to which settlement houses responded to community needs or consolidated middle-class control in urban ghettos" (Batker, *Literary* 82) is still a matter of discussion, but the figures of the ghetto girl and the New Woman constitute a vital argument in this debate, as they expose the exploitation of immigrant labor disguised by the façade of philanthropy. The fact that these young women rejected the humble

class positioning prescribed to them by middle-class attitudes and wanted more in life testified to their appreciation of independence and individual freedom, above conformity and passivity; *vide* a meaningful title of Yezierska's novel *Arrogant Beggar* (1927), or her story "The Free Vacation House" (1915). By questioning domestic ideals, they promoted avenues of acculturation, which took into account their personal development, and, by doing so, challenged both gentile American and traditional Jewish models of womanhood. The criticism that these images draw shows how complicated it was for Jewish immigrant women to embrace domesticity and work, Jewishness and Americanization, and simultaneously to gain approval on both sides of the hyphen.

The ghetto girl and the New Woman stereotypes reveal gender to be an important aspect of the assimilative process. The brunt of criticism directed towards young, female Jewish immigrants put a lot of pressure on their shoulders. Prell explains, "Jewish women's most personal features–voice, style, and comportment–seemed constantly to be on the verge of dooming Jews to failure in American society" (*The Begetting* 12). No criticism of such personal nature was aimed at Jewish men, though, except for "their business orientation and [...] failure to attend synagogue" (Prell, *The Begetting* 12). Even though both stereotypes present detailed representations of distinctly female characteristics, they concurrently disclose a lot about the way the American Jewish public perceived them. The stereotype of the tacky and gaudy ghetto girl expressed fears about the inclusion of Jews, both male and female, as part of the American mainstream. Singled out as the communal scapegoat, young, working, Jewish women were the target of intra-ethnic criticism, whenever American social favors swung in undesirable directions. During acculturation, immigrant Jews had to respond not only to the changes happening at that time in American society, but they also needed to address its impact on traditional Judaism. In an attempt to balance both intra- and inter-ethnic anxieties, they constructed the ghetto girl stereotype as "a cultural meeting ground of American fears, if not open anti-Semitism" (Prell, *Fighting* 56). If anything was to exclude immigrant Jews from participation in American society, the gendered stereotype aimed at one of their own was seen as less menacing than historically loaded racial (marked by color), or antisemitic prejudice. The image of the New Woman, in turn, revealed the Jewish males' worries about intermarriage and the survival of the Jewish diaspora. The New Woman's Americanization, although desired and expected, challenged traditional Jewish patriarchy and upset the gender balance within the Jewish family and community. Therefore, Riv-Ellen Prell claims, both images "[represent] the experience of Jewish women **and** men" (*The Begetting* 12; emphasis in the original), by channeling the fears of both immigrant groups.

In the late 1920's, the stereotypical meaning of the ghetto girl lost its referentiality, but thrived in literature. The ghetto novel was an especially viable genre to present different realizations of the type: Abraham Cahan's *Yekl and The Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories of the New York Ghetto* (1896), Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* (1912), Lillian Wald's *The House on Henry Street* (1915), Edna Ferber's *Fanny Herself* (1917), Rose Cohen's *Out of the Shadow: A Russian Jewish Girlhood on the Lower East Side* (1918), Anzia Yezierska's *Salome of the Tenements* (1923), and Bella Cohen Spewack's *Streets: A Memoir of the Lower East Side* (1995) employ this image as a vital element of the depiction of the Jewish ghetto. Derided by contemporary social critics, both Jewish and American, the ghetto girl stereotype was re-read by feminist criticism and given scholarly attention.

1.5 The Jewish Mother

Probably the most dramatic change regarding the female role in the Jewish family happened in the twentieth century when Jews began to leave the ethnic ghetto and join the American middle classes. This was a turbulent time not only for American Jews, but also for America at large: the Great Depression of the 1930's inflamed ethnic problems within American society, especially among groups who were competing for the same jobs; antisemitism escalated as the Jews were accused of controlling American capital and business, and the tragic fate of European Jews, especially assimilated and successful German Jews, under the Nazi regime shook the American Jews' belief in stability. The outbreak of World War II fueled American antisemitic sentiments so much that

> during the 1940s from 15 to 24 percent of the American population surveyed defined Jews as a 'menace to America.' When the United States was at war with Germany and Japan, a greater percentage of Americans held negative attitudes toward Jews than toward German or Japanese Americans. (Prell, *Fighting* 125)

In order not to aggravate the situation, Jews tended to avoid public disputes and continued to blend into American society so successfully that "in the 1930's [they] began to 'vanish' as subjects from [...] American popular culture" (Prell, *Fighting* 127). Their growing financial stability and an increased access to middle-class living made it possible for them to move to the suburbs ("the gilded ghettos"), where they "retained their prewar residential patterns of living in close proximity to one another, but they did so by abandoning urban life en masse" (Prell, *Fighting* 157). Although geographically they became part of the middle classes and, as American citizens, enjoyed a wide array of professional opportunities, they were still unwelcome to join their Protestant neighbors in social activities. The postwar suburbs witnessed another struggle for Jewish

social inclusion, which entailed both intra- and inter-ethnic disputes. More subtle but equally damaging discrimination against Jews took place at universities (which introduced quotas for admitting Jewish students), at housing estates (which refused Jewish home buyers), at workplaces (which used the ethnic criterion for employment), and through various forms of the "gentlemen's agreements," which denied Jewish membership at clubs, fraternities, and sororities.

The shift in female roles in the Jewish family had already started when Jewish immigrants began to adapt to the prevailing bourgeoisie model of female domesticity, according to which women were basically expected to preserve traditional morality, stay religious, and do good deeds; the last of these roles combined Western philanthropy with traditional Jewish charity (*zedakah*). In the Old World, many shtetl wives had to provide for their families and thus developed "strong personalities and sharp business skills" (Koltun 273). In Eastern-Europe, entrepreneur Jewish women had more chances of being exposed to local culture, because they were often fluent in local languages. In American Jewish immigrant narratives, such as Abraham Cahan's "Yekl, A Tale of the New York Ghetto" (1896), Shalom Asch's *East River* (1946), and Edna Sheklow's memoir *So Talently My Children* (1966), we can see female characters portrayed as essential to the survival of the family: "when women's wage earning was still vital to the family, the energetic women who used their skills and ingenuity to help support their families are cast as admirable characters" (Baum 191). Enterprising Jewish women were depicted as "robust and direct, energetic and independent. Female charm, in the recognized American sense, was not one of their virtues" (Baum 189). They evidently exhibited those traits that were in conflict with the model of American wifehood, as it advanced among the middle classes from World War II onwards. This emerging ideal wife was modest about her own needs and instead concentrated on her husband's professional and social promotion, but she still retained the appearance of a sophisticated lady. As a mother, she had to sacrifice herself for the happiness of her children, however, in no way would she impede their independence. Women who "held on to the old attitudes and attempted to take control of financial matters were seen, at least in literature, as domineering and emasculating–or as laughable" (Baum 193). The endorsement of feminine qualities of domesticity and refinement, which were aligned with the American cultural ideal of womanhood, and the simultaneous portrayal of women as temperamentally and physically unsuited to do business, exposes the scale of impingement of the dominant American attitude on the Jewish community. The Western, middle-class definition of womanhood imposed on Jewish women a more conservative role than the one they had enjoyed in

Eastern Europe; however, in America, Jewish women advanced in education and various forms of entertainment such as the Yiddish theatre, vaudeville, radio, and television.

The common representation of the transitional figure between a working mother and a lady of leisure is "the foolish, overdecorated wife of the parvenu. She is a caricature of the real "lady," her pretensions to refinement laughable, and her shallowness and materialism contemptible" (Baum 199). Mrs. Cohen, from Michael Gold's 1930 novel *Jews Without Money*, is a good example of such a characterization: "Diamonds shone from her ears; diamond rings sparkled from every finger. She looked like some vulgar, pretentious prostitute, but was only the typical wife of a Jewish *nouveau riche* (Gold 217; italics in the original). Even though her depiction is most unfavorable, she is not an active participant in the oppressive capitalist system, which Gold criticizes in his novel. What she does is to perform the role that is expected of her: that of the consumer and a lady of leisure. "In spite of the fact that proletarian novels advocate social change by arousing class consciousness, their content is often gender-biased [...] they reduce female characters to passive agents who are ensnared in the man's world" (Gasztold 135).

The two major factors affecting the life of American Jews in the 1940's, the existent threat of antisemitism and their acculturated life-style, resulted in the shifting of the hub of Jewish culture out of the public sphere toward the realm of domesticity. Jewish men concentrated on work, pursuing white-collar jobs, which financially enabled, and later sustained, their arrival in the middle classes. Providing was an exclusively male activity, for "man's masculinity was defined in large part by his working and being breadwinner, and [...] attaining material success from it" (Cantor 170). The position of sole breadwinner consolidated his authority over the family. For an aspiring Jew, "the first status symbol on the Lower East Side of New York was a nonworking wife" (Cantor 172). Should his wife seek employment, it signaled her husband's financial incompetence and lack of business skills. The wife's duty, in turn, was to ensure that the Jewish household fell nothing short of the American one, both in idea and design. In other words, it must be run in a manner that reflects her husband's affluence and prosperity. Women were expected to find fulfillment in pursuing the roles of wives and mothers, and to behave like "ladies of leisure"– now that they were freed from household chores by servants. "Their role as ladies needed to complement their husband's financial position; by conducting themselves properly, they become assets" (Baum 199). As the Jewish father became associated with work outside the family, the Jewish mother, who had no direct access to production and wealth except through her husband, concentrated on domestic issues such as raising the children and performing

household tasks. Her prowess as a good housewife matched her husband's professional accomplishments and completed the picture of an acculturated and successful family that had come a long way since its immigrant origins.

The moment the suburban Jewish family became an emblem of successful acculturation and assimilation marks the shift from the immigrant to the assimilationist position. Symbolically rendered in the opening line of Saul Bellow's 1953 novel *The Adventures of Augie March*–"I'm an American, Chicago born,"–the protagonist's statement removes all doubt about his national identity. But the move from the margin towards the mainstream also channeled Jewish anxieties that accompanied their newly acquired social position. Financial success was important, but it did not ensure acceptance by the American middle-classes, which were still reluctant to embrace the newcomers. Once the unwelcoming attitude towards Jewish neighbors became obvious, the brunt of criticism directed at the stereotypical Jewish mother came to represent all that still hindered American acceptance of Jews. In other words, the stereotyped Jewish mother conveyed both the worst traits of the Old World and the major obstacles to Jewish assimilation in the New One. Thus, the figure of the Jewish mother became the focus of an intra-ethnic frustration and the source of the leading stereotype of the post-World War II period.

Not all cultural representations of the Jewish mother carried a negative bias and criticism, as there was a Jewish mother who became a beloved mother of many Americans of non-Jewish origin. Gertrude Berg was an actress, a writer, and a producer of a popular radio and, since 1949, television sitcom, *The Goldbergs*, which aired from 1929 to 1962. She created one of the most popular female characters of Jewish origin–Molly Goldberg. Combining the sentimentalized yidishe mame with the life wisdom and common sense of a knowledgeable matriarch, she captivated audiences across ethnic and religious borders, becoming the epitome of an open-hearted and caring American mother. Portraying the Goldbergs as a Jewish, but not too Jewish, family, she skillfully merged Yiddish-inflected speech with the general problems related to a working-class background: financial worries, paying the rent, problems with employment, food, children, health, and managing the private affairs of closest and distant members of the family. A deliberate omission of potentially inflammable political and racial issues tailored the show to suit a gamut of American tastes. That is why its representation of a "typical" working-class Jewish family is not exactly accurate, as it eschews family feuds, divorces, religious concerns, mental illnesses, racial prejudice, and the debilitating effects of physical work. In relation to her children, she is nothing like Portnoy's mother; Molly is a respectful advisor who allows children to reach their own decisions and a patient observer of their, if sometimes problematic, maturation.

Good-natured, humane and smart, Molly manages to peacefully resolve all of her own and her neighbors' problems, always promoting moral values over the material ones. Thus, she proved that

> immigrant mothers did not have to be left behind as Jews moved forward, nor would they pollute Judaic values with materialistic concerns. With mothers like Molly reliably steering the course, immigrants and other working-class citizens could make it in America. (Antler 48)

Molly Goldberg was the prototype of later, more distorted, representations of Jewish motherhood.

Philip Wylie's *Generation of Vipers* (1942) is a bitter critique of American materialism, which introduces a critical label of "momism," a cult of motherhood, as one of its causes. Other works, such as Edward Strecker's *Their Mother's Sons* (1946), lent "momism" a certain degree of academic legitimacy by applying the term to psychiatric diagnoses. Both popular and scholarly views united in depicting the American mother as domineering and overprotective: "they held mothers responsible for such diverse social phenomena as male juvenile delinquency, alcoholism, and homosexuality, all of which were held to be direct threats to American national identity and security" (Carroll 182). "Momism" is a product of postwar American culture, which reflected the tensions and insecurities brought by World War II and the Cold War onto American society. Understood as excessive attachment and devotion exerted by middle-class mothers to their sons, "momism" inhibits children's natural development and distorts maturity, making them weak and dependent. Pathological motherhood was seen as a threat to manhood, especially at a time when young, strong men were needed to provide national security. There were even claims that authoritarian and oppressive mothers were to blame for stimulating homosexual behavior, which, according to David K. Johnson, during the Cold War period was associated with communism. The appearance of "momism" is grounded in the shifting gender and family roles, which at the beginning of the twentieth century altered the social fabric of American society. National suffrage (1920) and women's entrance into paid employment and social realms earlier reserved to men, such as those of politics and workers' unions, forced men to modify the definition of gender roles. Consequently, it triggered male hostility, which found a safety valve in rampant antifeminist critique; although, at the same time "many liberals, both men and women, supported Wylie's attack on moms, viewing it as an assault on moral hypocrisy, sexual repression, and intolerance" (Carroll 318).

Even though "momism" was not directed specifically at Jewish mothers, but targeted the symbolic American mother, its fundamental claim about the

mother's suffocating love towards her children finds resonance in stereotypical representations of the Jewish mother. At the same time when Wylie's concept of "momism" was gaining popularity, a group of social scientists lead by Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead conducted cross-cultural research on family patterns in ethnic communities, which was later published as *Life Is With People: The Jewish Little Town of Eastern Europe* by Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog in 1952. The researchers combined a humanistic and scientific approach in the exploration of "high" as opposed to "primitive" ethnic cultures in America. They interviewed family members and studied literature, folktales, songs, films, and the press. The study offered a generalized portrait of the Jewish mother, which will later be perpetuated in American culture. According to Herzog's and Zborowski's findings, the Jewish mother exhibits unconditional love to her children; suffering and worry are indispensable elements of her definition of motherhood, and overfeeding is tantamount to love.[6] What emerges from this long-lasting and extensive research is a complex portrayal of Jewish family roles, which eludes easy classification. Some elements, such as close familial bonds, mother's inexhaustible attention, and the importance of children's well-being, echo earlier realizations of the stereotype of the Jewish family. However, Joyce Antler, points at its flaws:

> Although the book has been criticized for its nostalgic, unrealistic, positivist tone, its portrait of a 'nagging and whining" Jewish mother slipped under the radar and went unchallenged [...] the image of the Jewish mother disseminated by the book and related articles did not so much break stereotypes as entrench them. (74)

The stereotypical Jewish wife/mother, "associated aggressively with wanting and demanding" (Prell, *Fighting* 145), is accused of excessive consumption. "Status success and suburbanization were some of the demands she placed upon her husband" (Prell, *Fighting* 145), who is presented as a victim of her insatiable needs, and somebody who fruitlessly tries to satisfy her gargantuan craving for accumulation. Her lack of moderation also reveals itself in an unequal way, in which she tends to the needs of her family. She

> suffocated her family, but especially her children, with food and nurturance that made giving and receiving a poisonous act. As an excessive giver, she never wanted or received anything directly, but she was highly manipulative. Her name was synonymous with guilt, her second attribute. Her demands were impossible to meet because she wanted what usually seemed impossible to give–total

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[6] See Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict. "Social Science Uncovers the Jewish 'Family Plot' " in Joyce Antler's *You Never Call, You Never Write* (73-100).

> loyalty. [...] [S]he was often portrayed as naïve, stupid, or hopelessly out of touch with the world of her children. (Prell, *Fighting* 145)

She is impossible to please, like in the joke: "What did the waiter ask the group of dining Jewish mothers? Is ANYTHING all right?" Finally, she was seen as "crass, bullying, asexual, antisexual [...], she overfeeds everyone, and obsesses about digestion and elimination" (Pogrebin 260). In short, the Jewish mother stereotype has become a universally recognized metaphor for emotional harassment, whose lifetime has been extended by means of cultural and scholarly representations.

Acquisition was an important element of assimilation and women spearheaded the process, which "provided immigrants with the markers of American identity and social mobility–from American food products to a piano for the parlor" (Hyman, *Gender* 98). When Jews were moving to middle-class districts, they decorated their homes so that they would match their non-Jewish neighbors. At the same time, excessive consumption was seen as undesirable and corruptive of traditional American values. Ostentatious materialism was regarded by Protestant neighbors as tantamount to crudeness and lack of sophistication. In the transitional period of social mobility, Jewish mothers were both encouraged and chastised for buying, depending on who formulated the argument: the margins or the mainstream, respectively. In both cases, it was the woman who was held responsible for criticism: if she does not spend, her whole household and life-style would be regarded as not up to her American neighbors' standards–clear evidence of Jewish failure to assimilate. A failure to successfully emulate the aspiring model had far-reaching consequences, one of which was the disapproval of her husband, who had been working hard to ensure that the family had the means to match their peer group. However, if she spent money and paraded the latest material symbols of middle-class living, her non-Jewish neighbors would criticize her for her excess and vulgarity, and she would be deemed extravagant and reckless–again, a signal of her, and by proxy Jewish, failed acculturation, and the reason for social ostracism.

In the shtetl, the mother did not depend on the children's success to affirm her social position, as she herself was also the provider. In the American milieu, where she was confined to the realm of domesticity, her self-esteem was connected with her children's career, especially as she bore the responsibility to socialize them. "The shtetl defined success in terms of Jewish values: that she or he became a mensch, and a good Jew. In America, success meant the son's material achievement and status and the daughter's 'good marriage'" (Cantor 209). That is why mothers encouraged sons to pursue education and professional careers, preferably those of the proverbial doctor or lawyer. A daughter, however, needed education only as much as it would enhance her

prospects for matrimony. This is how the mother from Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1967) talks about her daughter: "The child is no genius, but then we don't ask the impossible. God bless her, she works hard, she applies herself to her limits, and so whatever she gets is all right" (2)[7]. The expectations towards Jewish daughters were modest, and a mother's goal was to "mold her daughter into a marriageable female" (Cantor 220), rather than insist on her academic or professional career. The mother's task was arduous in itself, as the established ideal of beauty was defined in non-Jewish terms: straight blonde hair, a small nose, and a slim figure. A young woman on the brink of matrimony must also appear gentle, reserved, and not as outspoken as Jewish women could, allegedly, be. All in all, in order to become worthy of men's attention, she must come nearest to the American ideal of beauty. Only social invisibility, she learns, would make her desirable, and it is her mother's job to make sure that she arrives at that target.

In regard to her daughter's upbringing, the Jewish mother faced conflicting motives. Teaching her daughter subservience and docility may have secured a desirable match with a prominent gentleman, but it would thwart her daughter's chances of becoming an independent-minded and self-motivated person. Moreover, fashioning her physical appearance and self-expression in a way that erases Jewish traits, for example, by having the proverbial nose job, or by dying dark hair blonde and straightening frizzy hair, may ensure her success at assimilation and attract wealthy suitors, but it also queries the survival of Jewish values and traditions–in short, the survival of Judaism. The mother's role was to balance her daughter's personal happiness and the expectations imposed on her by her diasporical legacy; for many Jewish families acculturation resulted in lessening the ties with Judaism, and consequently, the diminishing role of rabbis in the lives of middle-class Jews. Therefore, the task of maintaining the Jewish tradition was delegated to the mother, as she already bore the brunt of responsibility for socializing her children. Any failure to do so would be attributed to her deficiency as good mother and a good Jew. A daughter's rejection of maternal authority was more ambivalent, and less common, because she was of the same gender, sharing a strong familial bond, and those societal expectations that targeted women regardless of their age. The daughter's negation of maternal values was directed against the concept of motherhood as the only socially approved itinerary available to women. For daughters, the mother figure embodied restraints against personal and social development, which are grounded in gender hierarchy, rather than in the

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[7] Philip Roth. *Portnoy's Complaint.* London: Corgi Books, 1971. All references are to this edition and are cited by page within the text.

particular mother-daughter relationship. Joyce Antler confirms: "Jewish mothers as presented by Jewish daughters are often troubled and troubling, but they are rarely the extreme caricatures given to us by men" (8-9).

As long as the daughter is to be groomed for marriage, which releases her from parental control, the mother's relationship with her son does not wither with his maturity. The Jewish mother is decried for her fixation on her son, for whom no woman is good enough. She infantilizes her son no matter how old he is and sees him as somebody who is in constant need of motherly attention. Sophie Portnoy, the stereotypical Jewish mother, complains about her adolescent son: "the A student, who his own mother can't say poopie to any more, he's such a *grown-up*" (24). Her love creates a bond that is going to last forever: "Who is going to stay with Mommy forever and ever? Who is it who goes with Mommy wherever in the whole wide world Mommy goes?" (50). Thomas Sowell explains the Jewish mother's special care for her son as a result of the trauma they experienced in the Pale of Settlement, where Jewish boys were kidnapped and forcefully conscripted into the army, in which they had to serve for the next twenty-five years: "understandable in view of the Jewish experience in eastern Europe, where Jewish children who wandered off might never be seen again [...] The life pattern of centuries was not readily broken in America" (82). Although the mother never asks directly for love, she expects her son to express his gratitude since she is ready to sacrifice her happiness and overlook her own desires for the benefit of her beloved son. By installing in her son's mind a feeling of irreparable guilt, she manages to control his life and ascertains his obedience.

Paradoxically, it is her son who, as author, often presents her in a stereotypical and satirical way, as done by Clifford Odets in *Awake and Sing!* (1935), Bruce Jay Freedman in *A Mother's Kisses* (1964), Dan Greenburg in *How To Be a Jewish Mother* (1964), Philip Roth in *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), and Wallace Markfield in *Teitlebaum's Window* (1970). The Jewish mother, whose sacrifice was appreciated and welcomed on the way to assimilation, was later viewed as domineering and oppressive. The opening words of Philip Roth's novel show how important the mother figure was for the protagonist: "She was so deeply imbedded in my consciousness that for the first year of school I seem to have believed that each of my teachers was my mother in disguise" (1). Alex is the apple of his mother's eye: "Of me, the heir to her long Egyptian nose and clever babbling mouth, of me my mother would say, with characteristic restraint, 'This *banditt*? He doesn't even have to open a book–'A' in everything. Albert Einstein the Second!" (2). Mother "is vying with twenty other Jewish women [from the same apartment building] to be the patron saint of self-sacrifice" (15). She fills her life with baking, grating her

own horse-radish, sewing, knitting, darning, ironing, watching the butcher "to be certain that he didn't forget to put her chopped meat through the kosher grinder" (11), and lighting candles for the dead. "She is never ashamed of her house" (12); "where health and cleanliness are concerned, germs and bodily secretions, she will not spare herself and sacrifice others" (11). Her love is overpowering when she smothers her son with attention:

> Open your mouth. Why is your throat red? Do you have a headache you're not telling me about? You're not going to any baseball game, Alex, until I see you move your neck. Is your neck stiff? Then why are you moving it that way? You ate like you were nauseous, are you nauseous? Well, you ate like you were nauseous. (36)

Both of Alex's parents are presented as "outstanding producers and packagers of guilt" (39), but it is his mother who is "a master really at phrasing things just the right way to kill you," such as: "I don't love you any more, not a little boy who behaves like you do" (14-15). A child's upbringing in a post-war Jewish home involves a whole set of rules and regulations: "The hysteria and the superstition! The watch-its and the be-carefuls! You mustn't do this, you can't do that– hold it! don't you're breaking an important law!" (37). That is why Alex blames his parents for becoming "morbid and hysterical and weak" (40): "this is my life, my only life, and I'm living it in the middle of a Jewish joke! I am the son in the Jewish joke–*only it ain't no joke*!" (39-40). Alex Portnoy blames his Jewish mother for his impotence and all other misfortunes which happen to him, and, in consequence, decides to avoid all Jewish women, a strategy to ensure his contentment. He consequently pursues gentile women as objects of his love, exact opposites of his mother in terms of appearance, speech, manners, and worldview. Thus, he emulates an assimilative path for immigrant Jews for whom marriage to a non-Jewish woman was seen as the final step and reward for successful assimilation.

Because the accompanying father figure is virtually transparent and yields no formal control or authority, the Jewish mother stereotype testifies to the failure of traditional patriarchy in American Jewish acculturated families in the post-war period. The Jewish father took little active part in raising his children because he was mainly a provider: "This man, my father, is off somewhere making money, as best he is able" (49). Alex refers to him as the man with whom his mother sleeps and who "lives with us at night and on Sunday afternoons. My father they say he is" (49). Father's ambition is to maintain his family's middle-class life-style, which usually comes down to providing financial security:

> In that ferocious and self-annihilating way in which so many Jewish men of his generation served their families, my father served my mother, my sister Hannah,

> but particularly me. Where he had been imprisoned, I would fly: that was his dream. Mine was its corollary: in my liberation would be his–from ignorance, from exploitation, from anonymity. (7)

His family's well-being is his personal reward, even if he had originally imagined his life differently. It is interesting to note that the post-war comic representation of the Jewish family differs from the American model in portraying "the father [who] is weak and almost invisible, the mother [who] is dominating and all-powerful, while the son assumes the ambiguous role of a glorious victim [...] of his mother's solicitude" (Stora-Sandor 137) [my translation].

The second generation of American-born and acculturated Jews no longer needs a controlling mother who gives herself to her children and demands their reciprocation. Jokes about the Jewish mother started when children–mostly the second generation of American-born sons–did not need her attention anymore. "She is charged both with expressing too much love, thus delaying the son's individuation, and with expressing too much criticism, thus undermining his self-confidence" (Ravits 7). Mother's unrelenting care was perceived as tyranny, she was "the all-engulfing nurturer who devours the very soul with every spoonful of hot chicken soup she gives, whose every shakerful of salt contains a curse" (Duncan 231). And what better way to challenge her, if not laughter. Jokes spread the stereotype of the nagging Jewish mother beyond ethnic borders, providing a common ground for Jewish and non-Jewish men: the figure of an oppressive mother with whom any man could identify, and a common representation that could jeopardize masculinity. Antler asserts that "[a] crucial ingredient in this phenomenon was the misogynist message that coded unacceptable behavior as female rather than Jewish" (143). Jewish culture allowed men to be emotionally expressive, which in terms of American manhood was seen as a sign of weakness.

> Deprived of political independence and, in most places, of the right to bear arms, Jewish men denigrated physical prowess as a cultural ideal. Instead, they cultivated intellectual and spiritual pursuits. They expressed their masculinity in the synagogue and in the house of study, not on the battlefield. (Hyman, "The Jewish Family" 25)

Hence, the Jewish mother stereotype passed from marginal–distinctively Jewish–to mainstream American discourse, introducing masculinity as a common standpoint for Jewish and non-Jewish men. In consequence, it allowed a mutual identification for Jewish and American representations of manhood, which until then had differed considerably.

To borrow Joyce Antler's title *You Never Call, You Never Write*, mother's complaint suggests the tension between the expectations of grown up children, who are ready to leave the family's nest, and abandoned parents, who are not ready for the separation. Hence, the stereotype acquires a universal dimension serving as a model for the parent-child relationship. The mother's role here is especially complicated, as she must cope with the conflicting agendas: on the one hand, she must ensure and protect her child's safe growth, but, on the other hand, she must know when to let go so as not to impede the child's natural development. The Jewish mother stereotype exemplifies the case when one party fails to acknowledge the necessity of separation, and the other fails to realize its origins. The Jewish mother jokes dwell on the boundaries which separate motherhood from overbearance, and love from harassment. As they are narrated from the child's perspective, mother is the scapegoat for the child's unsuccessful passage from childhood to adulthood. Consequently, she is later blamed for failures in his or her adult life. The parent-child universal tug-of-war for self-independence and authority found a unique realization in an American Jewish context of post-war America.

In the post-war period acculturated Jews quickly learned that, in spite of their remarkable social ascent, they were still socially ignored by their non-Jewish neighbors. External indicators of middle-class life, which were relatively easy to acquire in the booming post-war economy, proved not to be enough to ensure Jewish social inclusion. "The overall economic success of Jews as a class in the United States, the jealousy others have felt over this success, and the discomfort this success creates in Jews who are fearful of living out the stereotype of the 'rich Jews'" (Torton Beck 93) found a safety valve for their anxieties in the creation of the stereotype of the Jewish mother. Since the figure of the wife had long been a subject of Jewish humor, the Jewish mother became the most popular character of American Jewish jokes until the 1970's. In the 1940's, the sentimentalized yidishe mame was transformed into a martyr whose willingness to sacrifice everything for her family was only equaled by her talent to induce her children's guilt and repress her husband. The key elements of the Jewish mother's representation were her labor and activity, measured against the amount of pressure she was capable of exerting on her family in order to achieve her goals.

The Jewish mother became the embodiment of what non-Jews viewed as the worst traits connected with ethnic identity, especially those signifying her failure at complete assimilation: the Yiddish accent, the ethnic manner, and a lack of understanding of dominant cultural mores. The more she encourages her son to Americanize, the more she herself becomes alien to him, thus becoming a burden that might hinder his acceptance by mainstream society. As a reminder

of his immigrant origins, she becomes the source of his shame and embarrassment: "By virtue of gender and generation, [she] functioned as a scapegoat for self-directed Jewish resentment about minority status in mainstream culture" (Ravits 4). Pronounced as "being too Jewish," and thereby branded with "Otherness," the Jewish (m)other stereotype marks an important phase in the Jewish transition from immigrant to "native" American status, and reflects in-group self-hatred, misogyny, and antisemitism. Undesirable qualities from both American and Jewish backgrounds were channeled into the collective image, in which the female aspect coincided with ethnicity. "Roth, like other contemporary male novelists, projected into the Jewish mother the negative features of 'Otherness'–Old World backwardness, loudness, vulgarity, clannishness, ignorance and materialism" (Antler 143). As the stereotype is ensconced somewhere between minority and dominant group, it projects the meaning that encompasses both spheres of power. Therefore, as Riv Ellen Prell points out, "scholars of stereotypes [...] understand them most often to be projections onto the minority of the dominant group's fantasies about its own needs and desires" (Prell, *Fighting* 12). Anxiety, which appears at the intersection of ethnicity, gender, and assimilation, reinforces the sense of Otherness. Consequently, the key to the viability of the Jewish mother stereotype may be located elsewhere: "[s]erving as icons for many of the criticisms of American life–permissiveness, indulgence, and a focus on consumption" (Prell, *Fighting* 162), Jews came to realize that the nature of criticism was not necessarily ethnically or religiously related, but represented the anxiety of American society at the time of its post-war transformation. Having been the latest and most spectacularly successful addition to middle class society, Jews fell victims to social prejudice, which surfaced at this time of social and cultural change taking place in America after World War II.

Apart from overtly male-authored representations of Jewish motherhood, the 1950's also witnessed female authors who put the mother figure in the center of their narratives. Authors such as Grace Paley and Tillie Olsen portray working-class Jewish mothers and their concerns related to the generation gap in immigrant families, gender roles, and working class issues. Contrary to male writers who tend to engage in general dilemmas, they focus on trifling, yet, sometimes suffocating, details of everyday life, on social activism, and the need for artistic creativity. The gender and ethnic lens provides additional perspective, which helps to interrogate what it means to be an ethnic and working-class mother in post-war America. The female world presented in Paley's and Olsen's works differs from the middle-class venues inhabited by acculturated and financially secure families such as the Portnoys. A sense of responsibility both to Jewish heritage, community, and family is the overarching

thread guiding the narratives, even though it often comes at odds with the protagonists' own desires. It is no longer a one-sided portrait of the woman who is defined and judged only in relationship to one aspect of her life–motherhood. Paley and Olsen address ambivalence and frustration, as elements of motherhood, and they draw attention to the female protagonist who falls victim to social and gender expectations. A strong feminist agenda in, for example, Olsen's "Tell Me a Riddle" (1961), validates women's lives beyond domesticity, allowing them to pursue their own dreams. Even if they are embedded with radicalism, Paley's and Olsen's heroines become harbingers of feminism, which invites women to articulate their own needs. Jewish women who want more in life than to be good mothers provide a counterpoint to more satirized and male versions of post-war motherhood.

The Jewish mother stereotype as a cultural construct entered American letters in the 1960's, coinciding with the second wave of feminism that swept the country. The woman's agenda gained importance together with other social and political movements of the time. Feminist theory provided innovative analytical tools to discuss the Jewish mother stereotype, combining the study of Jewish tradition with the critical tools offered by a feminist lens. In feminist rhetoric, the Jewish mother stereotype embodies the idea of double oppression: as a woman and an ethnic. Such an approach is especially interesting since the majority of literary representations of the popular staple are of male authorship. The cultural resilience of the stereotype can be attributed to its overtly male perspective, which flowed with the dominance of male authors characterizing the American literary scene of the post-war period (Saul Bellow, Philip Roth, Bernard Malamud, I. B. Singer). Hence, the stereotype is so compelling because it targets two vital elements, which are essential to its construction. On the one hand, the female character, both aggressive and selfish, threatens to emasculate male authority and questions gender roles, which are prescribed and sustained by the dominant patriarchy. "[T]he stereotype dovetailed so effectively with archetypes of the dangerous female, usurper of patriarchal power, just when women seemed on the verge of becoming newly dangerous and politicized through the women's movement" (Ravits 5). On the other hand, the ridicule and scorn accompanying its literary representations and a collection of jokes about the Jewish mother, which are still in circulation, aim to undermine an ethnic woman's authority. "What's the difference between a Rottweiler and a Jewish mother?", asks one: "Eventually, the Rottweiler lets go." The gender-inflected criticism conveys the message that codes her incongruous behavior as female, whereas, her Jewishness reinforces and broadens the stereotype's appeal across social and ethnic barriers, bearing responsibility for its lasting impact on American consciousness.

Young Jewish women involved in the feminist movement had to negotiate their own response to motherhood, which was first filtered through their relationships with their mothers, and later modified through their own experiences as mothers. The changing construction of motherhood reflected ideological shifts within the women's liberation movement as well as changes inside the Jewish community. At first, the activist daughters rebelled against their mothers as role models, against the frustration brought on by limited possibilities of self-realization, beyond family life. "In this respect, they resembled Betty Friedan, who admitted that she wrote her landmark book, *The Feminine Mystique*, in order to distance herself from her mother" (Antler 150). Radical feminists, such as Shulamith Firestone, author of *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), rejected biological motherhood and called for engineered reproduction. Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970) offered sisterhood as an alternative to motherhood: "A metaphor for friendship and mutual relations between women, sisterhood freed women from the necessities of pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation" (Antler 155). Jane Alpert's manifesto "Mother Right" (1974) promoted women's collective power as a new avenue to social liberation; "[i]n their roles as mothers [...] women could act as the 'vanguard' of the revolution that could end their oppression and reshape society in the image of the new 'matriarchal family'" (Antler 159). Anger at their own mothers often initiated and later fuelled radical and feminist sentiments but also allowed second-wave daughters to come to terms with their own personal anxieties. Those activists who became mothers not only had to integrate motherhood with feminism, but also to confront their more radical sisters. Jane Lazarre in *The Mother Knot* (1976) introduced a new genre of feminist writing, which redefined the concept of motherhood, combining uniquely female personal experience with feminist ideology. In the 1980's and 1990's, the academic focus shifted from rebellion against mother's values to more ethnically universal theories of motherhood: "these theorists, like most second-wave Jewish feminists, did not publicly identify with their Jewish mothers–and rarely as Jews at all" (Antler 165). Adrienne Rich coined a concept of "matrophobia"–the fear of becoming the stereotypical Jewish mother, which explains the Jewish daughters' unwillingness to acknowledge their ethnic roots. Feminism instigated a gamut of responses to the concept of motherhood, which confirmed its continuous validity in the lives of daughters, who grappled with the label of overbearing Jewish mothers. By virtue of being both female and Jewish, second-wave feminists were summoned to identify the common agenda among conflicting motifs, which would validate the experience of motherhood and reclaim the Jewish woman's self-esteem.

Another reason why the Jewish mother stereotype has become so firmly ingrained in the popular imagination may be attributed to the fact that it specifically appeared in those areas where Jewish culture made a strong impact on mainstream American culture. Jewish entertainers chose representations of the Jewish mother to be the focus of their repertoire and the aim of their satire. Jewish writers and film-makers used the figure of the Jewish mother for the purposes of self-mockery, which was meant to ease the anxiety connected with their rapid social advancement. Representatives of stand-up comedy, such as Irwin Corey, the so-called Jewish Borsch Belt Comedians working in the Catskill Mountains resorts, Mel Brooks, Jerry Lewis, Milton Berle, and later filmmakers, such as Woody Allen, exploited and perpetuated the image translating their anguish into humor. Due to the popularity of their comedy routines, they entered the mainstream culture, becoming its vital and vibrant components. In consequence, "the figure of the domineering mother in America came to be labeled specifically as a "'Jewish mother' in the public consciousness" (Ravits 4). The reason why it happened so smoothly may be attributed to the fact that the popular topos attracts misogyny, which is visible in both American and Jewish patriarchies. Joyce Antler concludes: "A far-reaching and effective medium, comedy is in large part responsible for making the negative Jewish mother stereotype so pervasive and disproportionately popular" (5).

Next to the Jewish American Princess, which is a later addition, the Jewish mother stereotype has become the most popular representation of Jewish women in American culture. The story of the latter is the story of American Jews, whose experiences chronicle their social mobility: from immigration and assimilation, to postwar consumer society, and the nascence of feminism. Diverse images of Jewish mothers become the focal point around which Jewish anxieties and worries connected with American success are confronted. Today, even though the circumstances leading to the construction of this stereotype have long lost their grip, the Jewish mother stereotype continues to appear in the popular media and as topic of scholarly debates. In so doing, it demonstrates that the elements which contribute to its creation continue to allure contemporary audiences. In other words, the Jewish mother stereotype manages to respond to social changes across gender and ethnic boundaries, in a way that ensures its persistent viability.

1.6 The Jewish American Princess (the JAP)

The stereotype of the Jewish American Princess (JAP) emerged in the 1960's and 1970's in America during the time of contestation and adjustment. A liberal government and economic prosperity helped to facilitate a climate for social change, spearheaded by young Americans who began to question their parents' authority and challenge the existing values. As a reaction to the conformity and materialism of the 1950's, Americans exercised their right to freedom of speech and engaged in various protests, addressing problems such as civil rights and abrogation of discrimination on the basis of race, gender, social class, and economic standing. Proponents of the counterculture advocated for the idea of detachment from existing social conventions and traditional modes of authority. Experiments with drugs, sex, and identity were to help construct alternative ways of life. Although the participants assigned primacy to individuality at the expense of social norms, they also helped to widen social awareness by promoting such ideas as peace, love, and altruism. The civil rights movement extended the rights of full citizenship to individuals regardless of race, ethnicity, or sex. The antiwar movement attracted members from college campuses and middle-class suburbs, labor unions and government institutions, uniting them in opposition to the Vietnam War. Second-wave feminism brought public attention to women's reproductive rights and the problem of workplace equality. Attitudes toward female sexuality, especially outside the boundaries of heterosexual marriage, were changing. The acceptance of birth control pills, which gave women greater control over their lives by separating sex from procreation, changed ways of thinking about domestic and sexual roles of women in society. Gay rights movements increased social tolerance for homosexuality. Patriarchy and traditional gender roles were challenged, instigating heated social and religious debates across class, ethnic, and gender divides.

For American Jews, this was a time of diminishing antisemitism and growing prosperity of the Jewish suburban middle-class. Notably, the JAP stereotype is ensconced in the middle-class experience of successful Jews and, as such, signals the final stage of Jewish Americanization. Since the 1960's, it has become the predominant Jewish gender stereotype, which occasionally shares public interest with the Jewish mother. The JAP represents a young Jewish woman that is no longer under her Protestant neighbors' scrutiny, nor does she feel the need to justify her status–the anxieties of assimilation and acculturation are a thing of her past. As a representation of Jews' recent affluence and social mobility, the JAP has been the topic of jokes and the protagonist of novels and comedy routines, and her image appeared on T-shirts and greeting cards. What is different from other gendered representations,

though, is that this stereotype is not entirely of male authorship, as some women endorsed and perpetuated the image by purchasing commercial JAP commodities. The concept of the JAP is difficult to contain, as it cannot be reduced to a singular configuration of traits: there are actually women, not necessarily of Jewish origin, who admit to being "Jewish American Princesses."[8] Seen as a social construct that has no direct bearing on reality, the JAP stereotype defines any woman who enters the middle-class and performs certain rituals. Thus, the JAP is not only one characteristic, but a collection of qualities, to use Rive-Ellen Prell's words–a "detachable identity," which can be assigned or adopted. Its derogative connotation is revealed when it is used to label a certain unwelcome female characteristic and challenges to others. But, when a woman deliberately calls herself a JAP, she expresses her pride in the lifestyle, which she has chosen to embrace. JAP-baiting on college campuses in 1987 commenced a successful awareness campaign against this gender slur. In particular, Jewish feminists drew attention to the danger of such insults towards young women, and its social reception. Consequently, after this kind of awareness-raising activity, the market for JAP merchandise decreased considerably in the 1990's.

The JAP stereotype functions as a way to accommodate three characteristics: that of a young female, a Jew, and the specificity of the American milieu. It "single[s] out certain qualities in women, characterize[ing] them in the first place as unattractive and, in the second, as specifically Jewish" (Baum 236). The JAP is portrayed as a self-centered and assertive woman who is obsessed with the possession and acquisition of luxurious goods, which define her high material and social status. She craves luxury, which is only possible through the constant acquisition of the latest symbols of affluence, such as designer clothes, jewelry, cars, neighborhoods, and vacation resorts. The JAP represents a selfish and spoiled girl whose privileged social position makes her a desirable companion for others. Young women of lesser means who try to copy their idol are especially susceptible to her charms. Although her level of education is rather average, she is cunning enough to always get her way. The JAP uses her social power, which is represented by fashionable clothes and stylish accessories, a carefree lifestyle, and an unfailing conviction of one's worth to have her way. The American part of the acronym signals the United States as the place where such spectacular social mobility, as exemplified by American Jews, is possible. The JAP no longer needs to emulate others or prove her own worth in American eyes, as she has become the American paragon of

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[8] According to *The Official J.A.P. Handbook* (1982) by Anna Sequoia, one does not have to be Jewish or American to be a JAP.

consumption. Her lavish lifestyle, which testifies to her affluence, is the poor immigrant's American Dream come true; she is what she is wearing, eating, where she lives, and how she spends her leisure time.[9] Over the years, the term has come to represent a materialistically oriented and presumably spoiled Jewish woman, who has lost her ethnicity to become the embodiment of American consumerism. Both despised and craved, criticized and endorsed, the JAP has become an important element of contemporary American Jewish culture.

The first part of the acronym signals ethnicity as an important aspect of the JAP stereotype. In the Eastern European shtetl, Jewish daughters suffered an inferior position, compared to that of the sons, whereas in 1970-1980's America, it is the Jewish daughter who is smothered with attention and money. However, the JAP has no interest in Judaism, and she attends the synagogue only to parade her new diamond ring or a designer outfit. Her Jewishness is not explicit but manifests itself in certain traits, which evoke the previously discussed obstacles that a Jewish woman encountered on the path to Americanization. The JAP is obsessed with her appearance, especially her weight, which is watched carefully, as she is in constant need of dieting–the reminder of early 20th-century representations of Jewish women as stout in comparison to the slender American ideal. She has probably had her nose done and hair straightened and dyed blonde, as well. The JAP tends to buy on sale or through wholesale, looking for a bargain. These tactics supposedly prove her suppressed Jewish nature–miserly and shrewd, which cannot be entirely concealed under the fragile shell of her assimilated persona. American women who look for a bargain are called frugal and practical, whereas, the JAP stereotype brings ethnic prejudice to attention. The JAP's awareness of sexuality and skillful manipulation of men around her–first her father, then husband–evokes 19th-century images of a beautiful but dangerous Jewess-seductress, who poses a threat to the established notions of family. Her childlessness suggests sheer bodily pleasure without the burden of procreation, defying both Judaism and patriarchy. Prell observes that "[t]he passive body may be most closely connected to the idealized Victorian woman who, though married, found activity in general, and sexuality in particular, distasteful" (*Why Jewish* 339). Her non-productiveness is also expressed by the love of bodily

[9] It is an allusion to Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) where she claims that gender is not essential, but constructed through performance; gender is something one does, not something one is, a sequence of repeated acts "within a highly rigid regulatory frame" that finally produce "the appearance of substance" (32-33).

adornment, especially heavy make-up and excessive, preferably diamond, jewelry. Prell makes a connection between the subverted idea of labor and the JAP image:

> Encoded in the Jewish woman's passive and adorned body is the very paradox of middle class work. The highly decorated surface rests upon an unproductive foundation. Indeed, the woman's body absorbs labor and investment without, in the parodied image, production or reproduction. (*Why Jewish* 344)

Thus, by evoking images of Jewish women that found criticism in American eyes, the JAP stereotype echoes the undesirable and problematic traits associated with the Jewish ascent to the middle class. The JAP embodies Jews' anxiety about their acceptance in American society signaling "the dangers of a Jewish woman who had distorted the rewards of mobility by her excess and dependence" (Prell, *Fighting* 190). Just like the previous gendered stereotypes of the ghetto girl and the Jewish mother, JAP jokes demonstrate that even though acculturated Jews melted into the American middle-class and have become the symbol of social mobility and affluence that only America could offer, there are still gendered elements that are classified as negative and Jewish, which somehow still undermine the group's success. In Prell's words: "[s]he represented the dangers of Jewish difference (the Jew in the Princess) and desire (the Princess in the Jew) that were both excessive" (*Fighting* 198). Whether such representations of the JAP result from antisemitism or misogyny, ethnic prejudice or sexism, they all signal femininity as an important characteristic, and make it responsible for its negative connotation.

The JAP stereotype emerged at the time when notions of class, race, gender, and sexuality were being redefined. Jewish marriage patterns were changing as antisemitism decreased, creating a good environment for inter-ethnic marriages. "In the early 1960's only 10 percent of Jews intermarried with 20 percent of the gentile partners going over to Judaism. By the late 1980's the rate of intermarriage was over 50 percent and only 10 percent of the partners converted" (Norden qtd. in Davies 85). JAP jokes are the response to the anxiety that arose between the feeling of duty towards Judaism, which meant marrying a nice Jewish girl/boy, and the desire to favor personal preferences in the choice of marital partners. By presenting Jewish women as controlling and demanding, Jewish men found an excuse to marry shikses, portrayed as the antithesis of the Jewish female: gentle and docile. What is more, the "nice Jewish girl" too often resembles the stereotypical Jewish mother, thus threatening Jewish men with the prospect of living their lives under permanent control.

Similarly to the Jewish mother stereotype, the JAP is described in terms of her materialism, consumerism, and acquisitiveness: the features connected with Jewish integration into the American middle class. The Jewish mother and the JAP share the determination to promote marriage, assertiveness, and male criticism, but what the mother was criticized for (her excessive and guilt-inflicting care for her family) the JAP completely lacks (she is self-absorbed and indulges her own needs). The mother's focus on the family disappears to give rise to an individual and gendered egocentrism of a young woman. The mother is nurturing and giving, even excessively, and demands the children's gratitude in return. The JAP, on the contrary, expects to be provided for without even thinking about reciprocating to her family, especially with regard to her daddy's attention. The mother's care results in her relentless work for and attention towards her family. Never questioning the purpose of her sacrifice, she devotes her whole life to maintaining a perfect household. Contrary to mother's productivity, the JAP is only a consumer: she takes without giving. She does not earn a living or provide for her family, nor does she perform household chores, which she regards as a waste of time. The JAP represents "ill-gotten affluence purchased through the subjugation of the labors of others" (Prell, *Fighting* 189). A well-known JAP joke demonstrates the point: "What does a JAP make for dinner? Reservations." Her ideal house is 6000 square feet with no kitchen and no bedroom[10]. Men are driven away by her unquenchable thirst for luxury and the fear that they would not be able to ever satisfy her needs.

As in the characterization of the Jewish mother stereotype in which there is a special link between mother and son, the JAP has a specific relationship with her father, which lies at the core of her persona. The JAP shares her mother's desire to see her daughter enter into successful matrimony, but it is her father with whom she enjoys a really strong relationship. The middle-class mother, who is a housewife, cannot provide adequate financial support, so the JAP resorts to the breadwinner–the father. She is used to having her material wishes satisfied, but she is not interested to know where the money to pay her bills comes from. It is her wealthy, doting father (a businessman, a doctor, or a lawyer), or equally moneyed husband, without whose financial success, she would never have been able to enjoy material privilege. The dependent JAP does not exist without men who make it possible for her to maintain a lavish lifestyle. She takes it for granted that she is being taken care of by the men in

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[10] Examples of Jewish jokes can be found in: Larry Wilde. *The Last Official Jewish Joke Book.* New York: Pinnacle Books, 1980, Maude Thickett. *Outrageously Offensive Jokes*. New York: Pocket Books, 1984, William Novak and Moshe Waldoks. *The Big Book of Jewish Humor*. New York: Harper and Row, 1981.

her life. And it is her father who first indulges "his little girl's" every wish, confirming the conviction of her privileged position. Theirs is a mostly financial relationship, with the well-defined roles of a benefactor and a beneficiary. The JAP's stereotype puts in focus her economic dependence, as a substitute for family ties, which trades parental/spousal love for money. What is more, the JAP insists on maintaining her affluent lifestyle at a time when post-war affluence was already declining, thus singling out American Jews as a group somehow resistant to economic regression.

Although she expects her husband to take over her father's task of footing her bills, there is another angle to her marital relationship. She is presented both as sexually manipulative and frigid; in Dundes's words, she is generally "indifferent to sex and she is particularly disinclined to perform fellatio" (461). She refuses oral sex because symbolically it would put her in the subordinate position of a giver of pleasure, stooping and yielding to her husband's will. She is seen as sexually timid, which might suggest her chastity and innocence, but it is rather a result of her acquired behavior, which she performs because it brings certain benefits. Her reluctance to engage in sexual activities is presented in the following joke about the Jewish definition of foreplay: it is either two hours of begging or when the Jewish man pays for her shopping spree. JAP jokes portray her as sexually passive to the extreme of being mistaken for a dead person, like in the following example: "Mildred and I had doggy sex last night. I sat up and begged and she rolled over and played dead." Her intimate moments are devoid of touch and affection and seem to be a temporary inconvenience to be put up with. The JAP can neither experience nor give pleasure: "How do you know when a JAP has had an orgasm? She drops her nail file." She can be excited only by the prospect of getting more luxurious goods: "How do you tickle a JAP? Gucci, Gucci, Goo." And her favorite position is the one "Facing Bloomindale's." Prell observes that "[t]he Jewish woman's profound reluctance to participate in sex or to be an animated partner who experiences or gives pleasure is central to her cultural representation. She is inactive in the domestic realm–both the kitchen and the bedroom" (*Why Jewish* 334). As she avoids marital sex, she is not a mother. Childlessness enables her a self-centered position and undisturbed consumption, even though it is against the fundamental principles of Judaism, which put emphasis on the prolongation of the Jewish race. Since the JAP's lifestyle defies traditional Judaism, it becomes a source of intra-ethnic criticism.

The JAP can manipulate her sexuality in order to influence her husband, as sex is a means for her to get what she wants. Whether she grants or retracts sexual favors is connected with how well her man finances her needs. The humor of JAP jokes does not exist without the figure of the victimized Jewish

man who complements the picture. He is emasculated and helpless in the face of her excessive want. Patriarchy is not the dominant order in this relationship, as he neither exercises control over his wife, nor is able to demand her obedience. The JAP is not, however, presented as adulteress, so when she refrains from marital sex, she does not engage in extra-marital affairs either. An ability to control her sexuality makes her the daughter of the 1960's cultural and sexual revolution, signaling a person who is confident about her own femininity. A pretty, young, and chic woman is an embodiment of male sexual desires, and her awareness of this fact gives her leverage in relationships with her partners. JAP representations provide a conflicting picture: she is both chastised and sought after by her male suitors, and her sexuality is accepted and criticized, depending on whether or not it conforms to a male vision of womanhood.

In literature, the concept of the JAP functions as a discursive stereotype, which manifests itself in a network of multifaceted ideas that produce meaning. Stereotypes of groups reduce the definition of that group to only one aspect, regardless of the group members' distinctive individual features. In the case of the JAP, there is no single definition of what it means to be a JAP; instead, different characteristics related to young, wealthy, and snobbish Jewish girls may match the label. Alan Dundes enumerates those traits of the JAP that are consistent with her stereotypical image: "The J.A.P. is spoiled, and spoiled rotten. She is excessively concerned with appearance. She diets. She may have had a nose job [...] She worries about her fingernails. She is interested in money, shopping, and status." (461). These qualities, however, do not work in isolation but are reinforced by social structure, whose components solidify the stereotype. JAP discourse reflects the production of knowledge about Jewish girls on individual and communal level. JAP characteristics are conflicting and present her as both dependent (on her father's or husband's money) and independent (controlling and calculating in voicing her needs), both active and passive (especially when she regulates her sexual favors), consuming and nonproductive (she spends money but she does not earn a living). Prell notices that "paradoxically, the JAP's threat of entrapment developed not at the height of Jewish women's dependence, but during their growing economic independence" (*Fighting* 201). Hence, the image of the JAP responds to male concerns about the scope of female empowerment.

Prototypes of the JAP are Marjorie Morningstar, from Herman Wouk's 1955 novel, and Brenda Patimkin, from Philip Roth's *Goodbye Columbus* (1959). Despite Marjorie Morgenstern's striving for a rich husband and material affluence, she is not a typical JAP, as she also wants to be a fulfilled and happy woman. The man she falls for is Noel Airman, whose Christianized first name and Americanized surname suggest his break from the ancestral faith. Noel is

culturally uprooted, he rejects his father's (who is a judge) authority, his family's affluent lifestyle, and Judaism to pursue an artistic career. Unfortunately, his quest for freedom and self-realization becomes illusory, and he ends up trapped in a tricky marriage. Marjorie finally realizes the emptiness of his artistic persona, which is expressed in his name: an airman is a man suspended in the air, blown about by the shifting winds of circumstance. A *luftmensh* in Yiddish signals an absent-minded intellectual, whose thoughts are far away from mundane problems. Marjorie's final decision to reject Noel Airman's proposal of matrimony reveals the conscious decision of an adult woman who has taken charge of her own life. However, marrying a successful professional and becoming Mrs. Milton Schwartz, a conventional Jewish wife and mother, fulfills Noel's prediction that she will turn into another "Shirley"– the earlier manifestation of the JAP.

Philip Roth's Brenda Patimkin, on the other hand, is portrayed in a less sympathetic way as a spoiled brat who manipulates her father and criticizes her mother for, for example, shopping in cheaper stores than Brenda believes she deserves. "Brenda represents the trap of domesticity; her material demands are antagonistic to the idealistic ambitions of the man who has the misfortune to fall in love with her" (Baum 253). Other popular representations of the JAP include Goldie Hawn in *Private Benjamin* (1980), Fran Drescher in *The Nanny* series (1993-1999), Alicia Silverstone as Cher Horowitz in *Clueless* (1995), and Sarah Jessica Parker as Carrie Bradshaw in the *Sex and the City* series (1998-2004). "Chanel Hanukkah," a conceptual piece by Jewish artists Cary Leibowitz and Rhonda Lieberman (1991), assembles Chanel bags, jewelry, and lipstick in the form of a menorah. The artists use designer commodities, which become ritual objects combining American consumer culture and its purchase by ethnic Americans. Isabel Rose published *The J.A.P. Chronicles: A Novel* (2005), which offers a wry look at the glamorous life of upper-middle-class society. Shirley Frondorf in *Death of a "Jewish American Princess": The True Story of a Victim on Trial* (1988) discusses the trial of a Jewish restaurant owner who killed his young wife. His attorneys present him as a victim of the typical JAP– his wife, whose emotional abuse and excessive financial demands drew him to homicide. The man was finally acquitted of the crime he had confessed to committing.

Deconstruction of the JAP stereotype began with the rise of feminist studies and involved explorations of popular culture (Byers 2009), its role within the Jewish family (Baum at al., 1976; Prell, 1998; Byers 2004), and in literature (Dundes, 1985; Prell 1998). Initially, the JAP stereotype was seen as an example of ethnic humor or a seemingly truthful portrayal of young and rich Jewish women. Prell explains that

> [w]ithin the Jewish community a consensus that publicly condemned the image was finally reached following the publication of a 1988 issue of the Jewish feminist magazine *Lilith*, which devoted a section to the discussion of the stereotype and how it was used on college campuses. (*Fighting* 179)

The JAP portrayal was deemed harmful, as it encouraged sexism and antisemitism. Together with the Southern Belle, the WASP Princess, the Valley Girl, and the Kugel,[11] the JAP is synonymous with those who are defined by their sense of entitlement and are regarded to be undeserving of what they have got.

The success of feminist campaigns and growing social resentment of blatant racist and antisemitic remarks contributed to the decline in the circulation of the JAP stereotype in the early 1990's. The late 1990's, however, witnessed its cultural revival. Used by the Jews and non-Jews, the JAP stereotype still appears in American popular culture, even though it is rarely used in a self-referential way: the jokes are told about the JAP, not by the JAP. The title of Alana Newhouse's 2005 article: "The JAP: Reclaim Her or Reject Her?" identifies the choice that young American Jewish women have, with both options stated in the title seen as equally feasible. The present trend deconstructs traditionally negative connotations of the JAP by subjecting its meaning to the scrutiny of modern female identity. In contemporary media representations, the JAP stereotype has been re-read in a way that disrupts its predictable image: "[the JAP's] privilege is no longer just about consumption; her privilege is also about community, intellectualism, creativity, and friendship" (Byers, *Not Just* 64). Julia Appel explains the mechanism as "power-shifting, in which the traditionally disenfranchised exert power by reclaiming slurs and reconstructing them, thereby robbing them of their derogatory punch" (49). It is interesting to notice that the label is mostly being reclaimed by young, self-confident women who are street-smart and cosmopolitan.[12] They consciously "peel away many aspects of the old stereotype–the snobbishness, the dependency on daddy's Amex, the sexual frigidity–and keep [...] well, the shoes and the Chanel" (Newhouse). In a contemporary, global, consumer culture, the need to stand out from the crowd

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[11] According to Belzer (2001), The Valley Girl is the JAP's equivalent on the West Coast. The Kugel is the stereotypical representation of rich and pampered Jewish women in South Africa (Dundes, 1985).

[12] Rebecca Starkman's 2010 M.A. Thesis: "Revisiting the Jewish American Princess: Jewish Girls, the J.A.P. Discursive Stereotype, and Negotiated Identity" explores the ways in which contemporary Jewish girls use the JAP stereotype to mediate their own identities.

may be manifested by adopting and boasting about a sense of privilege, better still if accompanied by some controversy, such as the one connected with the Jews and the idea of material prosperity. There is a danger in reclaiming the JAP stereotype, however, when the intended re-appropriation fails to query the image and, instead, feeds its perpetuation.

1.7 Stereotypic Images of Jewish Women–Final Remarks

Family roles in Jewish households differed considerably from those of their host countries, as Jewish men were considered weaker in comparison with their non-Jewish neighbors. This conviction gave rise to the creation of an image of an effeminate and feeble Jewish male. Aviva Cantor explains the phenomenon:

> All violence had to be eliminated from the behavior of Jewish men to prevent their using it against non-Jews. It is primarily in this specific ban on violence against people outside the group that the Jewish community-as-extended-family dynamics differs from that of the traditional/classic extended family under duress. (81)

Having to conform to the limitations of life in the Diaspora, Jewish men enjoyed more power inside their community, controlling religious, legal, and social aspects of life. The rabbis reinforced this image by defining the notion of manhood "in terms of commitment to and achievement in learning Torah. Thus, they replaced the classic patriarchal definition of masculinity, man-as-macho fighter, with the alternative definition of man-as-scholar" (Cantor 92). Physical strength ceased to be seen as a marker of masculinity, giving priority instead to intellect. Studying the Torah was regarded as a form of spiritual resistance, which was considered necessary to the survival of the Jewish community. As men's work broadened their mind, but did not necessarily increase their income, the Jewish family "could not afford to exclude women from participating in the fierce struggle for economic survival in the Exile" (Cantor 108). Apart from breadwinning, women's responsibility rested on ensuring the notion of the ethical life of the family and community, hence the insistence on female morality.

Immigration to America considerably diminished Jewish women's position in society, as American cultural norms and the middle-class status to which they aspired recognized a woman's role to be based in the home, not at the marketplace. Men reclaimed the responsibility of breadwinning: "In America a man's masculinity was defined in large part by his working and being a breadwinner, and [...] attaining material success from it" (Cantor 170). The last aforementioned quality came to take precedence over Judaism as "the

value of material success was [...] transmogrified into an American Jewish value, as worthy of individual and family sacrifice as learning Torah had once been" (Cantor 170). As women were expected to become "ladies of leisure," they had to consume in order to match up the reference group–the middle class. Consequently, Jews adopted a standard of female beauty, which favored non-Jewish traits such as blonde, straight hair and a slim figure, forcing Jewish women to enter into competition with gentile, especially as "[t]he non-Jewish wife became the ultimate status symbol and trophy for many Jewish men–proof that they had 'arrived'–and a major source of validation of their masculinity" (Cantor 174). Jewish women had to confront these issues balancing between tradition and progress, want and modesty, vulgarity and sophistication, acceptance and derision, Jewish desires and American fears. The ghetto mother and ghetto girl stereotypes reflect these anxieties and map the Jewish road to Americanization through a feminist lens.

Jews' arrival to the middle class testified to their financial success and showed how well they had learned the basic concepts of free-market capitalism. It also illuminated fears of rejection by their non-Jewish neighbors, who were reluctant to socialize with the Jewish nouveau-riches. The Jewish mother stereotype evolved at the junction between inter and intra-ethnic concerns, as a medium through which Jewish men communicated their right of belonging to the middle class. These men were the second generation of Jewish immigrants, well ensconced in America, who no longer needed mothers' protection or attention. Jokes about the Jewish mother, which circulated in post-war America, presented a derogatory image of a nagging and overbearing woman, whose undesirable features might impede her son's success at assimilation and mainstream acceptance. These jokes juxtaposed a vulgar and domineering mother with a gentle and Americanized son, who was ashamed to see how much she was still lacking in terms of manners. The son already knew what the "proper" behavior was, and his jokes poked fun at those incidents that illustrated where his mother still failed to match the American model. This awareness also allowed Jewish men to forge an allegiance with American men and, thus, legitimize their own status within the middle class.

The JAP stereotype maps not only the Jewish passage along the middle-class path to Americanization, but also queries consumer culture, as well as economic and cultural upheavals of the 1970's. Literary heroines of the 1950's such as Marjorie Morningstar and Brenda Patimkin, the early prototypes of the JAP, became the representations of young Jewish women living in post-war America and enjoying middle-class affluence. They are the flip side of both the warm and loving yidishe mame and the nagging but caring Jewish mother, who eagerly sacrificed their own lives for the good of the family. The JAP

> twists Daddy around her little finger and stalks a husband who will support her in the style to which her father has made her accustomed [...] She is trendy, sexy looking, but, alas, frigid. She is tired, she has a headache, sex is inconvenient; she prefers shopping [...] She is a collector of furs, jewelry, and vacations. She loves to entertain but she hates to cook. (Pogrebin 259)

By appealing to Jewish and non-Jewish consumers of popular culture, the JAP came to symbolize Jews' success at upward mobility. At the same time, her image came to represent wealthy and spoiled Jewish girls in search of comfortable marriage and financial security. Such negative representations of Jewish women carry an inherent threat of antisemitism, especially as post-war affluence began to decline towards the 1970's, leaving many families in financial distress. Perpetuating an image of Jewish women as spoiled and money-oriented, so much so that they refused to acknowledge the changing economic situation, invited criticism from more socially and economically conscious parts of American society.

What is interesting, though, is that the JAP's Jewishness is not manifested through religious rituals, which seem to play only a minor role in her life. Young and privileged Jewish women are devoid of specifically Jewish characteristics, both in terms of outer appearance and conduct. The post-war period witnessed a redefinition of Jewishness, which accommodated modern ways of being a Jew in America, and according to which "Jewish identity encompassed more than religious observance and could in fact exist in the absence of religion" (Herman 173). The shift is indebted to the growth of Jewish feminism between the 1960's and 1970's, when greater numbers of women entered into paid labor and began to reject the idea of male religious dominance and the cultural preference for male children. Their attempt to redefine conceptions of Judaism entailed a look at its relationship to gender, identity formation, peer relations, and community. Judaism, however, has definitely remained a vital variable, if not the decisive one, helping to multiply the JAP's possible configurations.

The fact that these stereotypic images of Jewish women were created by men is of great importance, as "the women–daughters of fathers and wives-to-be were conduits through which the males transacted their intergenerational relationship" (Prell, *Cinderellas* 125). By perpetuating the image of a spoiled and demanding Jewish woman, Jewish men voiced an anxiety about their own ability to provide financial security for their families at a time when only men were expected to work. Having to put their own dreams and desires behind the demands of their parents left them unfulfilled and disappointed. That is why "Jewish men construct Jewish women as representations of a vision of American success associated with their parents' dreams for them" (Prell, *Rage*

262). The JAP fulfils her immigrant grand-parents' American Dream and, at the same time, is punished for it. Jewish men rebelled against following in their fathers' footsteps by deriding Jewish women and deeming them undesirable for marriage, especially when juxtaposed with gentile women. Aviva Cantor explains that "Jewish men try to use the Judeophobic misogyny of the "JAP" slander to promote inter-ethnic male bonding by figuring Jewish women as the common enemy of all men and thereby deflect attacks by non-Jewish men against themselves" (251). With the growth of feminist awareness this strategy fires back at the whole Jewish community, as both men and women condemn the institution of marriage as reductive and damaging to their self-development: "Women refuse to be enslaved as prizes for male success and then are unable to move into new families. Men find freedom only by refusing the formation of the family" (Prell, *Cinderellas* 138).

The JAP social stereotype functions on different levels: as a symbol of social power and social conformity. When used by Jews, the JAP slur projects the idea of Jewish self-hatred or internalized antisemitism–a complex and paradoxical way of being Jewish, which involves holding antisemitic views and expressing contempt of one's own people in order to ally with the dominant (American) majority. Both encouraged and criticized, American, but not quite, the assimilated Jews who circulate the JAP stereotype communicate tensions resulting from their success at social mobility and affluence. Hence, the JAP stereotype showcases the class-based anxiety of Jews who worry about acceptance by middle-class America. When used by non-Jews, the JAP label alludes to the whole history of Jewish persecution and serves as a vehicle to further perpetuate antisemitic sentiments. Francine Klagsbrun observes its intrinsic antisemitism:

> In this day, polite Christian society would not openly make anti-Jewish slurs. But JAP is okay. JAP is a kind of code word. It's a way of symbolically winking, poking with an elbow, and saying, 'well, you know how Jews are–so materialistic and pushy.' (11)

There is a strong resemblance between the way the JAP and the "typical Jew" are presented: they are both physically different, greedy, materialistically oriented, manipulative, ungrateful, and untrustworthy. The acronym "JAP" is similar to the racial slur "Jap," which points at American World War II enemies–the Japanese. Thus, the scope of the JAP stereotype surpasses its humorous connotations and moves across ethnic borders to appeal to the whole society, not always in a desirable way–*vide* the feelings of antisemitism and class hatred it may spawn.

As a label used mainly by men to describe women, the JAP is argued to promote sexism and misogyny. It provides a mechanism through which Jewish men vent their own frustrations, such as the family expectations to marry "a nice Jewish girl," the need to explain why they choose to marry a non-Jewish woman, or the worry about whether they will be able to provide for the middle-class family lifestyle. The context of the feminist and women's liberation movements of the 1970's shows the JAP jokes as a reflection of males' own emasculation at the time of (Jewish) women's rising autonomy and empowerment. Dundes offers a different, if somewhat controversial, suggestion that the JAP characteristic can be read as "an expression of wishful thinking among [...] discontented housewives" (470) who realized how miserable and restricted their lives were under the impervious, patriarchal structure. That is why they refuse to perform household duties or grant sexual favors, which aim at satisfying male, rather than female pleasure. Regardless of the ethnic divides, the JAP serves as a metaphor for "*all* upwardly mobile American females who may be dissatisfied with the older traditional norms of a lifestyle demarcated by the duties of mother and wifehood" (Dundes 471; italics in the original). In a self-mocking way, the JAP satirizes sexist roles a woman is assigned in a family; but a self-centered and conniving kvetch as an alternative to a dutiful, middle-class wife does not sound too plausible, either.

No matter how nuanced gender stereotypes are or when in history they appear, the Jewish part of such labels still invokes the same idea of antisemitism, whose aim is to unsettle Jews who might start to feel comfortable and safe among their neighbors. The term "JAP" carries judgment and criticism of Jewish relationships with money, which I believe to be the key element accounting for its incessant popularity. Miriam Stone in "The Shame of the JAP" explains its persistency: "It was once uncool to be Jewish in America because Jews were poor and struggling. Now it's uncool because they aren't. The relationship between Jews and money is always shifting, and always uncomfortable" (31). As the JAP stereotype is by no means a fixed phenomenon, it offers a valuable lens through which to explore contemporary configurations of Jewishness. Studying how it enters into dialogue with earlier gender stereotypes, which traits it rejects, and which it reclaims and redefines, provides a viable tool in the discussion of the contemporary idea of American Jewish womanhood.

Chapter II In Search of Spirituality Within Judaism: An American Jewish Woman's Quest for Divine Love

Contemporary American women writers of Jewish origin are no longer constrained by the demands of their ethnic roots, nor are they expected to explore their "immigrant" identity imposed by the mainstream culture. Problems of immigrant adjustment, which bothered the first generation, and of the second generation's flight from marginality, are no longer key issues of contemporary American Jewish writing. Likewise, the struggle to balance their Americanness and Jewishness must no longer lead to the rejection of one of them. Until the 1960's, American Jews had been eager to assimilate into American society, erasing any distinctive features such as, for example, Yiddish accented language, religious observance, and distinctive physicality, which might have deemed them different from the mainstream majority. In the 1970's, multiculturalism introduced an opposite trend, which promoted ethnic and racial diversity. Since the mainstream ceased to prescribe the norm, the emphasis was shifted to what had been marginal in American society. Hence, interest increased in the relationship between normative Americans and different ethnic groups such as American Jewish, African-American, Native American, and Hispanic, rather than insistence on the historically dominant interaction between ethnic and WASP traditions.

Jewish identities, especially female ones, formed in response to shifting cultural representations of Jewish difference, among which religion plays an important part. One way to define Jewishness is to set it against Judaism; the religious component remains an important element of any American Jewish identity, whether manifested in pious embrace or in indifferent rejection. However, in the case of Jews, it is easy to confuse ethnicity with religious community. An individual account might not necessarily be representative of Judaism as such; in other words, a personal opinion does not have to reflect religious doctrine. One person's experience does not negate the existence of the social character of religion and its ability to characterize a particular group's life; however, the distinction between "I" and "we" must be acknowledged, especially since American Jews' relationship to Judaism often treats the religious element as representative of ethnic expression. Sociologists of American Jewry and novelists have taken up religion as a focus of their own

explorations, hence confirming the fact of the ethnicization of the Judaic religious system. Tracing how female Jewish characters mediate variables between secularism and traditional Orthodoxy enables insight into a complicated process of identity formation. Conflicts between their physical, spiritual, and sexual selves map the areas where the desired meets the expected, and where private becomes public.

Since American Jewish writers are liberated to select their own tools for defining a postmodern identity in the context of American Jewish culture, it is interesting to observe the trend which leads them back to Judaism. As many of them have been brought up in non-Orthodox or secular homes, Judaism offers them a new lens through which they can redefine who they are. This process usually does not embrace Judaism as a whole, but rather they choose some particular aspects, which are filtered and scrutinized under the gaze of literary authorship. Literature parallels and records changes in the social and cultural position of American Jews. Authors such as Anne Roiphe in *Lovingkindness* (1987), Rebecca Goldstein in *Mazel* (1995), Allegra Goodman in *Kaaterskill Falls* (1998) and *Paradise Park* (2001), Tova Mirvis in *The Lady's Auxiliary* (2002) and *The Outside World* (2004), and Jonathan Rosen in *Joy Comes in the Morning* (2004), explore this phenomenon and illustrate different ways in which one may re/discover Jewishness. Whether it is the return to Orthodoxy, a spiritual epiphany, or a conscious adoption of one of the available varieties of Judaism, the novels' focal points dramatize the characters' interest in their religious heritage.

2.1 Judaism and Women: A Difficult Relationship

Contemporary American Jewish women writers regard Judaism as an essential element of their (no longer necessarily hyphenated) identity. As the process of assimilation was closely connected with race, class, and gender, Judaism was also prone to the contesting, adapting, and mixing of diverse assimilative expectations and constraints related to the idea of womanhood. Religious ferment started already in the 18th century when

> [t]he Jews in Germany had introduced confirmation for girls no later than 1818; by 1830 the short-lived Reformed Society of Israelites in Charleston had already emphasized the religious equality of women in the ceremonies of child-naming, marriage, and burial. (Marcus 56)

What followed was that "[b]y the 1840's confirmation for boys and girls had been introduced into New York Orthodox and Reform synagogues" (Marcus 56). In America, the concept of Jewishness as faith changed under the influence of the Protestant majority. "The prime function of the Bar (and, later, Bat)

Mitzvah rite became to call attention to a family's material success, Chanukah to provide children a competitive alternative to the all-pervasive influence of Christmas" (Cantor 167). As church pews were filled with pious Protestant women, assimilated Jewish women were also expected to show their devotion in public. Even though women's sections in synagogues expanded, theirs was a mere token presence for they were excluded from ritual participation.

The embourgeoisement of American Jews encouraged the emergence of Reform Judaism, which altered the Orthodox service. The overall aim of Reform Judaism was to modernize traditional Judaism in such a way that it would meet the religious needs of its acculturated followers and, at the same time, come closer, in terms of service and worship, to mainstream Christian society. As Anglo-Protestant women became the reference model for the Americanization of their Jewish counterparts, the reconfiguration of Jewish women's class and gender roles reached the religious sphere. A prominent rabbi, Isaak M. Wise, having been influenced by novel trends and the growing feminist agitation "wanted the widows, wives, spinsters, and daughters in his congregation to enjoy the same privileges which the Protestants accorded their female members" (Marcus 58). For example, admitting women to the choir and training them to sing was a step in the direction towards broadening their participation in rituals, and the introduction of family pews ended sex segregation in the synagogue. What is more, women were admitted to the *minyan* (the assembly of ten, traditionally male, adults who are necessary for public prayers to take place) and enjoyed better educational opportunities. By the 1970's, this would result in the first women ordained as rabbis[1]. Reform ferment, however, was not a widespread phenomenon as the majority of American Jews were strictly Orthodox and viewed women's greater participation in Judaism and possible ordination as something incompatible with the tradition. That is why Jewish women had to face "a triple hazard: they had to cope with an American community which looked askance at both career women and Jews and they had to fight home, husbands, and a three-thousand-year-old social system" (Marcus 65).

Because of the division between the male public and female private realm, the home was the traditional center of Jewish spirituality and religious education. Viewed as "naturally pious and motivated mainly by concern for others, primarily for her family's well-being in the home" (Hyman, Dash Moore 84), Jewish women were expected to do charitable work (*tzedaka*), which

[1] In 1972, Sally Priesand became the first female rabbi ordained by a rabbinical seminary in the United States. She was the second formally ordained female rabbi in Jewish history after Regina Jonas who was ordained in 1935 in Germany.

developed into the establishment of various charitable organizations and benevolent societies. Because at the end of the 19th century educated Jewish women were not accepted by Christian clubs and societies, they founded the National Council of Jewish Women (1893) in order to offer a platform for Jewish women to express themselves freely. "[T]he largest Jewish woman's organization in the world" (Marcus 93) was Hadassah–the Women's Zionist Organization of America, which was founded by Henrietta Szold in 1912. Its goal was "to further Judaism in this country [the US] and to aid the Jews of the Holy Land" (Marcus 92).

Philanthropic organizations employed female volunteers who helped the sick and the needy, as well as assisted in the ritual preparation of deceased women for burial. Moreover, Jewish women engaged in

> work for slum clearance, low-cost housing, better public schools, child labor laws, juvenile courts, mothers' pensions, uniform marriage and divorce laws, civil service reforms, public health measures, legislative remedies for social ills, and international peace [...] [the establishment of] pre-schools for tots, and programs in public schools; they labored to solve the problem of truancy. They were concerned with golden-age clubs, with "meals on wheels" for the impoverished elderly; they welcomed persecuted German Jewish émigrés, and raised large sums to further education in the State of Israel. (Marcus 89)

Such extensive participation in public activities allowed women to broaden their living space beyond domesticity and facilitated changes resulting from an acculturated life-style. Even though the role of religion gradually diminished in the lives of immigrant Jews, Jewish women's adaptability and flexibility was largely responsible for the preservation of Judaism. A Jewish woman's identification with Judaism was multifaceted; Jacob R. Marcus distinguishes two kinds of Jewish "clubwomen":

> the one was a *Jewish* clubwoman–the other was a *clubwoman* who happened to be Jewish [...]The clubwoman per se was primarily interested in general, civil, humanitarian, and cultural goals; the "Jewish clubwoman" devoted herself primarily to Jews and their problems. (83)

When adopting the early twentieth-century political lens one could notice another division:

> Marxist-minded Jewesses would have no truck with religion; they despised the synagogue and its beliefs and looked with contempt on its male cohorts entrenched in tradition. Politically radical women were often schismatic Jews; anti-religious, anti-Zionist, they were perilously close to being anti-Jewish. (Marcus 122)

No matter how much or little Jewish women adhered to the spirit of Judaism, it was often their decision, especially as mothers, to maintain or abandon the laws of *kashrut* and to encourage or suppress their children's interest in religious observance. This fact made them agents both of change and preservation of Judaism, a claim supported by Fishman's study: "Both statistical studies and my interviews, however, strongly indicate that the cultural and religious impact of a Jewish mother in a home is greater than that of the father" ("Relatively Speaking" 315).

The assimilation and acculturation of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe shifted the traditional family roles: a Jewish man's position deteriorated as he no longer could live a life of an "idle" Talmud scholar, but he had to seek paid employment, often below his ambition, to support the family. Jewish wives, who were often sole breadwinners in the Old World, over time in America had to conform to the concept of the "lady," as defined by Victorian America. Much as the family needed her wages, "[f]or a wife to come under the authority of a male employer or to come into intimate association with strange men in a workroom threatened the husband's domain even though the idea of women's work itself did not" (Glenn 70). It was believed that a married woman's place was at home, so she was discouraged from taking factory jobs but could still participate economically by taking lodgers or piece work at home: "It helped pay the rent, the woman was her own boss, she maintained authority over the household" (Glenn 74). What is more, family small business "entwined itself with daily domestic tasks" (Glenn 77) and did not require women to leave the house, giving an impression that theirs was not a real job, such as a factory job might be. Unlike their mothers or fathers, Jewish daughters could enjoy broader educational, professional, and social opportunities in America than in the Old World. As "the vast majority of unmarried Jewish immigrant women living in American cities worked for wages by the time they were sixteen years old" (Glenn 80), immigrant Jewish families began to depend largely on their unmarried daughters and sons to supplement the family budget.

Securing the factory job posed another dilemma, as they were expected to work on Saturday–the time of the Sabbath. While small sweatshops, whose owners were Jewish, sometimes observed religious Orthodoxy, such allowances were not granted in big factories. Diverse ways in which the women coped with the problem reflect the changing patterns of their adjustment to American life: "For some it posed little conflict, for others it created moral dilemma, and for still others it represented a full-fledged crisis" (Glenn 140). Nonetheless, many young women tried to mediate between total neglect and fervent observance, between the influence of the Orthodox family and economic necessity. The fact is that "strict Orthodoxy was declining in Jewish immigrant communities,

especially among the younger generation" (Glenn 142). Notably, the process did not begin with American assimilation as many young Jewish immigrants from Russia and Poland had already been exposed to radical political opinions that challenged traditional Jewish Orthodoxy.

The twentieth century saw Jewish women comfortably ensconced in American society, especially as they were entering the middle class in large numbers. Education and personal careers provided alternatives to marriage and parenthood. For example,

> [i]n 1920, 26 percent of new teachers were Jews, and a decade later, 44 percent were Jews. By the 1940's and 1950's Jewish women were the vast majority of all public school teachers in New York City, which had at that time the world's largest public school system. (Hyman, Dash Moore 94)

Leaving the city centers for suburban neighborhoods was a sign of Jewish affluence, unmatched by any other ethnic group. The tragedy of the Holocaust and the persistent threat of antisemitism, which manifested itself in the exclusion of Jews from higher education and residential neighborhoods delayed, yet did not interrupt, the assimilative process. The homogenization of the Jewish community was a fact. Jewish women were expected to embrace American gender norms, which expected them to abandon paying jobs once they married. Child rearing and domestic chores became their full-time responsibility. Moreover, they "adopted American mores that placed religion within the feminine domain" (Hyman, Dash Moore 96). Intermarriage and viewing religion as a matter of "one's personal choice" altered the concept of religion and spiritual identity, which has been essential to the idea of Jewishness. That is why Heilman claims that

> Jewish identity for many American Jews [...] is no longer something associated exclusively with religion, long the most acceptable and hence common way American Jews had for characterizing themselves. Instead, Jewish identity seems to have moved increasingly toward ethnicity or heritage and culture, while being 'a good Jew' has been defined in vaguely moral terms. (135)

The rise of Jewish feminism in the 1970's called for the evaluation of the role of women within Judaism, however, at the beginning the activists focused more on women's issues rather than the specifically Jewish ones. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), for example, does not forward the author's or the text's Jewishness allowing women of all ethnic and racial backgrounds to ally with its ideas.[2] In the early years of the feminist movement

[2] "Betty Friedan asserted her Jewishness only a decade or so after the publication of her book, and in response to the United Nation's welcome of Yasir Arafat and her

the feeling of sisterhood and the universality of women's oppression were more important than its insistence on ethnic particularism. Traditional Judaism was viewed then as another example of patriarchy; therefore, one of the objectives of the feminist movement was to evaluate the legacy of rabbinic Judaism, which had been held responsible for chauvinistic repression within the Jewish tradition. The predominantly male representations in liturgy as well as in the scriptures, and the marginal treatment of the matriarchs were subjected to criticism. Although the Hebrew Bible portrays women who are politically active (Deborah), who dare to challenge male authority (Rebecca, Tamar), and who try to find their own path to God (Ruth), their true merit is measured against how well they can "further divine plans and spiritual or nationalistic goals and not merely their personal ambitions" (Fishman, *Follow* 3).

Rabbinic literature presents a predominantly negative image of femininity: "women have been made in historical Judaism to experience themselves as impure, dangerous, and devalued" (Boyarin 153). Rabbinical representations by male authors portray women as dependent on men–as mothers, wives, and daughters who are stripped of autonomy. A need for male control derived from the fact that Jewish women were seen as possessing a passionate and uncontrollable sexual nature, which, in order to be harnessed, required various religious and social arrangements. One example is the enforcement of sexual separation up to seven days due to woman's menstrual periods, which make her responsible for being "unclean" in the eyes of the community. Another one is the silencing of female voices during worship and the delegating of women to separate quarters, so that they do not distract men from prayer. The exclusion of women from the study of Torah, on the one hand, preserved a purely male authority from the pollution by "unclean" femaleness, and, on the other hand, denied women knowledge, which might be further used to question the dogma of male dominance. The female body underwent a special scrutiny in rabbinic eyes, resulting both in rabbis' contempt for and fear of it. For example, procreation was seen as a male domain, with women providing only a body–a vessel to bear a child. The role of motherhood was belittled because "the majority of the rabbis distinguished between procreation as an active male role [...] and bearing children as the female's designated passive purpose" (Baskin 119). Thus, women who were childless had a very low social position.

Rabbinic interpretations tend to denigrate women's roles in the grand scheme of Jewish history, instead accentuating their domestic and child-bearing

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perception of the reemergence of anti-Semitism" qtd. in Deborah Dash Moore "Jewish Feminism Faces the American Woman's Movement" (221).

duties. Fishman's conclusion that the women of the Hebrew Bible "may not necessarily have wanted children but that the patriarch authors of the Bible needed to present women as being obsessed with motherhood" (*A Breath* 5) offers a feminist lens to the discussion, in which women were more often subjects than participants. Rabbinical commentators accentuated the importance of the survival of the Jewish diaspora as a whole, often at the expense of personal happiness and liberty. Jewish women were to be the guardians of domestic life, which provided a safe haven amidst the hostility of host cultures. That is why rabbis enforced the image of the good Jewess, which is indelibly connected with her role as wife and mother. They did so because they saw that the world outside might offer Jewish women emancipation and empowerment unrivaled by what they were afforded by their own community, the possibility that might pose another threat to the continuity of traditional Jewish values.

The synagogue became the main target of female emancipatory endeavors in America. In Eastern Europe, Jewish men prayed both at home and in the synagogue, whereas women prayed mostly at home, for "prayer was not seen as exclusively a group activity" (Fishman, *A Breath* 144). In America, few Jews could pray three times a day at home since they were constrained by the demands of their jobs; therefore, only a visit to the synagogue allowed them place and time exclusively for prayer. Since Jewish women were barred from synagogue services, they continued to pray at home; however, lack of influence on religious content and form made "many women [feel] estranged from Jewish prayer and spirituality" (Fishman, *A Breath* 145). In recent decades, Jewish feminists have begun to demand equal access to positions of religious leadership, participatory involvement in prayer, a reclamation and reinterpretation of *tekhines* (Yiddish petitionary prayers, which constituted a vital part of women's day-to-day religious life), and the removal of hierarchical categories from Jewish prayer and thought.

Either by modifying the existing rituals so that they include female attributes, or rereading the traditional texts to illuminate their latent feminine aspects, Jewish feminists' aim is to bridge the gap between the contemporary world and the world of Talmud and, consequently, to bring parity with Jewish men. In Judith Plaskow's words: "women are seeking to transform Jewish ritual so that it acknowledges our existence and experience. In the ritual moment, women's history is made present" (48). Jewish feminists also emphasize that "their innovations do not blur or distort Judaism but instead reclaim and reemphasize elements that were erroneously suppressed" (Fishman, *A Breath* 232). Sylvia Barack Fishman observes the rift in regard to Judaism, which in the 1970's began to divide the American Jewish community along gender lines: "when most American Jewish men seemed to be drawing away from Jewish

ritual, and few men worshiped regularly with prayer shawls and phylacteries, some Jewish women began to explore these and other traditionally male modes of religious expression" (*A Breath* 8).

Although Jewish feminism developed under the influence of the American women's movement, the movements' paths parted when the latter failed to acknowledge its distinctively Jewish and communal concerns[3]. Undoubtedly, Jewish feminism has brought both female and Jewish visibility within the realm of American Jewish society. Jewish women have come to enjoy choices and opportunities that allow them either to pursue individual freedom or to explore the spiritual depths of traditional Judaism, unless they choose to enjoy both. They may refer to themselves as religious or secular Jews, and "they also call themselves 'cultural Jews,' 'politically Jewish,'" or, "a 'culinary Jew'" (Pinsky 44). The existence of sometimes exotic-sounding varieties of Jewish experience testifies to its further inclusiveness, but also signals the areas of potential disputes within modern Jewish feminism. Some familiar issues shifting between universalistic and particularistic concerns are still being raised, such as the question of balance between the allegedly exclusive positions of being a Jew or being a feminist, senses of communal responsibility, and needs for security in view of antisemitism. Secularization and high intermarriage rates have spawned common topics of discussion about the survival of the Jewish people. Modern feminist thought has also introduced ideas that seem contrary to the survival of Judaism, such as lesbian and gay perspectives that problematize the idea of procreation. Moreover, Jewish feminists have voiced their concerns about Israel's ambivalent role in the conflict in the Middle East.

Modern day Judaism in America is highly decentralized, with each denomination, be it Orthodox, Conservative, traditional, Reconstructionist, Reform, or "New Age" Judaism, establishing its own communal rules. Such plurality results in a gamut of American Jewish cultural discourses, which reflect the complexity of the modern Jewish experience. The contemporary idea of Jewishness escapes rigid definitions, claiming its component elements, such as Judaism and gender, at times congruent and at times dissonant. Therefore, Riv-Ellen Prell argues:

> Jewish feminism is best studied 'locally' within particular Jewish movements, synagogues, and communities as well as in the settings where women meet to

[3] On the differences between American and Jewish feminism see Deborah Dash Moore "Jewish Feminism Faces the American Woman's Movement." Deborah Dash Moore. Ed. *American Jewish Identity Politics*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008. 221-240.

> teach one another how to lead prayer and study Talmud, and to conduct and share what came to be called women-centered rituals, such as celebrating a new moon. (3)

The contemporary definition of Jewishness relates to what Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen call "the Jew within," "in recognition of the finding that, to an ever larger degree, the discovery and construction of Jewish meaning in America [...] occur in the private sphere" ("Rethinking"127). Despite the fragmented nature of Judaism, an overarching principle for any breed of Jewish feminism is "to distinguish those elements that are so intrinsic to mainstream Judaism that to lose them would be to lose the integrity of the religion and the culture, from those that are incidental and nonessential outgrowths of Jewish life in a variety of societies" (Fishman, *A Breath* 233). The question remains, though, who might have an actual authority (religious and/or secular) to decide whether the given feature is essential enough, or not. The problematic nature of such an inventory is clear when one realizes the existence of the whole range of individual groups within Judaism that struggle for power, trying to attract new congregants by advertising their inclusivity, diversity, and innovation.

2.2 A Need for Conformity

While turn-of-the-century American Jews responded "to being treated socially as nonwhites by developing a working-class socialist form of Jewishness" (Brodkin 138), the post-war Jews responded to the extension of occupational and educational privileges, formerly offered only to white members of the middle class, by "celebrating [Jewish] resonance with this mainstream" (Brodkin 150). One of the consequences of becoming a model minority was Jews' increased secularization. Reconstructionist Judaism, which began in New York as early as the 1920's, provided assimilated Jews with the means to safely balance their Jewish and American identities. Its founder, Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan, author of *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life* (1934), advocated the interpretation of Judaism in light of contemporary life and thought, without abandoning its traditional values. As early twentieth-century Jews tried to redefine the notion of Jewishness to make it compatible with the American ideals of democracy and individualism, their ancestors' ways appeared less and less attractive. Involvement in 1930's left-wing movements and the artistic avant-garde only deepened their spiritual estrangement from Judaism. Having acquired an unaccented speech, gentile-like manners, and middle-class positions, verified by the acquisition of material evidence of their successful departure from the immigrant generation of their parents and grandparents, American Jews distanced themselves from traditional Judaism. As much as American Jews

were losing their distinctive ethnic visibility, they were reminded by college quotas, job discrimination, and the Rosenberg Case (1953)[4] that their full acceptance by mainstream American society was still pending. To further the process, American Jews were eager to conform to American ways, re-negotiating their own relationship to Judaism in the process.

In a fictional memoir, *1185 Park Avenue* (1999), Anne Roiphe describes her growing up Jewish in the 1940's and 1950's on the East Side of New York City, in one of the buildings that accepted Jews. Her mother, Blanche, is heiress to the Philips Van Heusen Shirt company; a lady who is used to a pampered life of luxury. Her father is a poor but ambitious lawyer, who sees an opportunity to rise up in the world through marriage. As far as the shirt money is able to support the couple's lavish lifestyle, their loveless relationship becomes a trap for both spouses. Hating and blaming each other for personal unhappiness, they find solace in alcohol and extra-marital affairs. The birth of two children, Anne and Johnny, goes almost unnoticed to both parents, as the cook and the governess substitute for parental roles. Born into a world of affluence, Anne nonetheless feels lonely and neglected, craving her chain-smoking mother's attention. The young girl must compete for the love of her vain mother and her philandering, egoistical father. Roiphe's memoir captures the essence of uptown Jewish societal life, concentrating on the Park Avenue location, which is synonymous with wealth, privilege, and old money: "the people at 1185 were almost united in the belief that industry was our destiny, that money was the root of all good living, and the absence of money was the pit of despair, the face of the monster everyone feared (7)[5]. The family's aspiration to be accepted by the American mainstream is founded on the acquisition of material wealth, which allows the adoption of an upper-class lifestyle and overrides the need to acknowledge their immigrant past. Anne's parents pay little attention to the outward manifestations of Jewish rituals and practices because cultural invisibility and social mimicry facilitate their social inclusion. The family's religious ambivalence may be observed while decorating the Christmas tree and not maintaining a kosher kitchen. Only Anne's mother belongs to the Park Avenue synagogue, where on the high holidays, with children and other members of her family, she would make an appearance: "[o]n the high holidays

[4] Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, American citizens of Jewish origin, were in 1950 indicted for conspiracy to transmit classified military information to the Soviet Union. After the trial, the couple were found guilty of espionage-related activity and, despite many court appeals, executed in 1953. They were the first U. S. civilians to suffer the death penalty in an espionage trial during the Cold War.

[5] Anne Roiphe. *1185 Park Avenue*. New York: The Free Press, 1999. All references are to this edition and are cited by page within the text.

my mother went to synagogue all dressed up in a new suit [...] My mother did not understand a word of Hebrew because she was never taught but she knew by rote some of the passages" (120). Yet, mother's visits to the synagogue had little spiritual dimension: "[m]y mother does not exactly believe in God either [...] She did not believe in the old laws, in the separation of milk and meat, of Sabbath observance, of study of Talmud and Torah." (121). For Blanche, the service is more of a social occasion to catch up on the hottest gossip and to parade the latest fashion, and she passes this message on to her children.

Johnny's Bar Mitzvah is an opportunity to show off the family's wealth and boast about the quantity and value of the presents the young boy gets. Yet, it is the mother who hires a tutor to prepare the boy for the ceremony. Not out of a religious impulse, most likely, but to follow the custom and, to be technical, she is the one with the money to spend:

> The tutor was a young man from the Bronx who was earning his way through rabbinical school by tutoring the boys of families that held bar mitzvahs for their sons, in a cultural nod to their grandparents, in a gesture of group solidarity at a time when the group still held together because most other Americans wouldn't let them into their clubs or businesses. (139-140)

When her daughter also wants to learn Hebrew, the mother explains: "[y]ou can marry a man who can read Hebrew" (139). Mother sees no purpose in the girl's religious education, as it will neither advance her social position, nor make her a better match, the way straight blonde hair, a small nose, and a new outfit might.

As long as Anne's mother does maintain a feeble link with the ancestral religion, her father is indifferently hostile to any manifestation of Judaism. Eugene refuses to go to synagogue together with the family, claiming that "[i]t's ridiculous. Superstitious. Mumbo jambo, boo-hoo ladies' stuff [...] He says that he can live without God" (121). Johnny's interest in Judaism irritates him and he criticizes the boy for looking "like he just got off the boat" (160). The meaning of this phrase is very important for it encapsulates an important part of the early American Jewish experience:

> It is a pejorative referring to a newcomer who hasn't learned the ways of the new world, who is still stuck in the mud of the past, still a creature at the bottom of the social order, language wrong, clothes wrong, expectations of what is right and wrong, wrong [...] It is not to know about Jack Benny and Ingrid Bergman, not to know about the Rainbow Room or the names of the suburbs like Great Neck and Woodmere, Harrison and Rye. It is to be a peddler, an outsider, a creature not of the Enlightenment but of the despised past where one was despised. (160)

It captures the dread of antisemitism, the hopes for the American Jewish Dream, and the aspirations of those Jewish immigrants who believed complete

assimilation to be the right path to make America their home. This phrase also captures the father's worst anxieties and symbolizes the past he only wants to forget: "[i]t hurt my father to see his son as if he just got off the boat because he himself had arrived as a child and learned as quickly as possible to hide that fact" (160). Father's life aim was to escape the immigrant stigma; law diploma and marriage to a rich girl were to prove that he was heading in the right direction. As a reward for his assimilative diligence, he can enjoy the next step on the social ladder, from which he may look down on less acculturated and less successful Jews.

Johnny's announcement that he wants to be a rabbi shocks the family; mother's initial amusement–"it was sweet she thought like a five year old wanting to be a fireman" (156)–changes into fear:

> My mother laughed nervously at the idea. In her whole life she had never known anyone who had become a rabbi. She did not consider this one of the esteemed professions. It reeked of low salaries and indentured service to the more enterprising [...] And besides there was something backward about it, something that seemed un-American, as if the ship of our family fortune had suddenly reversed directions, leading us back to the small town in Poland where the rabbi and his students had been the cream of the crop, the top of the heap, the envied, the valued, the cherished, the ones sought out for the hand of rich men's daughters. (161)

The desired occupations, in this conception, are white-collar jobs', those that bring higher status, social recognition, and a good income and, most importantly, that escape the ethnic stereotype of the Jewish peddler or pawnbroker. Father's reaction is even more dramatic: "[a]bracadabra, "said my father. "Right off to the gas chamber with the likes of you" (157). Being only a generation away from immigrant hardships makes father a vulnerable member of the class to which he so fervently aspires to remain. Seeing his own son discard his life effort to fit in makes him desperate and induces the feeling of detachment from his family. Evoking Hannah Arendt's concept of the "parvenu" Jew, Anne's father apes the gentiles and rejects his Jewishness, but instead of gaining self-satisfaction, he is left to live in a "twilight of favor and misfortune" (89-90). This middle-of-the-road position makes him vigilant against the slightest allusions to his Jewish past.

Parents' derision and rejection of their Jewishness shows how uncomfortable they really feel in their newly-acquired Americanness, and how close they still are to their immigrant past, despite the protective facade of the material signs of their acculturation. Hard immigrant beginnings are only a generation away, long enough to furnish an upper class lifestyle, but too short to secure mental comfort. Just like the previous generation of turn-of-the-century

German elite for whom "the desire to assimilate brought with it a reluctance to fight the growing antisemitism directly for fear of jeopardizing their place in society" (Brodkin 157), later generations also exhibit

> a justifiable wariness about the extent to which America's embrace was real. They also had qualms about the costs of joining the mainstream to a Jewish sense of personal and social morality. On the other hand, they were ambivalent about Jewishness itself, about being too Jewish. (Brodkin 139)

The Park Avenue address is a new location for assimilated and successful Jews; another step away from their less successful brethren and towards the American main stream. A sense of ambivalence about assimilation could be expressed in a variety of ways, for example, in antisemitism, self-hatred, social critique, or misogyny. Therefore this sudden approximation of Judaism, which takes the form of the son's interest in his father's origins, threatens the success of the father's project to become a full-fledged American and shows how unstable its foundations really are. As much as Jewish economic success may be "paradigmatic of the postwar expansion and democratization of the middle class," American Jews "shared a deep ambivalence about middle-class power that paralleled broader American trends but also was connected to longstanding anxiety about the consequences of Jews assuming power in the non-Jewish world" (Berman 409). Though economic success certifies Jewish value to America, the same argument may be used to threaten the American public against the idea of Jewish control and power. Reflecting on their rapid social ascent, Berman observes that

> Jews tended to employ two different and often contradictory ideological statements to account for their middle-classness, one that proffered Jewish success as proof of American opportunity, and the other that characterized Jewish success as a measure of the unique and superior attributes of Jewishness. (414)

However, an enquiry as to the nature of Jewish difference from other ethnic groups may become fodder for substantiating antisemitic claims. To counter them, father's comments may be read as examples of Jewish self-hatred, often recognized as "a generalized symptom of Jewish emancipation and assimilation" (Glenn 96). The anxiety of the process is shown in his ambivalence towards Jewish success based on the idea of material wealth. On the one hand, he does not want to be recognized by the same qualities that Americans resent in other Jews and that would put him on par with the undesirable minority, as these qualities also deter his affiliation with the majority for which he is longing. On the other hand, bearing in mind his humble origins, he eagerly consumes his wife's wealth to support an extravagant lifestyle, which he keenly grows accustomed to. His unhappy family life seems

to be a price to pay for the decision to marry for money, not love. Examples of Jewish self-hatred provide a viable argument in a discussion about Jewish particularism, nationalism, and cosmopolitanism, the problems which always arise at the intersection of Jewish and non-Jewish environs, and which were especially sensitive in the context of World War II–*nota bene* the tragic fate of assimilated German Jews.

Lacking in encouragement and curiosity, the children's religious education was shallow and perfunctory:

> We attended Sunday school. In America, Hebrew School, *cheder*, had changed to Sunday School so we would be more like other Americans [...] we learned about Jewish history which merges into Jewish religion in a marriage of fact with fantasy, mysticism with realism. (127)

Anne's parents severed connections not only to their Hungarian and Polish roots, but also raised their children in a spiritual void:

> The thing of the spirit, the pious urge, the turning of the eye upward, the bending of the knee that years later I would see in paintings on museum walls, the streak of light illuminating the face, the hands clasped in humility, these remained to me a mystery. (122)

The secular and rootless world reflects a more uncomfortable relation to their status as Jews. Roiphe's memoir shows that even if cultural assimilation has been successful, its mental version is still more difficult to attain. An inability to resolve identity conflict and the need to keep a constant guard against any attempts to disavow one's social position by, for example, making a direct allusion to one's Jewish past, results in disrupted family bonds and the feeling of self-alienation, especially because outside the ethnic ghetto, understood both literally and psychologically, there were no longer clear-cut boundaries to be bought or easily appropriated between the minority groups and mainstream society. Acculturated Jews had to maneuver their way among the subtle differences dividing the two. Being Jewish carries for Anne's family no positive connotations, nor is it a source of spiritual nourishment. To wealthy Jews, remarks about their not-so-distant past evoke embarrassing memories of early immigrant hardships: hard work, social exclusion, and a desire to assimilate, things with which they no longer want to be associated. An anxiety of belonging and a fear of rejection are at the bottom of their life experiences, as is low self-esteem as a minority group. The belief in social mimicry and social invisibility become the key means to secure American Jewish existence. The declining role of religion in post-war America did not help Jews to battle the feeling of inferiority, but secularization, consumerism, and feminization provided new tools for self-realization. As the Holocaust was too fresh to talk about and ethnicity was only emerging to revise the idea of middle-class conformity,

American Jewish lives in the post-war decades were driven by two key terms: conformity and assimilation. Berman explains the difference between them: "[w]hile conformity was the key word to convey the anxieties of American middle-classness, assimilation became the key word to communicate the tensions of Jewish middle-classness" (419). Effort towards social mobility illuminates the problems within the Jewish family resulting from the generation gap; religion and intermarriage being the potential trouble spots between traditional parents and secularized children. The following part of my discussion will address those issues.

2.3 Judaism and Intermarriage

When American Jews' successful assimilative efforts resulted in their arrival at the middle class, the shift from margin to main stream brought in its wake more contacts with non-Jews, especially as social boundaries within American society were becoming less impregnable. Acculturated and assimilated American Jews became accepted as potential spouses to members of the dominant group. Thus, the distance between Jews and other white, ethnic groups began to shrink, allowing more channels of communication. What followed was an increased rate of exogamous marriages, which in the case of Jews comprised a specifically complex phenomenon related to the definition of who a Jew is–an amalgam of ethnic, racial, and religious factors, with the latter ranging from traditional Orthodoxy to atheism, making the identification of a Jew especially difficult. That is why the issue of intermarriage, understood as marriage between individuals of different racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, continues to divide the Jewish community:

> For many Jews bent on assimilation intermarriage became the vehicle of entry into the respectable echelons of the host society. By the same token, for those committed to "tradition," intermarriage became the ultimate symbol of Jewish withdrawal, and rejection of it served as the ultimate symbol of survivalism. (Mayer 269)

The National Jewish Population Survey, first conducted in 1970, revealed a dramatic change in Jewish marital selection patterns: intermarriage rates "nearly *doubled* from the end of the fifties to the mid-sixties, and nearly *tripled* from the mid-sixties to the early seventies" (Mayer 271; italics in the original). In answer to a growing incidence of intermarriage, seen as threatening to Jewish survival, the Orthodox branch of Judaism "seemed to have succeeded in stemming the tide of intermarriage; the rate actually diminished between 1985 and 1990" (Mayer 280), whereas the Reform movement supported liberal tendencies within Judaism, recognizing its benefits "inasmuch as they have produced a growing number of converts" (Mayer 280). According to a 2001 NJPS report,

"31% [is an] overall intermarriage rate for Americans Jews currently in their first marriage. [...] 47% of Jews who married in the five past years had wed non-Jews, up from a readjusted intermarriage figure of 43% a decade ago" (Kim, Leavitt 143). As psychological and material benefits resulting from assimilation took precedence over Jewish particularism, one of the consequences of this model of social adjustment was the finding that "American Jews have been influenced by the notion that advocating for Jews to marry Jews may be somehow un-American" (Fishman, "Relatively Speaking" 303). The consequence is, that "fewer than half of American Jews today actively oppose mixed marriage" (Fishman, "Relatively Speaking" 304). Intermarriage has been one of the most crucial variables in the demographic change of the American Jewish cohort, which triggered further religious and cultural transformation. It is no wonder that it still generates diverse responses, which highlight survivalist and assimilationist agendas, involving the questions of one's identity, religious and ethnic affiliation, and the set of values to be passed on to the next generations. Not all intermarried Jews are lost to their communities, as we observe spouses convert to Judaism and children from inter-faith families being raised as Jews. Within the context of a modern, pluralistic society, the idea of intermarriage may be seen as the harbinger of social progress that benefits from cultural enrichment. Conversely, it may represent an inevitable attrition signaling the demise of Jewish ethnic and religious distinctiveness. Whether the decision to marry within or outside the faith is a result of a personal choice, or a strategy designed by the leaders of communal policy, it is open for debate; however, the anxiety surrounding this controversial issue is one of the key problems that contemporary American Jewry faces today.

In American Jewish fiction, attitudes towards intermarriage parallel attitudes towards assimilation: those authors in favor of complete assimilation champion the primacy of romance as a substitute for the Old World institution of arranged marriages, and those preoccupied with the preservation of Jewish ethnic identity blame inter-faith marriages for Jews' dissolution in the American melting-pot. For this reason much dramatic tension in American Jewish novels comes from inter-faith romance. A Yiddish writer, Sholem Aleichem, portrays *Tevye the Dairyman* (1894) who sits *shiva*[6] for his daughter Chava because she defies his paternal authority and marries a non-Jew. Intermarriage as gateway to total assimilation is portrayed in Anzia Yezierska's *Salome of the Tenements* (1923), whose plot also reveals an ambivalent nature related to such a liaison. Later on, in the post-war period, Philip Roth's protagonist in *My Life as a Man* (1974), Nathan Zukerman, marries a non-Jewish woman as conscious liberal's

[6] Shiva is a week-long mourning period in Judaism for first-degree relatives, during which family members gather in the home of the deceased and receive visitors.

act of rebellion, breaking free from the oppression of his Jewish bourgeois home and suffocating heritage. A decade later, another novel by Philip Roth, *The Counterlife* (1986), illustrates a reversed version of such rebellion, in which Nathan's brother leaves his non-Jewish wife in order to move to an Orthodox settlement in Israel. With intermarriage having become so commonplace by the 1980's, an act of rebellion turns in the opposite direction: from an assimilationist to a particularistic position.

Intermarriage is a complex and vital phenomenon, which continues to append its representations in contemporary literature. Rebecca Goldstein's short story, "Rabbinical Eyes" (1993), features Rachel–the narrator, who is a Jewish woman married to Luke, a Christian "Semitophile" (180)[7], and a son of a minister. Despite the fact that their marriage is a happy one, there is one thing that bothers her; namely, her decision to marry outside the faith is condemned by her religious father, who, in a symbolic gesture of parental and communal rejection, sits *shiva* for her. An emancipated daughter of Orthodox parents finds herself emotionally confused when challenged by the birth of a mentally impaired baby. The pursuit of the question "why?" leads her back to her abandoned roots and forces her to re-evaluate life decisions.

The narrator's relationship to religion is ambivalent. On the one hand, she expresses contempt both toward her traditional past and unimpressive present, finding no value worth following in either direction. Her scorn of ancestral tradition is manifested in the way she describes her family's background:

> Hasidism had been a grass-roots movement, growing up among the Polish uneducated, in part a rebellion against the rabbinical scholarly elite, who equated spirituality with Talmudic learning. Hasidim don't study their way closer to God, but, rather, sing and dance their way to Him. (184)

Reducing the idea of religious observance to the practices associated with most primal rituals and denying its intellectual dimension belittles its importance in the protagonist's life. Rachel sees herself as a rational being and a sole agent of her destiny: "I was American-born, endowed with an Emersonian sense of self-reliance" (215), living a life in which there was no room for spiritual epiphanies. Her success at Harvard Law School and career as an attorney prove her professional achievement in the secular world. Even though she possesses scholarly knowledge, which allows her to see beyond emotions, religion in its intellectual and spiritual dimensions fails to entice her.

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[7] Rebecca Goldstein. "Rabbinical Eyes." *Strange Attractors*. New York: Penguin Books, 1993. 179-216. All references are to this edition and are cited by page within the text.

Just like Anne Roiphe's protagonist in *1185 Park Avenue*, Rachel's religious experience lacks the spiritual depth accompanying the ritual prayer from which she is excluded because she is a woman; the spiritual connection to Judaism is reserved for Jewish men who study holy scriptures. Rachel only gets a glimpse of her father praying:

> My father was wrapped in his prayer shawl, his left arm and forehead bound in his phylacteries. His eyes were closed and he didn't see me [...] And then I saw that there were tears streaming down his face. His cheeks were wet [...]I wish I had had the nerve, had not been so fatally shy, about asking my father then, when he loved me so much and would have tried to give me an answer, why he cried when he prayed. I wish I had asked him what it was that he did when he prayed. (184)

Rachel is denied the mystical element of religious practice as her father never invites her to join in his prayer, and she has no courage to ask him questions. In "'Hardly There Even When She Wasn't Lost': Orthodox Daughters and the 'Mind-Body' problem in Contemporary Jewish American Fiction" Susan Jacobowitz comments on the gendered divisions in Judaism:

> Intellect is stereotypically associated with men while emotion is stereotypically associated with women, but in Judaism–and particularly in Hasidim–there is an emotional component that men are supposed to bring to or experience through prayer. Ironically, Rachel has only the intellectual connection to her religion. (78)

Being unable to forge spiritually and intellectually inclusive bond to Judaism impairs her identification with father's religion. Her estrangement is doubled when she marries a gentile against her father's will. In both cases, patriarchal authority influences the gender hierarchy and illuminates ways that women are alienated within Judaism.

Goldstein's story shows a diminished role of Judaism in the contemporary American Jewish community. The narrator observes how traditional Judaism has devalued and lost its spiritual depth to suit Americanized Jews: "[t]he main point of an American rabbi is the Saturday-morning sermon, ideally delivered in that oily style congregations require from their clergy, lubricating the hard little pellet of religion so that it slides in with minimum pain" (181). Neither too demanding, nor too inquisitive, religion has ceased to instruct and guide Jews, but has become a cultural ritual and a social occasion. Another adjustment, albeit a favorable one, is visible on the level of the family: "[t]here was no gender differentiation in what they [parents] taught us. My father studied Talmud with me just as hard and as long as with Gideon [her brother]" (205). Rather than follow the patriarchal order, which used to allow scholarly pursuit only to its male members, Rachel's father approves of

the progressive world and decides to abandon the traditional gender divide in this respect. Paradoxically, knowledge of the Talmud equips the protagonist with the tools she later uses to reject it, giving preferentiality to an all-American belief in the importance of the individual mind and free choice. Rachel's upbringing, which is a mixture of Orthodox demands and liberal choices, reflects the erosion of traditional values, which lose significance in the face of American influences, a process yielding a Jewish woman who no longer defines herself solely in religious terms. The coalescence of Jewish and American traits produces a hybrid identity whose survival is based on the balance of individual preferences and communal expectations. The context of Rachel's voluntary marriage across religious and ethnic lines is used in the novel to illuminate what happens when this balance is disturbed.

A traumatic event, such as the birth of a mentally disabled child, reveals hidden anxiety, which makes the narrator question her otherwise-rational choices. To make sense out of an intensely personal trauma, she re-evaluates decisions regarding her spiritual life, a process that gives way to a variety of further negotiations. What she has long discarded as irrelevant to her experience comes back to her under the guise of two recurring dreams: in the first one, she comes home to find her husband and father drinking a glass of tea together. This familial and tranquil scene of domesticity is what she wishes for, since it would confirm her father's, and by proxy her forefathers', acceptance of her exogamous matrimony. She may lie to herself and pretend to the world that she does not care, but dream symbolism divulges how important the family's approval really is for her. It is not only the family's support that she seeks, since the *shiva* tradition, which is observed after a death, marks her expulsion–a symbolic death, not only from her family, but from the whole Jewish community. Her father's visit to her home would signify the acceptance of her exogamous family both by her Orthodox family, with her father at its head, and by the Jewish community, as the father figure symbolizes patriarchal authority within Judaism. Hence, the decision to marry outside the Jewish faith would not have to be equivalent with her being cut off from ancestral roots.

In the second dream, Rachel's father is holding Gabrielle, her mentally ill baby daughter, and offering her to her mother. The protagonist's first baby is born with a mental defect, and nothing could be done to prevent or amend the situation. Looking for signs and clues that could explain her daughter's condition, Rachel notices the baby's eyes: "[h]er empty eyes are rabbinical eyes. Huge, heavy-lidded, bruised, and sad" (204). The daughter shares her mother's eyes, a distinctive, matrilineal connection to the Jewish community. As the eyes are symbolic reflections of the soul, they mirror an essential element of the person's identity, which cannot be lost, and which provides the

link to one's origin. The words: "heavy," "bruised," and "sad" may refer to the diasporical Jewish history of expulsions, pogroms, and the Holocaust. Rachel's father is a Holocaust survivor, whose outdated yeshiva education makes him unfit for the modern world; he can neither find permanent employment, nor secure a respectful position within the Jewish community. The baby's melancholic eyes evoke the experience of loss and suffering of the previous generations of Jews, not to be forgotten amidst the wellbeing and prosperity of the present one nor diluted in the blend of interfaith relationships. Moreover, the emotional connotations of the words used to describe the infant's "rabbinical eyes" signify the importance of the spiritual element within Judaism, something ungraspable by the intellect that Rachel, because she is a woman, is barred from. The baby's condition might be seen as her mother's punishment for the betrayal of old ways, for her spiritual disobedience and blind faith in the power of intellect and autonomy. Or it might be a painful reminder of her own responsibility as a Jewish woman towards her heredity, which cannot be discarded at will. Finally, the baby's illness might just be a random instance of a genetic error, without any source of blame. Whichever reading is favored, one thing remains certain: when the rational mind fails to deliver a viable solution, the mother goes back to her spiritual inheritance in search of an answer. Fishman's study supports the claim that "[traumatic] events can and do precipitate spiritual responses and reevaluations of decisions on the religious character of the home" ("Relatively Speaking" 313). Yet Rachel is denied entrance to the spiritual realm of Judaism, as she can neither pray together with her father, nor can she draw comfort from her own prayer, something she had never been taught to do. It turns out that her own religion fails her when she needs it most. Her desperate hope that her father's acceptance of her exogamous family might somehow cure her child remains as elusive as her dream. When the truth, that there is no satisfactory answer, fails to suffice, Rachel begins to blame herself, as any answer is better than the state of uncertainty. These speculations, which aim at answering the mother's question "what-if?", focus on the significance of individual decisions, whose consequences reach far beyond the personal realm.

Goldstein's story interrogates the important issue of intermarriage in a way that both supports and questions its validity. The American ideology of self-reliance and individual authority disrupts the balance of the Jewish communal hierarchy, which was based on the principles of patriarchy. Americanized Jews make their own decisions based on individual preferences, rather than the teachings of Talmud, and one of such decisions is to marry for love, regardless of the spouse's ethnic, class, or religious affiliation. This conviction came with the American Jewish cohort's successful assimilation and is one of the ways they can profit from equal opportunities. On the one hand,

marriage across religious lines conquers intolerance and prejudice, simultaneously increasing social awareness that might serve as an effective buffer against xenophobia. On the other hand, exposure to a different set of beliefs, or a complete lack of such, fuels the process of understanding the self. Sylvia Barack Fishman in her study of inter-faith families, *Double or Nothing? Jewish Families and Mixed Marriage* (2004), observes: "[t]o an extent seldom realized, mixed-marrying Americans often construct a more pointed definition of their own ethnoreligious identity, as well as a new understanding of the identities of their spouses" (2). Goldstein's story shows that even if one escapes ethnic bondage–of Orthodox variety in this case–and is ready to draw freely from the achievements of cultural tolerance, the past will catch up with him or her, one way or another.

Even though desirable from the position of the dominant group, assimilation and intermarriage tend to erase distinctive features, religious and cultural, rendering a person with a disrupted identity, especially when the decision to intermarry involves the severing of familial ties. According to research conducted by James S. Frideres

> children from mixed marriages comprise a 'potential drop-out cohort' which confronts the Jewish community", so if they choose to stay, they "must overcome the deep rooted low religious and ethnic identity that has been internalized into one's self-identity. (155)

When seen in terms of cultural betrayal, the decision to intermarry, or to cross over to secular life, results in the "wrongdoer's" general ostracism, which is often spearheaded by his family's rejection. A denial of the family's approval leaves such a person suspended in the spiritual and cultural void, and usually more susceptible to alien influences.

It is usually in times of great distress that a person comes to realize lacks of family ties and begins to question his or her state of being. The fact that Luke is more comfortable with their daughter's illness than is Rachel marks a potential rift in their relationship. Personal trauma bares differing expectations and attitudes, which are grounded in one's culture and cannot always be shrouded by civility. By choosing the hasidic grandfather to hold the baby, Goldstein signifies the importance of one's religious heritage, which can provide strength and spiritual nourishment necessary to deal with the hardships of life, as it has served previous generations of Jews in times of distress. Suffering is an experience that has not only been shared by the Jewish diaspora; enduring it makes individual Jews stronger by providing a sense of communal kinship. Therefore, the distraught and secularized American Jewish mother dreams about her hasidic father, and not about her gentile husband.

Rebecca Goldstein's story claims Judaism to be an indispensable element of the American Jewish, "hyphenated identity," for it is the one that informs its ethnic and secular components. The author illustrates how an attempt to divide religious from cultural elements of personal identity dislodges its stability. "Rabbinical Eyes" portrays the Jewish parents' fear of intermarriage and the secularized daughter's right to choose her own partner, an illustration of a broader conflict between the adherents of traditional Judaism and the supporters of its more liberal variety. A reversed version of such a conflict is the theme of my next discussion, in which a secular, liberal, and feminist mother is confronted with her daughter's decision to join a haredi[8] yeshiva.

2.4 Return to Orthodoxy

In *Lovingkindness* (1987), Anne Roiphe presents three generations of American Jewish women, whose characteristic traits map changing relationships between American Jewish women and Judaism. The story's grandmother, presented only in flashbacks, is a thoroughly assimilated and successful woman who indulges in a wealthy lifestyle but suffers from her husband's infidelity. Jewishness means little to her, as she is not interested in her ethnic past. Her daughter, Annie, is a secular intellectual who sees religion as just another discursive concept to be analyzed. Her decision to marry a gentile is an emotional and actual escape from the constraints of her ethnic bondage. The youngest generation is represented by a granddaughter, Andrea, who rejects both her grandmother's spiritual void and her mother's secular, feminist values. Andrea wants to pursue her own path through involvement with various subcultures until she finds solace in extreme Orthodoxy, in a girl's school for "born-again" Jews in Jerusalem. There, she is ready to demonstrate her commitment to the haredi lifestyle by marrying Michael, a fellow convert to this sect of Judaism.

The two sets of grandparents, Andrea's and Michael's, represent two groups of Americanized Jews who defied traditional Judaism at the beginning of the twentieth century: the upper- and middle-class capitalists and the working-class activists. Andrea's grandparents are the product of Jewish success and affluence at the time when financial gains were read as vital signs of Jewish acceptance into American society. In order to uphold American hospitality, Jewish entrepreneurs avoided ostensible demonstrations of their distinct ethnicity. Annie recalls:

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[8] Haredi Judaism is the most conservative form of Orthodox Judaism, often referred to as ultra-Orthodox.

> [My] grandparents were not the religious sort. They stopped going to synagogue as soon as they were old enough to defy the old man [the great-grandfather] and his old-fashioned expectations [...] They spoke Yiddish, yes, but they were anxious that the next generation speak only the president's English. (17-18)[9]

Visiting the synagogue becomes a social occasion, rather than a religious experience:

> On Rosh Hashanah my mother would wear her best suit, her black shiny heels, and over her shoulders she would throw her fox skin [...] She wore her gold bracelets and her diamond ring and the gold earrings in the shape of scallop shells. Her lips and nails and toes were all magenta. (44-45)

During the service, Annie's mother is not engrossed in prayer, but is constantly whispering to her sister: "they had secrets between them that were even more important than the words one might say to God on the high holidays" (45). Andrea's grandfather would not even think of going to a synagogue: instead, he "had a predilection for attractive women, good clothes and fine leather attaché cases" (15). In his life, materialism and secularism replaced Judaism:

> He was not the kind of man to appreciate the power of another, to suffer remorse, to consider himself accountable, to concern himself with the interstices of the soul [...] He was not interested in Zion or in redemption. He was interested only in his place in the New World, where it was hard enough to carry yourself with your head high and keep the dirt off your shoes. (46)

Michael's grandfather "was a socialist and a union organizer. He was a printer and he wrote pamphlets encouraging the workers in Yiddish" (166). His devotion to the proletarian cause illuminates the class struggle to be of foremost importance for American Jews. Its adherents claimed that

> [t]he capitalist order is held responsible for the misfortunes and exclusion of the ghetto inhabitants, rather than their racial or ethnic affiliations. [...] [T]herefore, for the immigrants, it [was] more important to unite with other workers against the capitalist's exploitation, than nurture their ethnic identities. (Gasztold 146)[10]

Proletarian American Jewish writers, such as Michael Gold, saw class unity as an alternative model of assimilation. Moreover, "the ideas of collectivism and participation in the labor movement were for them a way to deal with anti-Semitism" (Gasztold 153). Michael's grandfather's contempt towards Judaism is illustrated as follows: he "would buy a pound of bacon every Yom Kippur

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[9] Anne Roiphe. *Lovingkindness*. New York: Warner Books, 1987. All references are to this edition and are cited by page within the text.

[10] See the chapter "The Voice of the Betrayed: Michael Gold's *Jews Without Money*" in my book *Negotiating Home and Identity in Early 20th Century Jewish-American Narratives* (2011).

and all day long he would fry it in front of the open window so all the neighbors had to do was to breathe and they could smell his position on God" (166). In the eyes of bourgeois and working-class Jews, Judaism was regarded as an obstacle to complete assimilation, a refusal to embrace the opportunities of the New World, and a hindrance that might thwart American Jews' chances of inclusion in American society. American Jews believed that erasing their ethnic distinctiveness was a prerequisite to becoming full-fledged Americans. Consequently, American acceptance would secure their peaceful existence in this adopted homeland.

Annie's secular upbringing divests her of her Jewish past: "I had a Hebrew name but my mother forgot what it was; like my appendix, it served no function and was excised" (13). As an assimilated American Jewish woman and a successful academic who pursues the feminist cause, she feels no particular sense of belonging other than to the reality of modern America: "I did tell you that we are Jewish, but I never made a fetish of it. I never told you that these were the only people that you should be concerned with or that any one group had an exclusive on moral or immoral behavior" (6). Similarly, Michael's father refutes his son's accusations of being antisemitic by saying that he is not ashamed of being Jewish but only "uninterested" (201). Annie marries Hilary Cabot Johnson, a man who

> had drunk in the Declaration of Independence with his mother's milk [...] who was not a tourist in towns where the white steeples stung the sky, [...] a man who couldn't tell a Yiddish joke, a man who didn't know that the enemy needed no excuse to move, [...] a man whose nightmares were strictly personal and did not extend beyond his own experience. (50)

A non-Jewish husband crowns Annie's assimilationist position, whose viability is, however, instantly tested under the duress of their "unbalanced domesticity" (29). The all-American husband mocks her "Jewish ideas about propriety" (52) and fails to provide a sense of security; however, his sudden death does not shake her "faith in the world's progress, its fundamental humanity, its capacity for surprising kindness and loving change" (53). As a liberal American Jewish woman, Annie puts little trust in religion but believes in the capacity of an individual's power to improve the world.

Annie's initial reaction to Andrea's decision to stay in the yeshiva is anger:

> I doubt the sincerity of your religious impulse. Are you sure you just don't want someone to tell you what to do? Don't you really think that those laws that determine what you can eat with what, when you can eat and what you say before and after, what belongs together, what should be separated, are

> infringements on your natural choices? Don't you determine for yourself your own personal ethical behavior? (18-19)

Andrea's conversion may be seen as a symbolic gesture, which discards all the benefits of the modern world, as well as an act of individual support for such basic American values as personal and religious freedom, individualism, pragmatism, and a sense of control over one's fate. By withdrawing from the world, Andrea defies not only her mother's ideals, but also the hard-won gains of the immigrant generation of American Jews. Her choice of the Orthodox life testifies to the fact that the American Dream of religious tolerance and individual freedom has lost its appeal to younger generations, after having been a sign-post for "the huddled masses yearning to breathe free." The novel's title, *Lovingkindness*, points at each individual's capacity to enable others to find their spiritual and mundane vocation: "our acting with and for others to help them develop their humanizing capacities" (Fried, "Living" 175). A wholehearted and tender embrace of the world serves as an antidote to the severe demands of Orthodox observance. Both types of worship are used in the novel to take issue with contemporary realizations of religiousness: those regarded as conservative, which are based on control and obedience, and those deemed progressive, which are founded on trust and love.

In the tradition of turn-of-the-century immigrant narratives of personal reinvention, one of the first steps of Andrea's and Michael's conversion is the changing of their American names into the Jewish ones: Andrea is replaced by Sarai and Michael by Micah. Mary Antin, in *The Promised Land* (1912), promotes the substitution of the Jewish name for a more English-sounding one, which symbolizes the character's departure from the Old World and his or her readiness to embrace the new one. As a gesture of reversed acculturation, contemporary characters use name-changing to cross over into the haredi world. Parents' choosing of their child's name is usually meaningful and carries certain expectations about the child's future. Thus, Annie chooses to name her daughter Andrea because it brings to mind the images of

> Greek islands set in pale blue pools and promising surprise and elegance, visits to shrines and mountaintops, olive groves and white walls, sun beating on clean steps of houses whose windows opened on waking babies and dark-eyed women who were staring at the sea. (8)

In Yeshiva Rachel, Andrea gets a new name, Sarai. Rabbi Cohen explains his choice: "[w]e felt that Sarai would be an especially appropriate name for your child because she seemed so in need of mothering and Sarah was the mother of the entire Jewish people" (67). The act of swapping names reflects a shift in authority: the dislodging of parental control and the affirming of rabbinic control. In Rabbi Cohen, Andrea finds the teacher that neither her feminist

mother, nor her secularized grandparents, have ever been to her. The knowledge that she has been denied throughout her upbringing, which is the legacy of her Jewish birth, is now available to her, and the decision to accept a Hebrew name sets her out on the way to reclaim it. The act of adopting a new name signifies her parting with secular life and marks her spiritual rebirth; this phenomenon is well-grounded in Biblical narrative: "[i]n the Bible, name changing occurs when one's life is touched by God and subsequently altered" (Rubel 113). To her mother, however, the name Sarai is reminiscent of "barren old ladies whose desires were granted too late to bring real satisfaction, a bitter old lady who banished her rival and the child of her rival" (8). These two different readings of the importance of this biblical matriarch reflect traditional and contemporary approaches to womanhood. Through the modern lens, Sarah's absolute obedience to Abraham and her slightly wavering faith in God's plan annihilate the significance of her own ambitions and personal tragedies (*vide* the story of Hagar), making her a problematic heroine for contemporary women. In order to understand her daughter's motives, Annie has to draw a connection between two ideologically incongruent manifestations of her daughter's identity represented by the names Andrea and Sarai, no matter how reluctant she is herself to come back to the world that her own parents had discarded. In other words, Jewish history invades their private realm, challenging mother and daughter to try to do the impossible–to marry modernity with Orthodoxy, preferably without compromising either of them.

In order to undercut the credibility of Andrea's decision, her mother doubts the veracity of her spiritual makeover: "I am not sure that human beings can turn themselves inside out and pick at random their spot in the universe" (47). Recalling her daughter's troubled adolescence, she believes that Andrea has been brainwashed and cannot tell right from wrong anymore. Even Andrea's psychiatrist cannot explain the girl's decision, consistent with his lack of success in restoring to health her fragile and disturbed personality. As there have been no haredi ancestors in their family, nor any commitments to age-long traditions, Andrea's "return" seems a desperate attempt to conjure a new identity. To further challenge Andrea's/Sarai's validity of her embrace of Orthodoxy, her mother's gaze at haredi life is reminiscent of twentieth-century antisemitic rhetoric, which drew attention to men's black hats, black coats, and long sidelocks, women's opaque stockings and long-sleeved dresses, and above all to their secretive lifestyle and clannishness. The ostensibly visible haredi-style clothes connote otherness, which appears incompatible with the mainstream American culture. In order to prove Andrea's rationalization futile, her mother questions God's existence:

> The last years of our history have revealed that all the wisdom of the Talmud, all the pages of Zohar, all the oral tradition, all the wit of Maimonides, all the scrawls of Rashi, will only bring us to the ovens with our eyesight already damaged by the fine print and the dim light. (72-73)

Holocaust imagery serves her as proof of the diminished role of spirituality in the contemporary world. Correspondingly, Annie's arguments repeat a known query about God's absence in the context of the Holocaust. They also allude to death as a metaphor for her daughter's loss; Annie talks about grief: "I am in mourning for you for having turned into the kind of Jew who might mourn if your child married out" (48). Since no argument manages to shake Andrea's confidence, the imagery of irreparable failure accompanies her mother's letters, deeming fruitless her attempts to understand her daughter's motives.

Annie sees Andrea's decision to join the haredi woman's yeshiva in terms of loss: on the one hand, her daughter loses

> her mind, her independence, her knowledge of multiple realities, the multiple choices, her willingness to be accountable to herself, for herself, under the sky, to be human without wailing to the clouds, to be human and know that when we cry, we cry only in each other's arms or we cry alone. (71)

On the other hand, the mother dreads losing her own hopes regarding her daughter's future career; she wanted Andrea "to cast a small shadow over the planet, maybe build houses or design new methods of production or improve our health-care delivery system [...] to change the order of things, to fight it and improve it" (104-105). Annie finds it hard to accept Andrea's determination as a mother who loses a daughter to an alien set of beliefs and as a second-wave feminist who sees the failure of her consciousness-raising campaign, which finds no resonance in Andrea's mind-set. The younger generation has mistakenly interpreted the goals of the women's movement as equivalent to the rejection of family values, which resulted in impiety and general confusion. With a hint of irony, Annie identifies the cause of the diminishing interest in feminism among the young, which she does not locate among the movement's basic assumptions, but in "the unbridled hostility, the uncompromising, the unsmiling, the child-hating ones in our midst" (29). Contradicting feminist gains, but in accordance with her newly found faith, Andrea gives up her personal independence and is ready to live and raise a family in a world dictated by men.

This mutual failure of mother's and daughter's to meet each other's expectations calls upon and reveals a conflicting vision of life, at the bottom of which is the concept of freedom. Michael's father wants his son to be free, but on his own, not on his son's, terms: "I will allow him to find his own path as long as it is here in Cleveland and doesn't require the support of anyone's

orthodoxy. I want Michael to be a free man" (130) Even though Andrea and Michael are of legal age to make their own choices, their parents assert that they know what is best for them. In one of her letters Andrea/Sarai contests her mother's authority: "[y]ou never believe me. You never listen to me. You have such strong opinions about everything. But now I am right" (84). In order to escape parental control both children exercise their personal right to self-determination, something they have been told lies at the bottom of their parents' worldviews. Nora Rubel observes the limitations of those worldviews when it comes to their own flesh and blood: "[t]heir parents' liberal ideas only go so far; they have little tolerance for religious conservatism" (139). Liberal, but only to a point, parental hypocrisy is what drives their children away from adopting and reproducing the same system of beliefs. Forging an alliance against the common enemy–the haredi community–parents impose their own set of beliefs onto their children. What they fail to realize, though, is that they actually replace one dominant authority with another.

Both Andrea's mother and Michael's parents feel humiliated, seeing themselves as deficient parents and believing they have made a mistake whose consequences will result in their children's estrangement. An inability to produce a satisfying answer to where she possibly went wrong makes Annie pose hypothetical questions, such as: "If I had married again and provided a stable two-parent home for Andrea, would she now be in a postdoctoral program in biochemistry at Yale?" (44) Nora Rubel clarifies the parents' confusion as follows: "[r]ather than admit that their children are rejecting their liberal lifestyles for a purposely restrictive one, these parents imagine scenarios that include mind control and captivity to explain their children's behavior" (113). The critic further draws attention to another factor– the middle-class background of both Andrea's and Michael's families: "[w]ould anyone care if Orthodoxy attracted people who seemed to have no other destiny or opportunities? "(137). The endorsement of haredi rules involves the acceptance of a humble and frugal life and for a woman additionally implicates the acceptance of the patriarchal order. The haredi lifestyle is closer to working-class than to middle-class standards, which will also influence life opportunities for the children born in such families, as a lack of secular education will significantly reduce their chances of employment and economic stability. The fact that Annie's and Michael's educated and affluent parents have not only high hopes regarding their future, but also the means to support those aspirations, further complicates the dynamics of the narrative, especially that all the assistance is so easily discarded by their children.

Towards the end of the novel, Annie seems to lose her secular confidence and tries to find equilibrium between the major ideological differences dividing

her daughter's viewpoint from her own. Thus, she wonders whether Orthodoxy might actually offer Andrea exactly what she is missing in the secular world: "protections, inducements, nurturing" (77). She realizes that "too much choice, a world without boundaries, has pushed Andrea overboard" (77). When advances in science and social progress disappoint, a structured and controlled life may appear to offer a safe haven in a world torn-apart by a variety of conflicts. Every mother wants her child to be happy, and Annie cannot fail to notice that it is actually in the yeshiva that Andrea's health, both physical and mental, has improved. After years of drug abuse, fake relationships, and abortions, her daughter's life seems to have found meaning. Andrea's enthusiasm about her new-found destiny and her unabashed optimism, however, do not dispel her mother's worries about her future. "Recognizing the virtues of ultra-Orthodox life and the failures of American feminism, Annie lets her daughter go; it is an act of maternal "lovingkindness" (Furman, "Anne Roiphe's Ambivalence" 137). The fact that Annie is looking forward to the next generation, her grandchildren, means that she is giving up on changing Andrea's/Sarai's mind to leave the haredi life:

> When my granddaughter is eighteen and restless with all she has been taught, I will invite her to visit me. Once she is here I will slowly introduce her to science and math and deductive reasoning and Chekhov and Dostoyevsky, Locke and Susan B. Anthony, and when she is ready I will suggest to her that she become a doctor and stay here and go to college. (264)

This premeditated act of retaliation on the one hand helps Annie to come to terms with her daughter's determination by showing respect for the choices she makes but, on the other hand, confirms the mother's unwavering position as champion of modern secular ideas. The fate of the Johnson family is not sealed, as with each new generation comes the possibility of change. In a world of multiculturalism, intermarriage, and secularism, Roiphe's narrative demonstrates the problems of identity crises, which concern the future of Judaism and other religions as work-in-progress.

Miriyam Glazer indicates a parallel avenue for Annie's waning refusal to come to terms with Andrea's/Sarai's decision; as long as Annie's memories are illuminative of a spiritually empty upbringing and life, in which sexism results from gender alienation, her successive dreams of Rabbi Nachman help to restore her emotional balance and unite her again with the Jewish metaphysical legacy. Glazer continues to comment on Annie's position:

> She is finally able to name the source of the rage she has harbored against Rabbi Nachman–and Judaism–all along, the rage she has harbored ever since childhood, the rage that led her to distrust the world of men, to reject a spiritual life and seek refuge in intellect. ("Male and Female" 88)

Identifying the cause of her own anxieties facilitates her understanding of what she has been missing, since she chose the life of intellect and reason. In Lewis Fried's words: "[h]er dreams of Reb Nachman of Bratslav, invitations both to solve as well as accept the finitude of reason and the pathos of the quest for meaning, give way to the human need to encounter the holy" ("Living" 178). Or, as Annie puts it: "[m]aybe if I am very quiet I will hear God whispering, explaining matters to me or releasing me from the need for explanation. If reason cannot lead to reconciliation, can I abandon reason?" (263). By reclaiming the validity of spiritual life, Annie is freed from the burdens of her past (a sexist, secular, emotionally barren home, and an unhappy marriage), and comes closer to her opponent's views, hence her decision to reveal Michael's parents' plot to smuggle him out of Israel. This conciliatory gesture towards Rabbi Cohen, which might be indicative of her own ideological shift, is later undermined by her plan to reclaim her future granddaughter into her own world. The limited restoration of the missing part of Annie's identity helps her to part with her daughter but does not alter her secular and feminist worldview.

The author portrays Andrea as a young woman who is lost amidst the confusion of modern America. Her upbringing in the spirit of tolerance does not seem to prepare her well for adulthood; a lack of structured life, when the multitude of choices surpass her cognitive abilities, rendering her inept at dealing with daily challenges. Likewise, none of the subcultures she joins seem to provide her with a meaningful set of guiding principles. In line with the politics of pluralistic and liberal society, Andrea is not exposed to religion, which is seen as limiting rather than liberating to personal experience. Therefore, what draws her to life in the yeshiva is what she is missing in American life–an unabashed certainty about the righteousness of one's decisions. Moral relativism, which claims that standards of right and wrong are the products of specific times and cultures, is substituted with the feeling of confidence that vitality is located in routine tasks, which her mother "did not teach [her] at the right age" (39). In Rabbi Cohen's words, "[e]ach day [Andrea] changes into an increasingly contented, useful and virtuous woman" (65). Household chores, which for a liberated feminist are minor to personal development, acquire importance equaling spiritual knowledge. What this daughter finds elevating–"[w]hen I sponge the table and the crumbs are gone and the board is again honey-colored and the patches of light from the window shine on my part of the floor, the One Above is pleased with me" (39)–her mother mocks: "[h]ere we have it–the way to serve God is on the kitchen floor, on your knees with the heavenly aroma of Ajax in your nostrils" (39). By the same token, in a conversation with his father, Michael asserts that "everything here makes sense. Everything we do has a symbolic meaning that happened in the past" (201). By juxtaposing two polarized positions within contemporary

representations of Judaism, Orthodox Israeli and secular American, the narrative calls for new frameworks of interpretation. *Lovingkindness* portrays those aspects of Jewish practice and law that unite and divide modern American Jews in an attempt not to champion one of them, but to allow their adherents to meet. In the case of Roiphe's novel, Annie tries to reach out to Andrea in order to understand her reasoning; however, their ideological dispute gives way to the mother's simple worry about her child. Annie is ready to resign from her stance on Orthodoxy if she sees that her daughter is truly happy. This decision, which is prompted by the basic force of parental love, requires the mother to reevaluate her own ideological position. What results is a dialogue embedded in a dispute about conceptions of Jewishness in the contemporary world, the exchange of ideas that has been keeping Judaism alive and thriving.

The choice of Jerusalem as Andrea's destination testifies to the importance of Israel in the lives of American Jews, whereas the problem of Orthodoxy is paralleled in both nation-specific contexts. As Nora Rubel claims, "engagement with Israel is relatively new; Israel as a viable, physical, authentic center of Jewish life is a late-twentieth-century occurrence, usurping nostalgia for the shtetl" (134). In the case of *Lovingkindness*, the Israeli setting serves as a background against which the concerns of American Jews are presented. The historical setting of Jerusalem's Old City not only adds authenticity to Roiphe's narrative, but also legitimizes the genuineness of Andrea's conversion. Had she chosen to stay in an American yeshiva, her intentions might have been compromised by sheer proximity to the world she had decided to leave. The Old City walls not only physically divide the haredi from the outside world, but they imply a barrier that disrupts communication, "making the daughter's choice seem at once more insular, concrete, and foreign–in other words, something to be reckoned with, but incomprehensible and unassimilable into the mother's imagination" (Sokoloff 71). The physical distance between the United States and Israel echoes the ideological rift between secular humanism and Orthodoxy, American modernity and old-time Judaism, between mother's expectations and daughter's desires. The vivid contrast between the strict Orthodoxy of the yeshiva and a relaxed atmosphere of an American synagogue shows different representations of Judaism in the contemporary world. An American synagogue "made no excessive demands on its congregation. It allowed them to attend infrequently [...] It was a discreet synagogue" (149), whereas the followers of the traditional movements regulate and control all aspects of each other's' lives, according to the holy scriptures, "pushing [their] way into the daily life of its congregants, separating them from the others, confining them to certain streets, denying them the pleasure of philosophy and Hollywood" (149).

Roiphe's novel illustrates differences within modern Judaism based on the secular-Orthodox dichotomy, not only in American, but also in the Israeli context. Nora Rubel identifies a common fear about haredim: "[l]ike American Jews who worry that these haredim threaten their legitimacy as Americans, Israelis worry that the haredim, with their tight grip on the past as well as their control over religious life, threaten their image as a progressive people" (42). Annie's meeting with an Israeli lawyer reveals controversy around Orthodox rabbis:

> They have eaten up this society with their certainty, their unwillingness to let someone else drive a car, take a swim on the Sabbath. Intolerant, bigoted, fearful of a little menstrual blood, holier than holy, pious but cruel, demeaning women, forcing their truth on everyone else–that's what your grandchildren will do in Israel. (208-209)

The question lurking behind this argument concerns the problem of the growing forces of fundamentalism,[11] which may become an attractive choice for nonobservant Jews disillusioned with the illusionary freedom of modern society. Thus, the protagonist's anxieties as a mother reflect fears of American Jews about the possibility of haredi ideology hijacking conceptions of Judaism, "transforming it into an eighteenth-century form of Eastern European Judaism (with even more restrictions)" (Rubel 146). Orthodox Judaism does not only grow in importance in Israel, but it also challenges liberal American Jews by threatening to destabilize their position in American society. Promoting a radical and uncompromising form of worship, the haredim allow no influences from other strands of Judaism. Therefore, "[t]he most obvious and infuriating danger of regarding only ultra-Orthodoxy as authentic Judaism is the de facto delegitimization of all other forms of Judaism" (Rubel 148). Moreover, by providing an alternative to the American Jewish mainstream, the haredim demand Jewishness to take priority over any other national, ethnic, or class affiliation. Thus, contemporary Americans of Jewish origin might worry about the rise of antisemitic sentiments, which might be fueled by such unbalanced declarations.

Anne Roiphe's novel *Lovingkindness* is located in the space between two, seemingly irreconcilable, visions of contemporary Jewishness: American secular and modern Israeli haredi communities. The daughter's unexpected return to Orthodoxy draws attention to the shifting views of parental and

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[11] In an article "The Whole Truth" Anne Roiphe comments on the problem herself: "Fundamentalism, the oh-so-sweet certainty that your truth is the truth, that the word has been given and must not be changed, the law and order will follow the revealed truth–this fundamentalism, the tranquilizer of ambivalence, the amputator of doubt, is with us again" (86). *Tikkun* July/August 1989:86-88.

communal authority. The postmodern context illuminates the clangor of various representations of life choices, which fail to permanently engage the young woman's mind. The split into Orthodox and non-Orthodox Judaism exacerbates divisions between various branches and factions, which differ mainly on responses to the challenges of the modern world. Orthodox Jews want to retain authority by rejecting a relativist attitude, which is adopted by non-Orthodox practitioners; they refuse to accept, for example, patrilineal descent, intermarriage, and women's ordination. Their uncompromised position occludes any chances of a dialogue. Orthodoxy, on the other hand, offers a goal-driven life and emotional stability, which become an attractive alternative to young people looking for their own path of self-discovery. Like for young Miriam Markowitz, one of the characters of Allegra Goodman's *The Family Markowitz* (1996), who

> desires, desperately so, like other characters in Allegra Goodman's fiction, [...] a return to Orthodoxy, to an origin, to what she perceives to be, ironically, the protection of the covenant and the well-defined structures and strictures of ancient Jewish law. (Aarons 12)

Roiphe's novel does not prioritize a secular vision of life over the haredi one but shows how difficult it is to combine the two in an attempt to sustain family relations. Not severing ties with her alienated and estranged daughter, Roiphe's protagonist has to confront her own position as an outsider to the Orthodox world. Her recurring dream of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav proves that even a secular feminist like Annie Johnson cannot escape the legacy of her ancestral heritage. Even though her secular stance is clearly stated, the need to address what is suppressed manifests itself in night visions. The dream-like appearance of the rabbi's specter rejects the rational and intellectual realm as a place where spirituality is located. In other words, the holy presence may be divulged in ways the human mind fails to grasp. *Lovingkindness* does not discard but confirms the need for Judaism in the lives of American Jews–not the retrogressive or sexist elements of Judaism that provide illusory, but sinister, freedom for women, but rather the progressive and liberal variety. Roiphe's narrative expresses optimism as to the potential for an open-minded version of Judaism to enhance the self-centered individualism of an assimilated American life.

In Roiphe's novel, the relationship between Jewish women and Judaism has come full circle: "Yezierska describes the daughter's longing to escape from the foreignness and restrictions of the Jewish past. Annie's daughter wants to return to them" (Fishman, *Follow* 43). *Lovingkindness* presents three generations of women with three different approaches to Judaism: a grandmother's declining religiosity as a result of assimilation and acculturation,

a mother's modern secular and feminist point of view which claims religion to be yet another kind of structural oppression, and finally a granddaughter's return to traditional Orthodoxy as a consequence of her disillusionment with modern society. A woman's status within contemporary Judaism, as depicted in Roiphe's narrative, varies: it is viewed as subordinate, according to the feminist standpoint, and rewarding, in accordance with traditional Orthodoxy. Trying not to give prominence to any single strand, *Lovingkindness* demonstrates its dichotomy as a product of the interplay between the influences of the past and contemporary challenges. In postmodern American society, conceptions of Jewishness have largely lost a singular differentiating character, and a varying degree of religious observance has become one of many indicators of social diversity. The parents in *Rabbinical Eyes* refuse to accept their daughter's exogamous marriage, because they believe it would lead to the dissolution of Jewishness in the multicultural melting pot, whereas the mother in *Lovingkindness* worries about her daughter's complete immersion in traditional Judaism because it will make her "too Jewish" to contemporary American Jewish tastes. The nature of anxieties voiced by both parents reflects important concerns that continue to baffle multi-ethnic societies. Presenting a strictly polarized version of Judaism, however, Roiphe fails to address its many postmodern realizations, which have managed to establish themselves between the ultra-Orthodox and secular divide. Tova Mirvis' novel *The Outside World* (2004), which provides the background for my next discussion, presents the Jewish life on the Orthodox-secular border, while Allegra Goodman's *Paradise Park* (2001), with which I will end my discussion, portrays the idea of Judaism in its broad, postmodern variety.

2.5 Between Inside and Outside Spheres

Tova Mirvis' novel *The Outside World* (2004) offers a narrative plot that features an array of characters that subvert and destabilize the presupposed definitions of religious practice. Her characters embark on their individual journeys into the outside world, whatever this world means for them, not knowing where they would end up. Not surprisingly, their paths take unexpected twists and turns, which, by challenging adopted sets of values, make them question their old beliefs. As a starting point, the author introduces two families representing two differing religious backgrounds: an Orthodox family of Goldmans from Brooklyn, and the liberal community of Laurelwood, New Jersey, represented by the Millers. Whereas the Goldmans observe the strict Orthodox lifestyle, the Millers have found a way to marry the demands of traditional Judaism with the advantages of the life of an affluent middle class. Their children, all five of the Goldman daughters, as well as the Millers' son

and daughter, are expected to follow in their parents' footsteps, carrying the family tradition into the next generation. Mirvis' vision depicts a world in which ancient and modern collide, imbuing characters with as much certainty, as doubt. The narrative questions the idea of religious faith as something permanent and impervious to the changing world. Instead, the author presents characters whose search for religious truth takes them both through isolation and the joy of communal inclusion, through moments of skepticism and excessive zeal. The two pillars of their world, family and community, both support the wondering self and, at other times, suppress the inquisitive mind. Shifting between the urges of individual desires and family expectations, Mirvis' protagonists struggle to find spiritual meaning in the modern world.

Tzippy Goldman is brought up in the Orthodox world, in which her only dream is to marry a nice Jewish boy and raise a large family. It is a general assumption that "she would finish high school, get set up on shidduh dates, meet the right boy, get engaged, and have a beautiful wedding with lots of white lace and pareve vanilla cream frosting" (4).[12] Her mother had been envisioning her wedding day even before she was born: they

> spent years planning imaginary weddings, deciding on color schemes [...] they discussed chiffon and organza, compared silk to shantung and satin [then] they moved on to the marriage house, the dream space Tzippy and her husband would one day occupy. (3-4)

Tzippy has adopted this vision of the future in accordance with the family and communal expectations. In fact, all her girlfriends have been talking about the same thing: how to find the right husband. No wonder that "she couldn't imagine who she would be" (55) if she did not marry, or have children. This life scenario seems to be the only one available to her, and that is why she accepts it to be her sole destiny. She is not allowed to find out who she wants to be and what she wants to do in life; rather, her identity has been defined for her by means of a set of expectations and values characteristic of a specific community.

The happy projection of Tzippy's marital bliss is hindered by only one concern: that, at the age of twenty-two, she is still not married. By communal standards, she is becoming a spinster, a fact that brings worry and shame not only to her, but to the whole family. Tzippy's marriage is not only her private affair, as it affects the social standing of the whole family. With an older sister– a spinster, the chances of her four younger sisters to marry are greatly diminished. That is why closer and more distant relatives offer help to find a

[12] Tova Mirvis. *The Outside World*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004. All references are to this edition and are cited by page within the text.

match for the aging girl: "finding a husband for a twenty-two-year old was a national emergency" (4). Following Tzippy's quest in pursuit of a husband, the readers get a glimpse into the world of Orthodox matchmaking. There are numerous expectations addressed to both sides, whose fulfillment might seal a successful match. The boy's party wants to know if the girl is thin, pretty, rich, whether she will support her husband while he learns, whether there is a history of mental illnesses or divorce in the family, whether there are any distinguished rabbis in the family, and if they own a TV set. There might be various reasons for a fiasco:

> there was no chemistry [...] the family wasn't prominent enough [...] the boy was hoping for a more religious girl [...] the girl was hoping for a boy not quite so short [...] a boy who wore a black hat only on Shabbos and would every once in a while see a movie. (5)

Whatever the reason, they would continue to search because in their world there is no other alternative for young people but matrimony.

Tzippy's unsuccessful attempts to find a husband bring her to the even more confined world of ultra-Orthodoxy in a seminary for American girls in Israel, which "offered the girls a chance to immerse themselves in religious studies before marriage or college, whichever came first" (51). Even though she dutifully observes all the regulations of the Orthodox scripture, she still fails to find peace of mind. Immersion in religious life brings temporary comfort, but it does not dispel her old worries about spinsterhood. Then, Tzippy decides to take matters into her own hands:

> She had listened to the rabbis, who said that they should look for life lessons not in the silly advice columns of the modern world but in the Torah. She had waited for God; she had played by His rules. But no more. She was done with lists and done with waiting. This elusive husband–she was going to find him on her own. (59)

It turns out that her trip to Israel does not significantly enhance her spiritual life, but it allows her an opportunity to fulfill her mundane dream of getting married.

Tzippy may seem as a typical product of the Orthodox upbringing, but in fact she turns out to be an independent and strong-willed young woman. She feels that there is more to life than what she already gets. There is an urge in her that takes away her peace: "she lay awake and wished she could run across the living room, fling open all the windows and all the doors, and scream" (5). In a seminary in Israel, she also experiences restlessness of the soul: "[o]ne day she was glad she had come. The next day she put her head on her desk and wondered why she was here" (54). The strict religious environment is supposed to quiet the unrest that buzzed inside her, but "as she sat with the other girls and

their recharged fervor, the voice inside her was still there, growing steadfastly" (54). Tzippy tries to verbalize the feelings that confuse her: "[i]t's just that sometimes I wonder what would happen if it didn't work out like it's supposed to. What if I decided to try something else?" (54) She is not a rebel who would pursue her desires at any cost; instead, she manages to navigate her way within the allocated space. As she becomes afraid of the boldness of her own thoughts, she quickly adds: "[o]f course I would come back to this. But just to see" (54). This moment of hesitance signifies that she is aware of the possibility of transgression. Tzippy is fully conscious of the confines of her world and, although she wants to stretch its boundaries, she is definitely not ready to break them. As long as she tries to make her own decisions, such as whether to go to Israel, or embark on a private husband-hunt, they are always sealed by parental and communal approval.

Another example in which Tzippy exhibits an independent mind, albeit within the approved confines of Orthodoxy, is when she deviates from the stereotyped image of a married Orthodox woman and seeks secular education. It is only possible when she leaves home and, as a married woman, is freed from parental guardianship. The idea of departure is mirrored by a long distance between her new home and the New York of her childhood. Tzippy finds it easier to bend her young and inexperienced husband's will to her wishes than to battle with the power of parental and communal authority. Matrimony allows her the feeling of freedom, which she has never really been able to enjoy. Throughout her life, "[s]he had learned not to want for herself, not to say no, not to be selfish" (188). It is only when she sets up her own home that "[f]or the first time, she didn't have to think about anyone but herself" (189). As thrilling as it may initially appear, marriage fails to fulfill her desires. In line with Orthodox instruction, the lives of her married friends "were a cycle of pregnancies, births, and the fleeting time in between" (188). Her married life, however, begins with exploration of the secular world. In Memphis, she drives a car, goes to the library, and finally enrolls in academic courses. She discovers the fascinating world of non-Jewish literature–travel books that take her to distant corners of the world, and art books that show her different aspects of beauty. "She went back to the library every day, and the world around her widened" (191), making her realize that this newly found knowledge allows her to imagine a different path for herself, no longer a nursery school teacher, but an accountant, or a manager: "[s]he wanted to work. She wanted to have something of her own" (200). Tzippy does not tell her parents about the decision to attend college for fear of being rebuked, since "[s]he knew that this wasn't what people expected of her. Going to college seemed like a radical departure from what her life was supposed to be [...] It marked you as being modern or not" (200). That is why the only person she consults is her young husband. In this

way, she still affirms his patriarchal authority, but his naivety and innocence make it much easier for her to reach her goals. By subverting, yet not breaking, the traditional ways, Tzippy astonishingly finds her freedom through marriage.

Even though she is raised in Orthodoxy, Tzippy understands that the world is more complicated than the simple divide between those who keep Shabbos and kosher and believe in the Torah, and those who do not. As an excuse for her own transgressive mind, Tzippy recalls incidents in which Orthodox people do not always act the way they are expected to. She knows Jews who "went to movies in Manhattan [...] went mixed swimming with their husbands [...] went into dressing rooms to try on clothes they could never wear in real life [...] or read Cosmopolitan in doctors waiting rooms" (201). Dismissing accusations of hypocrisy, Tzippy claims that "[s]he knew it was okay to chisel out spaces to breathe" (201). In other words, Tzippy wants to fit in without giving in. Mirvis shows that there is enough room in Orthodoxy for everyone and that adopting a traditional lifestyle does not have to mean giving up one's desires. The combination of the Orthodox life with modernity is shown as possible on condition that the process is evolutionary, not revolutionary. Tzippy's example shows that there is always room for individual desires as long as they do not trump tradition. Put another way, Mirvis' protagonist demonstrates the constructive nature of her identity claiming that one's path in life is never fully determined, even though it may appear so.

Bryan Miller and his family have their world turned upside down after Bryan's two years in a yeshiva in Israel. A gap year between high school and college, intended as a time to freely explore the world and pause before the responsibilities of adulthood, turns out to be a turning point in his life. The yeshiva experience changes this rational boy into a zealous observer of religious law, which comes as a shock to his moderate parents, who "believed in the integration of religious and secular" (26). As a symbolic gesture commemorating the start of his new life, Bryan changes his name to the Hebrew name Baruch, "which they had given him in memory of Joel's father. But they had never intended it for use in the outside world" (27). Baruch adopts the traditional Orthodox attire, both in terms of manner and garment, and criticizes his parents for religious slackness. Even though the Millers are very understanding, having their only son in a yeshiva instead of at Columbia University is seen as "an embarrassment" (35). The parents are baffled by their son's new image but agree that kids need room to grow and explore. They expect his changed behavior to be only the temporary whim of an adolescent mind: "[t]hey had seen their friends' children pass through this stage of fervent religiosity" (27). All they hope is that their son will "return to a more comfortable middle ground" (28). Bryan/Baruch, however, rejects his parents'

definition of success, which means an Ivy League education, and, instead, wants to become a rabbi, and not the kind of "Modern Orthodox rabbi with a Ph.D. in Bible, at a shul where his congregants did one thing in front of him and another thing behind his back [...] He wanted the real thing, the unadulterated God" (35).

The boy's conversion signals a shift in authority, from parental to rabbinical. Now, he has his personal rabbi who advises him on important matters and who "warned him against being lulled into the complacency of his parents' so-called Modern Orthodox world" (28). It is the rabbi who encourages his religious learning and who advises him to marry Tzippy, whereas his parents are merely informed about his decisions. Predicting their unenthusiastic reaction, he instantly dismisses his parents' objections as irrelevant, and supports his own choices by invoking the rabbinical authority. Giving preference to the study of Talmud re-organizes Bryan's world by establishing a new hierarchy, which is based on the concept of religious relevance. In Rabbi Rothstein's words: "adherence to God's law pave[s] the way to happiness and truth" (34). Rabbi Rothstein highlights to Baruch the dangers of the outside world and explains the illusion of the middle-of-the-road approach to religious belief: "the Modern Orthodox had simply come up with a rationalization for their lack of faith, a way to feel better about being seduced by the charms of the outside world" (34). The rabbi's teachings undermine not only the Millers' parental authority, but also question the worldview adopted by a large group of assimilated American Jews. Imbued with new knowledge and an unwavering belief in the rabbi's words, Baruch accuses his parents of practicing "a watered-down version of truth" (34). According to his new vision of the world, there is no place for spiritual relativism, but "a clean cut, an unambiguous separation" (34). Baruch wants the well-defined rules that would make his world whole, and he believes that Judaism would provide him with such.

Baruch's marriage to Tzippy, on the one hand, fulfills the requirements of his religion, but, on the other hand, at a very young age makes him confront the responsibilities of a married man. In order to support his new family, Baruch agrees to his father-in-law's plan to open a kosher restaurant in Memphis. Unfamiliar with the intricacies of the food business, Baruch struggles with bookkeeping, orders, supervising the chef and waiting on customers. On top of that, he has to make sure that everything is kosher. Tired after a long day behind the counter, what he really wants is to sleep. No wonder that he has no time or strength to study as he thought he would. Thrown into the murky world of the catering business by his impractical and reckless father-in-law, Baruch is exhausted and unhappy. The young man remembers his father's warning, but seeks his advice only when his whole business goes bankrupt: "[f]eeling alone

and in over his head, he longed for straightforward advice. He wanted to hear the smart, practical voice of his father, who would know what he should do" (261). And his father is more than glad to reconnect with him.

Bryan's/Baruch's journey into the Orthodox world does not end with him becoming a Talmud scholar or a patriarch of a large family; on the contrary, it makes him face the grim realities of everyday physical work, which have little in common with the allure of spiritual elevation. The religious path guides him in an unexpected way that has him confront its most mundane aspect–the reality of hard labor. Had he gone to Columbia, he might not have had the experience of physical work at all, being absorbed in his studies. This astonishing twist of fate does not mean, of course, that Baruch has to give up his dreams. They might only be postponed, and, with a little help from his family, he may still be able to devote his life to holy scriptures. His first baby will soon be born, so he may have a large family after all; however, as his marriage is not based on the principles of traditional patriarchy, his wife is likely to become his friend and partner. Baruch's first and painful encounter with the problems of the adult world may teach him a lesson, but they do not shake his faith. Even though Baruch's and Tzippy's spiritual paths take opposite directions, the narrative harbors a feeling that they will meet somewhere in-between and work out their own version of religious practice. Whatever form it will take, they are not likely to leave Judaism.

Tzippy's mother, Shayna Goldman, exemplifies another tension between outside and inside, which is encompassed within endogenic borders. The fact that she comes from a secular background overshadows her future life as a member of the Orthodox community. Her initial name was Susan Cantor, and "her parents were Holocaust survivors who had become nonobservant. Her father had died when she was young, and her mother was often too sick or too sad to get out of bed" (14). Even though Susan's childhood is marked by a lack of parental guidance and religious instruction, she finds her way back to her roots:

> Looking for something she couldn't name, she once went to an Orthodox shul on a Saturday morning. It was a small congregation of older people, and they were thrilled to see a young face. After services, they gathered around her and treated her like a long-lost granddaughter. (14)

The Orthodox world provides her with an ideological framework and offers the communal support that her own family fails to provide. Since her mother's declaration that "[i]f her daughter insisted on living in a world that no longer existed, she wasn't going to have any part of it" (97), Susan has become not only a spiritual, but also a paternal orphan. The willful return to her parent's religious legacy facilitates her transition, whose symbolic gesture, just like in

the case of other characters, is the change of her name from Susan to Shayna: "she understood that there she could start over and make herself anew" (15). This moment also marks the beginning of a more meaningful part of her life, highlighted by her marriage and the experience of motherhood. Apart from a clear set of instructions and a sense of belonging, the newfound faith allows her to have what she never had: a huge and bustling family that "would dispel any loneliness" (97), even the kind that was haunting her adolescence as a child of Holocaust survivors. The narrative suggests that her life before, as a child in a secular world, does not seem noteworthy. In the manner of narratives about transformation and personal rebirth, it is implied that setting up an Orthodox home and starting a family brings clarity to her life, both on personal and communal levels.

Shayna's first lessons in Orthodox piety come at Stern College, where her roommate, Naomi, becomes her role model. Unsure about her own identity, Shayna envies "how comfortable [Naomi] is with herself" (91) and hopes that one day she will be equally confident. Soon she understands that conformity is the way to obtain acceptance: "if she wanted to be like everyone else, she needed to pay attention to what people did and said and wore" (90). Tzippy's marriage to Naomi's son brings the two women back together, but this time the dynamics of their relationship is different. The forthcoming wedding preparations are a pretext to finally demonstrate Shayna's confidence in religious matters. Contrary to Naomi's tentativeness about her son's choices, "Shayna was the one who knew what to do. She belonged here. She knew all the rules" (92). In Shayna's case, expertise in religious rituals proves that she has attained the desired level of social self-confidence, which finally legitimizes her membership in the Orthodox community.

The Outside World allows the author to shed some light onto the intricacies of inter-personal relations inside the Orthodox community. By showing how strong Shayna's fear of rejection is, the narrative interrogates the validity of her religious rebirth. The very fact that she has not grown up Orthodox is the best-kept secret in her family. Since she has not learned all the rules and regulations of keeping the Sabbath and kashrut in her mother's kitchen, she is full of doubts as to whether she does things in an appropriate manner. That is why, when she is finally invited to the Rosenbaum's wedding, "she felt more relief than pleasure" since "[b]eing invited was like a soothing voice that said you are doing everything right" (8). Her new life as an observant Jew is delineated by the roles of a wife, a mother, and a pious member of the Orthodox community. As a cultural newcomer, she has a sharp sense of the division between inclusion and exclusion and, consequently, of the need for identity performance. Shayna does everything to blend into the neighborhood:

she dresses like other women, she covers her hair with a wig or a hat, and she even acquires a slight Brooklyn accent, "sprinkl[ing] her sentences with bits of Hebrew and Yiddish" (16). She cooks, cleans, does the shopping, prays at sabbath, looks after five daughters, and cares for her neighbors. If she ever finds any of these duties objectionable, "she wasn't going to be the one to challenge or question and let her daughters suffer because of it" (16). At the same time, her engagement in physical labor enables her moments of emotional respite, in which she can forget her worries. The repetitiveness of the domestic chores provides a sense of permanence to her life and assures her own significance in the process of maintaining a religious household. Her duties, as a homemaker for her family and a guardian of religious purity, make her a valid member both of her family and community. If she failed in those duties, there would be no other substitute roles for her that the Orthodox world could offer.

Shayna's concerns regarding her doubtful social status illuminate areas of the Orthodox life in which female aspects take precedence. The pressure of constant public scrutiny multiplies her personal anxieties: "it wasn't only God who saw everything. The neighborhood had eyes, always open, always watching" (14). Her feeling of insecurity comes from her fear that the "neighbors would see through her, to the past. They would strip off her hat, her long skirt, and her stockings, and expose her as an impostor" (16). She is afraid of being marked as not observant enough, as not one of their own, which would mean communal ostracism. When she worries that she "might not understand a Hebrew phrase that everyone else did" (16), Shayna expresses uncertainty about her position vis-à-vis those who grew up in Orthodoxy. Her obsession to fit in is evident when she blames her secular past for the inability to conceive; she believes it to be "a punishment for her irreligious past, a public demonstration that she wasn't who she appeared to be" (15). Her daughter's wedding is then as much a matter of Tzippy's happiness, as a litmus test of her mother's adjustment. Marrying off an oldest daughter is "the truest test of whether she really belonged [since] [h]aving a mother who hadn't grown up Orthodox would make it harder for her daughters to find husbands" (16). At the same time, the lavish wedding ceremony offers a feeling of personal retaliation:

> Shayna wanted her daughter to be like the women she envied, women who said the right thing and were perfectly dressed and served beautiful meals and always belonged. The wig on Tzippy's head made Shayna feel that it was [for the first time really] possible. (103)

Doing what others do, and even better so, legitimizes her social position. Should she happen to excel over other mothers and earn their admiration, it would only be her personal achievement. Shayna could finally look with pride and

confidence into the eyes of those friends who rarely returned her calls, making her feel unwanted and insecure. In Sara Horowitz' words,

> [s]uch hyperattention to the details of dress, meals, and décor is a kind of Jewish drag, a concern with self-presentation to the members of one's community. That Shayna feels compelled to perform her belonging indicates that membership and identity are always under negotiation. (250)

The author uses a female lens to demonstrate the problem of social othering in Orthodox communities, illuminating those aspects of the Jewish woman's personality that are especially vulnerable in the construction of her social position.

A mother's anxieties reveal the tensions inside the Orthodox world, in which borders between inside and outside are reproduced. We can see how in close-knit communities the private is intertwined with the public, and how group control employs the concept of conformity to keep its members in unity. Shayna's worries are reminiscent of those typical of the immigrant generation, in which the desire to assimilate makes one sensitive to cultural differences. The fact that Shayna shares the experiences of both worlds, in her eyes, makes her identity tainted and vulnerable. Therefore, her return to Orthodoxy may only be fully completed with the next generation–her daughters. That is why she wants to make sure that her children are presented with a coherent set of values. In an ironic twist, her girls long for the things that are forbidden, i.e. non-kosher, and which are synonymous with the outside world. Only when Shayna realizes that a sense of belonging does not solely depend on social conformity does she begin to accept without fear her children's curiosity.

Ilana's peaceful world is distorted with her brother's return from an Israeli yeshiva, when his adoption of ultra-Orthodox mores changes his attitude toward other members of his family. When the long-awaited brother does not return her hug, she is confused, but when he explains to her that touching is forbidden, she feels angry and ashamed, "as if these rabbis and her brother were accusing her of an incestuous rabbinic sluttiness" (33). For the first time her womanhood is placed in focus, becoming the cause of her discomfort. Like other members of their family, she is baffled by Bryan's transformation, but having been close to him, "[s]he took the changes he had made as a personal affront and looked at him as if he had morphed into some creature she didn't recognize" (29). Ilana's frustration is an accusation addressed to her brother and his newly-found idea of piety, but, in fact, her voice also represents those who stay behind–the families of the "nouveau-frum":

> Bryan is acting like he's so religious, but I don't buy it. What about being nice to people? What about caring about how other people feel? What about respecting

> your parents? It's like he's decided that those don't matter just because he puts on a black hat and davens ten times a day. (111)

As people live in social networks, Ilana's words draw attention to the byproducts of any abrupt change in ideology–the positions of families and friends of those who decide to convert. Sometimes the costs may be so dear, resulting, for example, in shattered family relations and severed blood ties, that they question the whole purpose of the conversion. Faced with a new domestic situation, Ilana is driven by conflicting emotions: on the one hand, she wants Bryan back because she longs for their friendship, but on the other hand, she does not want the kind of relationship that Baruch offers. Bryan's conversion and a subsequent marriage create an emotional rift between the two siblings, which inevitably alters the dynamics of their relationship. As they choose to pursue the worlds that fall on opposing ends of the secular-Orthodox axis, they inevitably grow apart.

Ilana's reaction to the forces she can neither understand nor control is rebellion. First, she refuses to call her brother "Baruch" and keeps on calling him Bryan; she plays the music loud, and she questions his choices. As communication and understanding between them deteriorate, she directs her anger at the religious principles that draw them apart. By contesting the rules of Orthodoxy, she indirectly confronts Baruch but more importantly questions her own position vis-a-vis Judaism. Her rebellion takes different forms, initially only

> [i]n her mind, she rebelled in a hundred different ways. She didn't just eat treif, but she ate it in the school cafeteria, in sight of everyone she knew. She kissed boys in the hallway; she wore her bathing suit to shul. She climbed out her bedroom window on Friday night, slid down a nonexistent trellis and into a waiting car. (207)

These mental exercises in transgression give vent to her anger and frustration but also prepare her for the actual breach of Orthodox rules. By playing these scenarios in her head, she gets accustomed to the idea that her life might take a course different from the one her community expects her to take.

Only when Ilana is away from her home and parental care, where she "didn't feel bound by anyone's expectations of her" (194), does she join her less observant friends in probing what is forbidden. At a summer camp, she learns how to apply makeup, she tans, diets, blows her hair straight, and experiments with the latest fashion, but most importantly, she likes what she sees: "[s]he was becoming herself" (194). Ilana regards clothes as a kind of costume, which prepares one to play a certain part. Loose clothes and baggy skirts, which are part of the Orthodox school dress code, are also part of her image of a good

Orthodox student. What she begins to realize, though, is that they cover not only her body, but also muffle the expression of her distinctive personality, and hide "who she was" (194). Back at school, Ilana is ready to contest the school rules, and she has "no trouble ignoring [rabbis'] various pronouncements" (198). She already feels that "[t]heir words had little to do with her life" (198). The climax of her rebellion comes when during the school race Ilana, accidentally, or maybe intentionally, takes off her T-shirt and runs only in her bra and skirt: "[f]or a second [...] something inside her sprang free, and she felt like she was flying" (210). However traumatic this experience might typically be for an adolescent girl, for Ilana it is revelatory and fulfilling. Shedding the Orthodox garb not only physically frees her body, but also symbolically liberates her mind. Readers see how her image changes by means of performative power, to use Judith Butler's terminology. She acts and with each act constructs another element of her independent self. A performative dimension in behavior serves as an affirmation of her creative persona, especially when situated in a larger social milieu (she is not the only girl at school who questions the limitations of Orthodoxy). It is also a visible signal to the outside world, which conveys the message of identity as shifting and constructed.

Ilana's desire to change is not only a reaction to her brother's conversion, but is also connected with a specific time in her life, namely adolescence. She observes the changes in her friends' behavior: they start talking about boys, dieting, fashion, movie stars, music, and look "for ways to assimilate the latest styles into the Hebrew Academy dress code" (107). Like any adolescent girl, she starts to critically examine her body and compares it to the existing models of beauty: "[s]he wished she could open the pages of *Seventeen* and step inside" (109). In her diary, she writes of the things about which she can no longer confide in her mother,

> about the quiet thrill of looking up to see a boy staring at her legs. About pretending not to realize that her shirt dipped low when she bent over, pretending to be oblivious to the flash of her bra strap, the seemingly unintentional baring of the thigh. (195)

Ilana's worries and insecurities, which come from the realization of her new-found physicality, are part of the process of maturity. In her case, however, they are reinforced by a stricter code of conduct that is binding in her community. The rabbis at her school worry that their students "were becoming no different from their non-religious counterparts" (197), and this is exactly what young girls want, to be like the girls in the teen magazines. Therefore Ilana must define her femininity not only as an adolescent girl, but also as an Orthodox Jew.

Witnessing her brother's conversion makes Ilana think about what religion means to her: "Ilana did what she was supposed to, but she wasn't sure

she believed in it" (154). As a girl on the verge of womanhood, she becomes uncomfortable with the Jewish aspects of her identity. Conformity and obedience are the two strategies with which she is already acquainted: "[s]he could fake it best with them. She would pretend to daven if it would make people happy: open her siddur, mumble, and bow" (158). She starts to question the significance of the communal view, when her individual voice grows in prominence: "[e]veryone assumes that I have to be religious just because I was born into this family. But isn't it up to me to decide?" (211). Ilana wants to have a say in regard to her faith; in other words, she wants to be the subject of her life. It does not mean, though, that she wants to reject Judaism, but rather she attempts to probe its boundaries.

Ilana's maturation and coming of age as a social being are shown in the context of Orthodox Judaism. A Jewish young girl grapples not only with her adolescence, but also with Jewishness. Being exposed to modern Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox expressions of Judaism, she questions life in a shifting middle-ground, which fails to provide her with the coherent set of values and beliefs. The advice that her father gives her may not be conclusive, but it is undeniably sound: she must try and figure it out for herself, and if she does not get the answers, she must keep on asking. Ilana's father, who is an observant agnostic, believes more in the value of personal experience than in reliance on institutionalized hierarchy. Mr. Miller represents the idea of faith understood not as a prescribed and fixed set of rules and regulations, which are handed down from one generation to the next, but as a process in which an individual must face the tradition and construct his or her own mode of religious worship. In this way, a man is an active participant in worship, not just a passive recipient of the traditional practice.

Bryan's parents embody a growing representation of American Jewry who believe in a "third road" that allows Jews to take advantage of modernity without compromising their sense of distinct identity. The Millers are exemplary parents who listen to and respect their children. Naomi Miller never forces her opinion on anyone but tries to mediate through differences in order to find the middle ground: "[s]he might suggest, encourage, recommend, persuade, but she never resorted to a stuffing-food-into-their-mouths, throwing-them-into-the-swimming-pool sort of parenting style" (37). In other words, she is not a stereotypical Jewish mother as depicted in the stories by, for example, Philip Roth. Neither does Joel Miller, a corporate lawyer, resemble an authoritative and domineering head of the patriarchal family. His sense of Jewishness is seamlessly incorporated into a secular, middle-class lifestyle. Fully adapted to American mores, he is skeptical and reserved when it comes to his son's choices, but he is ready to discuss any differences in a polite manner. In a

subversive way, Bryan's/Baruch's parents fall victims to their own beliefs: "we've always taught them, about being independent thinkers, about forging their own paths" (44). The confrontation with their son's shift in worldview makes them realize that it is easier to propagate liberal views, yet more difficult to stand by them when they actually take shape. Bryan's newfound piety illuminates his parents' hypocrisy, since the world outside their worldview is what they claim to tolerate, but they find it much more difficult to accept it when it involves their own son.

As long as Joel stays relatively undisturbed by his son's spiritual trials, Bryan's conversion prompts Naomi to reformulate the boundaries between inside and outside in regard to her own experience. "Maybe there's something we should have done differently" (43), she begins to wonder. It is the mother who, in order not to lose her son, starts to reevaluate her own measure of religious devotion. She does so by involving herself in a healing circle led by an un-Orthodox rabbi. The idea of a "healing circle" evokes an association with New Age rites and ceremonies, which infuse the influences of eastern religions, holistic health, and self-help manuals. So does the rabbi's appearance: a long beard and long hair are reminiscent of a stereotypical image of a spirited man, i.e. a mental wellness coach, to use modern terminology. The setting and the whole ceremony aim at revitalizing and healing the spirit by means of practices that fall outside the auspices of the religious doctrine. In a darkened room in a local community center, with only soft music playing in the background, they take off their shoes so as to "plant [their] feet firmly on the ground so [their] spirits can soar" (267), they close their eyes, take deep breaths, and imagine themselves in different situations. The aim of the exercise is to connect with one's inner self: "[t]hink of the people you love [...] Let their faces fill your mind and try to connect with them. Peel back the layers that keep you apart, and try to see inside them" (267). The experience of the Women's Pre-Passover Healing Circle seems similar to any spiritual/self-healing session, which at present enjoys such worldwide popularity. In no way is this practice reserved to the Jewish tradition, but rather it shows how Judaism may incorporate new forms of religious/spiritual worship to stay attractive to its followers. Since there is room for adjustment, Mirvis portrays American Judaism as pliable enough to answer the demands of modernity. Consequently, a non-dogmatic approach to worship means that there is no need to rebel or leave the community. Highlighting flexibility and adaptability as key features of modern Judaism, the narrative ensures that everyone can find something suitable for himself or herself within the doctrine. Naomi represents a modern American Jewish woman who looks for her path within the acknowledged confines. She is neither ready to adopt a stricter Orthodox stance, nor is she willing to compromise her beliefs. Faced with the challenges of both the ultra-Orthodox

and secular world, Naomi chooses to stay somewhere in the middle, drawing from both sources, but privileging none. Spirituality, as a choice of religious worship, will be explored in more depth in the next part of my discussion, when I examine the heroine of Allegra Goodman's novel *Paradise Park*.

The Outside World portrays the world of Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jews in a way that is neither extremely critical, nor highly flattering. Among the familiar characters, there is a "nouveau-*frum*" son and a rebel daughter, a secularized father and an overbearing mother. With a large dose of humor and irony, Mirvis shows Orthodox Jews as having strict religious beliefs, but still as sympathetic characters; *vide* Hershel Goldman, whose unrelenting optimism makes his failures bearable. Shayna's example demonstrates that what Orthodox Jews fear most is the lack of approbation of their own neighbors, rather than God's wrath or the impact of outside influences promoting values that contradict their own. Mirvis' readers are invited to share different perspectives of the insular world, which is filled with sometimes-obsessive detail and ritual. Anxiety about Orthodoxy, which the narrative communicates, is connected both with debates about which version of Judaism is more authentic, as well as with the question about how to transmit a sense of Jewishness to the next generations. There is nothing to fear about the future of Jewish religious observance, according to the author's vision. The narrative's positive role models, especially those young characters who signify the Jewish future and who are willing to assume Orthodox ways, show that there is room for everybody. If there is a sign of rebellion against tradition, it is consigned within the socially acceptable limits of Orthodoxy. None of the characters is so displeased with his or her faith that they decide to abandon Judaism altogether. Tensions, which result from the porous borders between Orthodox and secular worlds, tend to be resolved among their own, inside the religious community.

In *The Outside World*, binary oppositions are used to signal a number of tensions that the narrative interrogates: religion/secularism, tradition/ modernity, the physical/the spiritual, individual desires/social mores, and reality/phantasy. Historically speaking, American Jews make a very interesting group that may be placed simultaneously inside and outside of the mainstream. When comparing themselves with people of color, Jews are "white," but they still consider themselves a distinct group when compared to the American Christian majority (they observe dietary laws, the Sabbath, and celebrate Jewish holidays). Mirvis shows how the terms outsider and insider, understood as belonging to an ethnic and faith community respectively, change when the boundaries between the two are probed. Although the author portrays characters that differ in the particulars of their observance, they are all Orthodox. Tzippy, Baruch, Shayna, Ilana, and Naomi express different modulations of individual

desire, which are presented within the contexts of their religious backgrounds. The narrative follows how they move in and out of their communities in search of personal fulfillment. On the way, they re-construct their worldviews, drawing from the available sources. As a result, the restrictive outside/inside dichotomy is substituted with a more malleable approach, which takes into account the meandering paths of individual development[13].

Mirvis' novel portrays American Jews who are no longer forced to choose between either secular or Orthodox worlds, but whose successful assimilation and acculturation allows them to move freely between any available permutation of the two. Their position also illuminates the constructed nature of modern culture, in which identities are not predetermined and fixed. Fluid borders enable an environment in which individuals may experience a growing sense of diversity of religious experience within American Orthodox Judaism. *The Outside World* shows that modern religious piety does not have to solely involve the execution of prescriptive religious norms, but that these norms are still valid in the construction of Jewishness. Mirvis' characters are ready to reinvent themselves, and American culture is presented as the facilitator of this process. The fact that the author does not favor any of the presented avenues of personal fulfillment presupposes that her main concern is not didactic or instructive.

2.6 Judaism and the Flexibility of Postmodern Piety

Jewishness, Judaism, and Americanness are key elements of an American Jewish identity, which interact, at times harmonically, and at times discordantly. Various configurations of these elements, which highlight or downplay certain characteristics, map the changing position of Jews in American society as well as their own ambivalent relationship with the idea of national affiliation and ancestral religion. As I have illustrated in previous examples, literature offers an interesting commentary on those changes. The need for total conformity to American norms often involved the rejection of Judaism, which was blamed for the persistence of the Jewish sense of otherness among Americans. In the 1940's and 1950's version of America depicted in Anne Roiphe's narrative nonfiction, *1185 Park Avenue*, Judaism is regarded to be an obstacle to complete assimilation, and many Jews believed that its eradication would secure their indisputable position in American society. Rebecca Goldstein's story

[13] The title of Mirvis' novel evokes an important collection of essays entitled *Insider/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism* (1998) by David Biale, Michael Galchinsky, and Susannah Heschel, which brings together conceptions of Jewishness and contemporary American culture.

"Rabbinical Eyes," which is set in the 1990's, queries the idea of intermarriage as aftermath of both successful Jewish assimilation and broader representation in various layers of American society. While the secular life of an exogamous couple does not necessarily involve trouble spots, spiritual trauma may trigger the Jewish spouse to re-evaluate the potential loss resulting from the decision to marry outside the faith. Finally, Anne Roiphe's *Lovingkindness* portrays the next generation–the daughter who (re)discovers Judaism in spite of her feminist mother's lack of understanding and encouragement. For the children of secular parents, the Orthodox religious community in Israel becomes an attractive alternative to the chaos and insecurity of American life. Their parents, however, find it difficult to marry secular Western humanism with fanatical religiousness.

These three examples from the rich body of American Jewish literature signal three important phases in American Jewish relationships to Judaism: from the negation of Judaism and total adherence to American values, through assimilation, whose success or failure depended on from which side of the "hyphen" one looked, and, finally, the rejection of American ideals and modern lifestyles, and the return to Orthodox Judaism. In each case, religion structures the American Jewish dichotomy, querying the protagonist's sense of self. Instead of complementing an American part of the hyphenated identity, Judaism provides a challenge, which may result in its total rejection and the substitution of another set of values. Confronting Judaism may also become a source of anxiety, which dislodges the character's stability, compelling her, as well as her family, to redefine their notions of self. Religion, especially in the context of Jewishness, has always been an important element in the construction of identity. In the contemporary milieu, however, when other markers of ethnic distinctiveness such as language and degrees of affinity with American behavioral and ideological prescriptions have lost their grasp, relationship to religion has remained one of those variables that still helps define a Jewish self. However, the problem is more complex because in the case of Jews it is easy to confuse an ethnic group with a religious community: by describing an individual experience one does not necessarily define Judaism. It is important to distinguish between a personal opinion and a religious doctrine. I realize the social character of a religion and its ability to characterize a particular group's life, but the problem remains how to mediate between the "I" and "we" approaches. Moreover, this connection acquires special validity in the case of Jewish women due to their historically complex relationships to Judaism.

The protagonist of Allegra Goodman's novel *Paradise Park* (2001), Sharon Spiegelman[14], grapples with the problem of Judaism in a way that is different from the efforts of earlier protagonists. There is no need for her to conform to American cultural and linguistic norms, as nobody questions her claim to Americanness. Jews no longer have to be careful about which part of the American Jewish hyphen to emphasize, as the hyphen has already been dropped. Identity struggles, such as the one described by Karen Brodkin, are generally not part of their experience anymore:

> Trying to be "normal," that is, white, and Jewish presented a double bind. Neither was satisfactory by itself, and it seemed to me that each commented negatively on the other: to be "normal" meant to reject the Jewishness of my family and our circle, as well as a more congenial kind of girlhood; to be Jewish meant to be a voluntary outsider at school. (11)

Sharon does not have to weigh her forefather's ethnic past against the gains of modern American life, nor does she need to resign from one aspect of her life to find approval within the other. The ethnic and cultural dilemmas of the melting pot ideology that her elders encountered on the way to a successful assimilation and acculturation have been devalued, except for one: Judaism, which maintains its multifold relevance to Jewish life. Today, when belief in the authority of multiculturalism is dominant, minority groups are welcome to maintain their distinctive ethnicity, which for American Jews often amounts to the celebration of Judaism.

Encounters with Judaism, which constituted the core of the conflicts of previous protagonists, find resonance in Goodman's character, albeit under different circumstances. It may seem that religion and ethnicity are of no relevance to Sharon's de-hyphenated identity, as she dates both Jews and (mainly) non-Jews, searching for true love, just like any other modern woman would. Yet, her final choice of an Orthodox Jewish husband undermines this claim, locating the search for love, in its spiritual and corporeal variety, at the center of her experience. Allegra Goodman re-writes the threefold category of American Jewish womanhood, placing its Jewish and female elements in the postmodern American context. What emerges from her narrative is a contemporary protagonist who is lost among the seemingly equal choices that the postmodern world offers. Sharon's religion is just one of many variables, which may shape her identity if she chooses to allow it to do so. Having been brought up in a secular and liberal family, which does not provide her with a

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[14] Eileen H. Watts notices that "[i]t is no accident that her name also points to riches of the self: Sharon is a fertile region of Israel, and 'spiegel' means 'mirror' in German" ("Selected" 259).

solid ideological foothold, she has to find her own tools to conceptualize the world. What she learns in the process is the realization that Judaism is an essential factor, which she can neither totally neglect nor easily embrace, but which she must address in order to discover her true identity. In doing so, she draws inspiration both from various strands of Judaism and from the values of postmodern America, mediating between constructed and essentialist approaches to reality. Sharon's quest for human and divine love parallels the condition of modern man, who looks for direction amidst the chaos and confusion of a decentered world. A search for spirituality becomes for Sharon equivalent with the discovery of her life force, no matter how little mysticism this life might eventually offer.

I will argue that *Paradise Park* offers both a representation of and response to a new expression of female Jewishness in postmodern America. Allegra Goodman revisits the concept of Jewishness as faith, stripping its definition of racial and ethnic constraints. Instead, she highlights its inclusiveness and adaptability, as a gesture of adjustment to the demands of the postmodern world. Sharon is a modern, cosmopolitan American Jewish woman who is eager to embrace a gamut of cultural, racial, and religious experiences. The concept of ethnic identification is for her not a hereditary burden, but a matter of choice. In a somewhat naïve way, the notions of prejudice and intolerance are alien to her, although she herself is subjected to their minor manifestations. Sharon's quest for self-realization and happiness may reflect any contemporary character's yearning, but what she finds at the end of her road signals the importance of Jewishness to who she is. This realization helps her approach ethnicity with a constructionist approach, highlighting its fluid nature while still stressing the importance of hereditary and ethnic distinctiveness. Sharon is not a passive recipient of her ancestors' identity, but an active participant in the world, which she probes, responding to the rhythm and tempo of a changing reality. Her identity thus consists of a matter of voluntary choices of particular elements, which she selects and adopts while gathering life experience.

The overarching thread guiding my discussion of Goodman's novel is what Sylvia Fishman calls the concept of "coalescence"–

> a pervasive process through which American Jews merge American and Jewish ideas, incorporating American liberal values such as free choice, universalism, individualism, and pluralism into their understanding of Jewish identity. (*Jewish Life* 1)

Fishman discusses two strategies that describe how a contemporary American Jew manages to navigate his or her ethnic identity: compartmentalization and coalescence. The first one is characteristic of those American Jews who wish to

retain their hyphenated identity by "employing two contradictory value systems either [utilizing] them in serial and separate fashion or [becoming] inattentive to their contradictions" (Fishman, *Jewish Life* 7). The division is usually made along public/private lines, with an acculturated lifestyle performed at work and public places, and a distinctly Jewish one–in terms of religious observance, cuisine, and behavior–at home and synagogue with coreligionists. Compartmentalization provides a way to reduce a risk of unwanted (i.e. antisemitic) reactions to one's ethnicity. Even though this strategy avoids the anxiety resulting from efforts to combine and satisfy the two parts of the American-Jewish hyphen, it still leaves a person straddling the two worlds, which exist side by side. According to Fishman's recent study,

> the psychology of compartmentalization still is precipitated by fear of embarrassment: contemporary American Jews are usually not afraid of being embarrassed by immigrant relatives, but they are often anxious over being linked to other images of Jews that might embarrass them. (*Jewish Life* 8)

Hence, compartmentalization continues to serve as a response to and a defense mechanism against negative stereotyping of American Jews.

Even though compartmentalization has been a vital part of the historical American-Jewish experience, nowadays it tends to give way to another trend, which combines secular and Jewish traits by

> either a reworking of the pattern of two cultures into a meaningful whole to the individuals concerned, or [by] the retention of a series of more or less conflicting attitudes and points of view which are reconciled in everyday life as specific occasions arise. (Fishman, *Jewish Life* 10, citing Redfield "Memorandum" 152)

The outcome of the process is an amalgam of two influences, with the essentialist one that no longer recognizes its original element, which is "identified as authoritative Judaism" (Fishman, *Jewish Life* 10). In an attempt to reconcile contemporary American life to Jewish tradition, coalescing behavior responds not to the whole system of values, but to the fragments of experience as they appear, "[privileging] one or the other as the situation seems to demand" (Fishman, *Jewish Life* 10). Dealing with problematic issues as they arise, one by one, is more convenient and plausible than altering one's whole world view. The more American Jews are prone to accept secular mores of conduct at the expense of the sanctity of Judaism, the easier they adopt coalescence as a coping strategy.

Sharon is the character who effortlessly blends her Jewish and American identities, choosing her persona at will, yet not in a devious way. Coming from two different cultural backgrounds enriches rather than limits her personality, and she is happy to draw from both. Her choices between American and Jewish

traits are conditioned by how much they can serve her irrepressible self, and not by the sense of responsibility resulting from her ethnic and religious obligations. Her behavior is characterized by cultural relativism, which helps her access different cognitive and moral systems in an unbiased way. Sharon's Americanness is revealed in the way she expects to find instant gratification, and when disappointed, she swiftly moves on without dwelling on the past failures. My discussion of *Paradise Park* will concentrate on how, heralding some of the concerns of postmodernity, the idea of coalescence is utilized by Goodman's protagonist.

Paradise Park is written in the tradition of the Bildungsroman, with the first-person narrator who embarks on a quest for love and happiness. In consonance with the genre's claim to personal development and education, the narrative shows the protagonist who undergoes a psychological growth. Within the span of seventeen years, Sharon has come of age, and the novel depicts her transition from youth to adulthood, from a naïve and carefree girl into a responsible wife and mother. Sharon's story is also reminiscent of a picaresque narrative, which presents a satirical picture of modern American spirituality in a realistic and humorous way. Its episodic structure shows the protagonist drifting from one social, cultural, and religious milieu to another, in her effort to find happiness. Sharon's solitary quest for self-discovery rhymes with the Emersonian defense of an ideal of individualism, which he illustrates in his essay "Self-Reliance" (1841). Sharon has enough courage to see matters through the prism of the self when she realizes that this is the only way to comprehend the majesty of God. Goodman's protagonist is deeply rooted in the Western and American literary tradition, forwarding the importance of an individual experience in self-discovery over the unquestionable acceptance of the prescribed communal norms, however lacking and limited her endeavors might finally turn out to be.

The protagonist's solitary search is not only a matter of her deliberate choice but results from the fact that her secularized and fragmented family provides her neither with inspiration for her life choices, nor with solid ground to stand on. "We started out and we were the most regular, most normal family" (70)[15], she says: then, life begins to change: her father leaves to marry another woman, her beloved brother Andrew gets killed in a drunk driving accident, and, finally, her alcoholic mother leaves her in the care of her ex-husband. Sharon's parents are the "flower children" of the 1970's who rejected mainstream organized institutions in favor of personal liberty and unrepressed

[15] Allegra Goodman. *Paradise Park*. New York: The Dial Press, 2001. All references are to this edition and are cited by page within the text.

development. In fact, her mother has not moved on, but still works in a New Age store, and is affiliated with the coven of witches, "with whom she practiced magic and women's rituals" (287).The 1970's hippies' attempt to remake the world resulted in an initial outburst of unrestricted freedom, but ended, at least for some, in the acceptance of conformity. Sharon's father, for example, becomes the Boston University professor, whose lifestyle succumbs to the typical American middle-class. The fact that he easily replaces one set of conventional values with another sends a message to Sharon that life choices may be easily adjusted. Hers is a totally secularized family that avoids Judaism, "[n]ominally my family was Jewish, but we didn't belong to anything, or do anything. For holidays, we went by the decorations in the stores" (48). A lack of a plausible source of religious reference leaves Sharon suspended in a spiritual void: she "was consumed with this thirst, this huge desire to learn and to know, and to somehow draw near the Creator!" (162).

Sharon's family does not even remotely bear a resemblance to stereotyped pictures of the Jewish bourgeois, "with father as driven wage earner, mother as conspicuous consumer and guardian of the faith, and daughter as tender trap" (Fishman, *Double* 105). The Spiegelmans also defy the stereotype of a multigenerational and closely knit Jewish family. Her father is strict and authoritarian, not resembling the loving daddy of the JAP, who can be easily twisted around his daughter's finger. Utterly disappointed in his daughter's conduct, Sharon's father does not hesitate to cut her off financially and severs all ties with his only child. Her mother, in turn, contradicts the stereotypically overbearing and protective Jewish mother: she does not cook or engage in any kind of household chores because she is depressive, and she eases her pain by drinking. In fact, Sharon's family is a didactic failure, as both parents renounce their parental duties: mother by disappearing from her life and father by remarrying (twice). Sharon's parents fail her twice: first, to equip her with the model of a functional family, and secondly, to provide spiritual mooring and guidance. She therefore has to find out what kind of woman she wants to be and only then can she look for spiritual fulfillment; duty to self supersedes duty to community. This possibility reflects new opportunities, which American society today offers to, at least, its white ethnic groups. As Fishman argues:

> Increasingly permeable boundaries in contemporary American society make ethnic identification a matter of choice for white Americans. Whether or not–and when–individuals choose to identify themselves as belonging to a particular ethnic group often depends whether such identification is rewarded or punished by the people around them. (*Double* 120)

The fact that after a long search Sharon chooses to embrace her own idea of Jewishness and stay among the people who share and approve of her world view, adds confidence and viability to her choice. She is likely to succeed when confronted with the outside world, as her home turf provides her with the feeling of self-assurance.

Sharon's family background is important for two reasons: firstly, she inherits the innocence and gullibility typical of her parents' youth. Both in appearance and personality traits, Sharon aligns herself with the ethos of the previous generation: she wears hippie clothes, is fastidious about healthy food, easily joins different religious communities, experiments with drugs to explore higher states of consciousness, and embraces the fruits of the sexual revolution: "I ended up staying high most of that week, and gave Baron and Thad all my money for the means of doing so, and also slept with them, which didn't bother me at all, because I was so focused on my inner life" (106). Sharon is a generous and open-minded nature-lover who enjoys folk music and dancing. Her joyous nature dreads the use of violence, which is one of the reasons why her relationship with Wayne fails:

> Wayne would bring you chocolates, and he would bring you flowers–real florist flowers–even if he couldn't afford to. Really, he would do anything for you–the downside being, if you talked back or provoked him or made him jealous, he'd just as soon slam you against a wall. (72)

She believes in the concept of human equality and refuses to join any ethnic or religious cohort, which "thinks it's any better than any other people" (161). Instead, she envisions a communal vision of mankind: "[a]ll the voices of the planet raised in song and humming like one enormous family" (162). For seventeen years, she has pursued a care-free life style, which promotes the fulfillment of personal desires over the obligations of a responsible daughter, student, worker, and woman. In Sharon's words: "[t]he child in me, and the wild girl, and the mixed-up traveler" (118), all the multiple selves demand her attention and she tries to appease each and every one of them. Driven by the appeal of personal liberation through epiphany, Sharon erratically follows in her parents' ideological footsteps, even if she believes her path to be unique.

Secondly, Sharon's family, dysfunctional both in terms of parental care and ideological footing, fails to imbue her with a specific set of ethical principles, which might help her decision-making process, thus, leaving Sharon open and unbiased to any experience. As she recalls, "at my mom's house there were no rules" (286). The lack of an inherited framework of reference makes her an outcast who feels unrestrained by the existing social and ethical codes, to which she tends to conform only when they serve her purpose. Her position in the world as an unaffiliated outsider is supported by Victoria Aarons' claim that

> in the literature of American Jews there arises a conspicuous shift from community to the isolated individual, from a communal sense of shared identity, shared past [...] to a disconcerting sense of isolation and fragmentation. (23)

Being devoid of family obligations and expectations that might obstruct, but at the same time enable, her search for truth, Sharon is free to probe the world and find out for herself what might render her life meaningful. Thus, she readily explores religious and cultural diversity, without the reductive need to categorize and evaluate her experiences. Sharon is a naïve idealist who eagerly welcomes and embraces whatever comes next, without drawing conclusions from past failures: "I was going to find God again, I knew it. Plenty of other options were still out there. If one didn't work, I'd switch. Visions, Bible study, hallucinatory trips" (108). On the one hand, her unbiased outsider status enables her to freely delve into an array of sub-cultures and various forms of worship; on the other hand, a lack of expertise to gauge these experiences makes them seem to carry equal weight to her. Even though her pursuit may grant instant gratification, as her story shows, its ephemerality prevents the formation of a consistent perspective that might furnish answers for her restless soul and mind.

Goodman mocks her protagonist's intellectual independence, which has no profound moorings in her actual knowledge. Sharon shows her ignorance when she is surprised that her father refuses to send her any more money after she drops out of university; when her name does not appear as co-author on the ornithology research paper, even though she agrees to go as an unregistered, unpaid, and unaffiliated volunteer; and when Professor Friedell refuses to accept her letter in substitute for the final term paper. Uncritical of her own conduct, she sees herself as faultless. Wild parties, trespassing on her father's property while he is away and trashing his house, an arrest for dealing drugs, and, above all, "breaking every rule he'd established" (281) fail to make her acknowledge her own behavior as faulty. In a conversation with her father, Sharon cannot understand why he wants to come back to things of the past, especially that *she* had already put them behind. Similarly, she complains to God that he isn't "really attentive to *her* needs" (101; italics in the original). By satirizing the naiveté of her parents, the narrative shows the consequences of an upbringing lacking in a consistent set of beliefs. An ill-understood personal freedom renders Sharon a person who has difficulty making her own decisions. She indiscriminately shifts between opportunities, taking them as they come and trying to figure out what is right for her and what not. Hence, her life is presented as more self-determined than reflexive.

As a background for Sharon's quest, the narrative reveals a tangled vision of postmodern American society, where ethnicities meld to produce new hybrid identities such as, for example, pastor McClaren's, who is "Scotch-Irish-

Hawaiian-Japanese-Portuguese, [with] dark skin and longish straight black hair, and Oriental eyes, and a sharp hook nose" (95); a neighbor in the co-op who is "[a] singer-actor-dancer-doctor named Will" (126); and a comparative religion Professor Flanagan who "came to teach each class dressed up in the style of the whatever prophet he was teaching [...] He was Buddha, and Moses, and Jesus, and Mohammad" (141). They all seem to cohabit the same space, respecting each other and enriching the social fabric of American society. Sharon's employment history features odd jobs, such as catching cockroaches to be sold for electroplating and growing pot in a government-owned jungle. She also finds employment in a succession of low-key occupations, such as temp secretary, cashier at a Hawaiian fast-food restaurant, clerk in a jewelry store, practice patient for medical students, Israeli dance instructor, and musician. The ease with which she moves from one experience to another signifies transience and temporality as the fundamental features of her world. Sharon takes this variety for granted and, resisting master discourses, accepts all ethnic, religious, and occupational variations as equally valid. The hippie generation's vision of America materializes in Sharon's world, where the idea of egalitarianism is measured by the amount of freedom a group can enjoy. Wade Clark Roof calls baby boomers of the 1950's *A Generation of Seekers* (1993), and Sharon follows in their footsteps, marrying postmodern multiculturalism with religious marginality: "but to me God's music was the whole-world ethnic fusion that belonged to everyone" (162). In tune with the postmodern shift in the patterns of thought and structures, on the one hand, the narrative portrays the success of American multiculturalism, but, on the other hand, the confusion resulting from moral relativism.

The triumph of multiculturalism is undermined by two episodes in which Sharon, in her naiveté, is surprised to learn that social relations are still largely based on various degrees of hierarchy and inter-dependence. When Sharon voluntarily joins a scientific research project on migratory birds, she is happy to assume that "it stopped mattering who was a professor, and who the student" (31). Projecting her own vision of universal equality, she fails to notice that it is not shared by everybody. When she is not mentioned as a contributing author on the final article, she realizes that scholarly degrees do matter in academia and, no matter how friendly the faculty might appear, being an unpaid intern does not make her an acknowledged group member. In another episode, the narrative shows where, in a manner that is typical of post-colonial rhetoric, American multiculturalism fails. Kekui's family disapproves of Sharon because she does not share their religion and she is a "Mainland haole–white" (53). The term "haole," which for the native Hawaiians means an "intruder and outsider and interloper" (46), is applied to stress the difference between inclusive and exclusive versions of ethnicity. No matter how eagerly Sharon relates to the

native, i.e. "true" vision of Hawaii, which involves speaking in a pidgin dialect and criticizing the islands' tourism policy, she fails to earn the approval of Kekui's family. The concept of membership of an ethnic group remains an important factor in postmodern America, though it may assume different realizations. Sharon is rejected not because she is a Jew, or by inference a white American, but because she is not Hawaiian. Goodman uses the theme of religion to highlight Kekui's family's hypocrisy: they spend four hours in church every Sunday praising God's love and, at the same time, refuse to accept Sharon as Kekui's girlfriend because she is not Christian. Contrary to Kekui's family's reductionist version of religion, Sharon regards it as something "from the old days" (50), which has already lost its authority. Her optimism and relaxed approach to life suffers defeat in confrontation with ethnic and religious prejudice, which is presented as still thriving in American society.

A search for God brings Sharon closer to Judaism via a myriad of representations of postmodern spirituality: 1) the discussion group hosted jointly by the Unitarian community and a Quaker fellowship, which involves "forums for learning where different people from the community would come and give talks about their beliefs or their work, or whatever turned them on" (156); 2) Kekui's family's Makiki Gospel Church, 3) Margo and Harrison's "Mind-Body-Spirit Exploration Seminar" held at annual couples' retreat:

> thinking it might be some sort of twofer: learning plus a resort vacation; contemplation together with all that extra cash [...]The whole thing might have been an adventure, or at least a humorous scam. Alone, I couldn't help noticing that my motives were crummy, and the whole retreat so phony (94);

4) Pastor McClaren's Greater Love Salvation Church and the sermon which fills Sharon with an orgasm-like exhilaration: "I felt all that mercy and all that love just surge through me, and I said, "Yes!" and I said, "Yes!" again. I said "Yeah!!!" And I said, "Yippee!" (98), which unfortunately lasts a disappointingly short time: "That whole experience, that whole birthing the night before! [...] It was already wearing off! I mean, not even a day, not even twelve hours, and I was back to my breakfast and my hotel carpet, and Satan's creature comfort ways " (99); 5) drugs: "I had to admit it to myself, on drugs, joy felt better–and so did peace and love and hope–at least to me." However, she soon realizes that "a saved person would never feel [...] closer to her God on acid" (108); 6) the Consciousness Meditation Center at "an enormous 1950's Buddhism ranch" (112) where a four-month long stay assures her that neither "silence [is] working on [her]" (117), nor a course of fasting, which only leaves her "body [...] crying out for meat and eggs, and, believe it or not, milk. It seemed like all [her] blood and flesh was crying out to eat the products of other living creatures and to forget about being holy" (12); 7) a room at the co-op

where "[w]e all shared the cooking and cleaning duties, and we were all dedicated to pure food and water, recycling, environmental activism, and the ideals of simplicity" (127), which gives a semblance of home; and, finally, 8) a course of world religions at the University of Hawaii, whose approach, more theoretical than applied, fails to answer any of her questions. A provisional and fragmented world of spiritual chaos feeds, but does not quench the protagonist's thirst for God's love. Even though Sharon has multiple epiphanies, soon each of them dissolves into the monotony of mundane life, prompting her to commence yet another search. Hence, the narrative offers a comment on the metaphysical crisis of postmodern America, and a general devaluation of contemporary representations of spirituality that offer no deeper remedy for the searching soul, except the lure of diversity.

The last part of Sharon's journey starts with her initiation into Judaism, which, in tune with postmodern discourse, is also depicted in its great variety. She begins her return to her ancestral religion in Hawaii where she meets Rabbi Siegel, but is instantly discouraged by "[t]his chosen people stuff, that just made you want to slouch down in your folding chair and disappear!" (148). Had it not been for her interest in Israeli folk dances, she would not have agreed to teach elderly ladies at the Martin Buber Temple: "[t]hey have music, but no instructor–since the one they had was deported back to Israel along with her sister–and they are looking to pay (top dollar!!) for a knowledgeable dancer to teach and lead them" (150). Then, she encounters bearded Lubavitcher, "baby rabbis," who have come to bring the Torah to Hawaii. At the Torah Or school in Meah Shearim, an ultra-Orthodox neighborhood in Jerusalem, where she attends "an intensive minicourse on Judaic law and history" (178), she learns that "[t]here was Kitchen Woman and there was Rabbinic Man (being the one who'd invented the realms in the first place)" (184). Later, she is enchanted by the Honolulu branch of hasidic Judaism, which is represented by Dovidl and Ruchel: "[t]hey were completely free and open to the public and were on Jewish thought–not just the rules of Judaism but on the mysticism of the religion, and at the classes there was more food" (198-199). The hasidic Bialystoker community in Seattle, with Bais Sarah women's program in Bellevue, "promised [Sharon] a new world as well. They were holding out to [her] a new earth and diet and language. They were providing an entire protective bubble–more protection than [she]'d ever found anywhere else" (250-251). Of Crown Heights, in Brooklyn, she writes: "I was there to learn, and to be forged in the crucible of Judaism" (255). Finally, she encounters the Brighton Havurah,

> a group that came together every other week at different people's homes to hold potluck Shabbat services. Potluck [...] didn't just mean everyone brought a different vegetarian dish to share for lunch, but also that everyone should bring some spiritual contribution to share with the group as well. (317-318)

By presenting such an array of manifestations of Judaism, the author stresses the notion of diversity within the contemporary American Jewish experience, without making a claim to authority. Each of the religious strands is presented as valid in its own variation, as each finds an audience within postmodern American Judaism.

While testing different strands of Judaism, Sharon applies the criterion of personal efficacy: as long as the given principle forwards her goals, she follows it, but, if it defies her instincts, she rejects it. Her preferences within Judaism clearly delineate the distinction, which she makes between the rigid rules and regulations based on scriptures and the spontaneous and revelatory manifestation of a divine being. Sharon rejects worship that depends on abiding by each and every one of the 613 commandments in the Torah, and she champions worship that involves "magic, and miracles. [...] God–not being some abstract concept but appearing in the world [...] in a feminine way, too, all the time interacting with the heavens and earth and the light and dark and all the animals and people and the plants" (213). Having experienced different manifestations of Judaism, she can say what she likes and dislikes about them:

> There's a lot of things about Judaism that I love, but a lot that really turn me off. I mean, I love the poetry and the songs and stories and all of that. And a lot of traditions are really beautiful to me, like Shabbes lunch. But a lot of it I find just rigid and disturbing, like the hierarchies of the religion, with the priesthood and all that, and the separation of the people of Israel from other nations, like we're better, and the separation of the men from the women, like *they* are better. And, I mean, I don't want to offend you, but I feel like I shouldn't be leading you on to think I can embrace all that in my life. (218; italics in the original)

Being sure about what she is looking for, she is not afraid to relinquish a futile pursuit and start anew. Thus, she gives up Orthodoxy, believing there is more to religion than a finite set of confining and narrowing regulations, and she is drawn to hasidim because of its spirituality and mysticism. Although it takes her over seventeen years to calm her restless soul, she does not settle for a partial goal, but explores her own desires until they are satisfied.

The character's cognitive process is grounded in an American trust in intellectual independence and self-reliance, but the subject matter is Jewish. Sharon puts on religious costumes until she finds the one that fits her best–the Havurah movement, which promotes modernity and spiritual experience over prescribed texts. *Paradise Park* presents Judaism as a matter of personal choice, with a trial period included, rather than the legacy of one's heredity. No matter how much Sharon desires the religious dimension of life, she does not want to give up her modern lifestyle or to be rid of ever having a voice: "[t]here was something I feared even more, which was that marrying would be an ultimate

commitment to Bialystok Hasidism! To marry: that would be to make my final vows to the community" (273). Hence, her decisions promote the idea of diversity, whether in its cultural or religious variety, refusing to narrow down her world to only one view. Goodman's narrative celebrates the variety that enables her protagonist to finally find her own comfort level in the practice of Judaism.

It is interesting to note the reversal of the starting position for American Jewish protagonists: early-twentieth-century ones, such as Mary Antin, Sara Smolinsky, and David Levinsky, were forced to occupy the role of "the outsider" because of their prominent ethnicity. Their assimilative struggle, therefore, aimed at securing their positions within the American mainstream. A modern protagonist, such as Sharon Spiegelman, also occupies the role of "the outsider," but this time her secular upbringing and lack of explicit ethnic difference makes her an outsider, not to the mainstream, but to Judaism. Sharon's journey takes her out of multicultural America into a specifically Jewish milieu, where she discovers her spiritual roots. Whether as a member of the minority group or of the mainstream, the protagonist's shifting position reflects the American Jews' assimilative journey. Sharon's quest is also used in the novel to take issue with the modern concept of *t'shuvah*; a "return" to Orthodox Judaism. It is both a vision and a life project at the bottom of which lies a spiritual re-alignment with the Divine presence. Coming from an agnostic background, Sharon undertakes a journey to find emotional and physical balance. At the same time, this quest for self-discovery brings her closer to God. It is interesting to notice that Sharon's return to Judaism does not initiate a generational conflict, such as, for example, presented in *Lovingkindness*; as long as her father is indifferent to her choices, her mother is sympathetic and supportive.

The title/central metaphor of "paradise park" interrogates the problem of individual freedom and happiness in the context of the hierarchized world. Paradise is an obvious allusion to the biblical idea of absolute happiness, something Sharon is looking for. "Park" suggests an amusement park, or a theme park, another postmodern invention, which, although completely manipulated, tries to give a semblance of reality. Looking at a bird show in Paradise Park, a bird zoo, Sharon begins to think about her own life:

> If the structure is imposed from the outside, how can a place be a true utopia? A real paradise, that would have to come from inside the birds themselves; that would come from their own hearts. A real paradise, that would mean undergoing a paradigm shift in your very soul. (75)

Feelings of confinement and captivity are rendered in the image of the zoo and repeated in textual explorations of the stifling Orthodox insistence on rules and

regulations. The fictional world as presented in Goodman's narrative is guided by conflicting forces, which provide an illusion of personal freedom. Sharon's choices thus counter not only her parents' generation's secularism, but express a mutiny against any hierarchical structures that exclude the notion of individual autonomy.

Sharon wants to be the agent of her own destiny, not "just the object, and not the instrument, of divine revelation" (271). This insistence on the individual and personal marks her as a truly autonomous and self-governing, if somewhat narcissistic, personality. At the same time, a large dose of self-irony which accompanies her conduct constructs an emotional distance, which allows the reader to look at Goodman's protagonist with understanding and sympathy. Fishman claims that "Judaism rests on the principle that belief is not enough to create a compassionate, spiritually significant life. Traditional Judaism has taken the approach that people need structured guidelines to live well" (*A Breath* 235). Sharon, however, represents a modern attitude to traditional Judaism, which results from "utilizing [her] free choice to select from traditional Jewish rituals only those behaviors [she] feel[s] may contribute to a meaningful Jewish experience" (Fishman, *Jewish Life* 12). Thus, Sharon tailors her own personal version of Judaism that resonates both with her spiritual desires and her femaleness. The fact that it is her own independent and willful choice carries a promise that she will remain faithful and committed in its execution.

Even though the postmodern insistence on plurality, mutability, and free choice finds resonance in Sharon's characterization, the fact that she chooses to fill the spiritual void of her family home with her own version of Judaism draws attention to the importance of ethnic legacy in the protagonist's life. Material comforts of the middle-class life, no matter how reassuring they might appear, provide a stark contrast for Sharon against the emotional and spiritual paucity permeating the relationships in her family. As the Spiegelmans' ancestral heritage has lost its relevance to their lives, they supplant Judaism with a modern secular ideology: "I grew up in a totally nondenominational family. My parents were the most irreligious people you ever saw. My dad was an economist [who] worshipped the almighty dollar. My grandpa was a card-carrying atheist" (132). Her parents' unspiritual lifestyle result in their shedding of the vestiges of their ethnic past, while Sharon, freed from assimilative anxiety and unburdened by cultural inheritance, is in a position to make a free choice among the available modes of worship. While listening to Rabbi Siegel, she comes to realize the essence of her ethnic and religious being. In other words, Sharon becomes aware of the Jewish soul inside her:

> This man is reaching out to me, but not just because I'm a sinner, or a loser, or a returning student. This person is seeking me out because we are related. Because somehow, somewhere, we come from the same Jewish place [...] I am his relative! He knew me first. (156)

Sharon has partially lived a life of quiet desperation until she finds her destiny in marriage to an observant Jew. Goodman's narrative posits the idea that a deeper and lasting bond between two people (Sharon and Michael) is possible due to both of them being Jews. Notably, Sharon's decision defies the idea of exogamous marriage, which is implied as inevitably bringing trouble in its wake. In this way, the narrative promotes an essentialist stance, which gives priority to the lasting importance of one's ethnic inheritance over other mutable aspects of modern culture, whose viability is a matter of a shifting perspective. "Once you're born a Jew, a Jew you will be, no matter what things you do or religions you try" (214), asserts the protagonist. Sharon's controversial declaration could very easily be (and has been in the past) used to justify a systematic othering and, in the extreme case, extermination of Jews. If this comment is supposed to challenge the idea of postmodern constructionism and stand for the final achievement of Jewish feminism then the whole idea of freedom and autonomy in the context of Jewishness becomes questionable.

The protagonist's many identities are ephemeral and transient, validating the importance of what she learns through her experiences: that only Judaism can provide real mooring for her life. None of the other religions she has tried has managed to save her spiritually, or provide a sense of communal belonging. Goodman's protagonist has to discover Judaism for herself, not to re-discover it, as she had initially experienced it. Her journey starts in a manner of a Melvillian white whale chase, in which an encounter with a whale is an encounter with God: "I saw God and I'm going to find him" (82). The starting point for her quest is the Christian tradition, and the final one is Judaism, both linked by an American Jewish narrator. When she finally finds both love and God in one man, it is not only their shared ethnicity, but a similar kind of restlessness that draws them together: "I saw someone who was questing and seeking and searching and yearning. I saw someone on a pilgrimage, and with the kind of soul that asks a lot of questions, and the kind of imagination that loves God to pieces" (266-267). As an allusion to the Song of Solomon–"I will seek him whom my soul loves" (452)–the protagonist tries to conflate love of God with love of man, holding the belief that both human and divine love complement each other making a person complete. When a man and a woman allow a divine spirit to penetrate erotic love, Agape meets Eros. Moreover, the reference to holy scripture, which is accepted both by Jews and Christians, evokes elements that engage Sharon's ethnic heritage and put it in a broader, multicultural context. At the same time, subverts gains of feminist thought. Goodman's

protagonist pedals the claim that what is really important for a contemporary woman is family and religion. More precisely, only a Jewish husband and Judaism are argued to facilitate ultimate fulfillment for a Jewish woman.

Goodman mocks Sharon's insistence on the importance of sensuality within faith, expressed as multiple epiphanies, music, dancing, and attention to food. The diminished role of rationality and pragmatism in the protagonist's pursuit challenges its meaningful profundity. Even the name of Sharon and Mikhail's band, "The Refuseniks," signals an embrace of an alternative lifestyle against the acknowledged modes of conduct. By constructing a reality that promotes the periphery over the mainstream and where definitions are blurred, Goodman's narrative poses questions about the shifting meaning of Judaism. How is one to discern when one variety of Judaism has absorbed too much of the mass culture to still be called Judaism? By the same token, who is to represent the authority to pronounce this judgment? Should it rest on an individual worshipper's shoulders, depend on the ruling of the religious hierarchy, or rather derive from the holy scriptures of Judaism? In the case of Goodman's novel, it is the female protagonist who assembles her own custom-made version of Judaism out of the debris of her postmodern experience, which, she believes, will give her life structure and meaning. The protagonist's decisions reflect Charles Liebman's definition of personalism as "the tendency to transform and evaluate the tradition in terms of its utility or significance to the individual" (129). Sharon wants to embrace her past and that is why she chooses to raise her son within the Jewish faith. By doing so, she selects those aspects of American and Jewish tradition that are to be melded in order to create her own version of the American Jewish future. As long as she rejects, what she believes to be the marginalizing aspects of traditional Judaism within contemporary American culture, she can resolve a seemingly irreconcilable conflict between the fear of losing Jewish identity and, equally frustrating, the fear of its embrace. Thus, the narrative's overarching thread locates the potential reinvention of Judaism in one woman's private experience.

Allegra Goodman expands the area of American Jewish experience in *Paradise Park*, moving it to the relatively uncharted territory of Hawaii and presenting a heroine who defies stereotypical representations of American Jewish women. Sharon rejects materialism, is not obsessed with her looks, and feels no need to accumulate jewelry, designer clothes, or otherwise adhere to a middle-class lifestyle. Hers is a spiritual, not material quest:

> Wayne had wanted to buy me something–a necklace made out of coral beads, or a little glass figurine of a bird, or a batik dress, or at least a stuffed animal–and I wouldn't let him, because all this idea of buying stuff for me made me nervous. Like he was determined to turn me into his princess. (72)

Instead, she follows a relaxed hippie dress code, never spending much time or money on her outer appearance. Sharon does not resemble a spoiled Jewish daughter, as she has to work and support herself. In fact, she is a liberated woman, describing her relationship with Gary as "more about lust, and his was also about lust, but more about romance" (75). Goodman's protagonist is the true daughter of "women's lib," unashamed to cater to her sexual needs. She's ironic, sincere, and tries to distance herself from her failed attempts at finding love, both in human and divine terms. Her voluntary quest is evocative of other heroines of American Jewish literature that do not hesitate to make life-changing decisions to reach their goals, such as Mary Antin's or Anzia Yezierska's protagonists. These previous female protagonists, however, sought a middle ground between the conflicting forces of the ethnic past and assimilative gains. Sharon's aim, though, is not to reduce but to enlarge her world, by bringing the best of Judaism and Americanness together. Erroneous and fallible, which only makes her more human, Sharon's characterization endorses those elements that express and fortify the viability of American Judaism within the frame of an individual postmodern experience.

Paradise Park illustrates the protagonist's quest also as an attempt to provide an answer to the question about the future of American Judaism. Rabbi Siegel articulates the general concern:

> Why is it that those of us who are born Jews look for answers in every single religion but our own? [...] in our century which is blackened by the greatest evil known to any since the dawn of time, since the dawn of man's existence–our people are not a light unto the nations, but a flickering candle of indifference. Our tree of life is weakened with intermarriage, and ignorance. Our children and, in fact, we ourselves, do not know what it is to be a Jew. (148)

Allegra Goodman tries to mediate between two extreme scenarios, which polarize the future of American Judaism: either its complete dissolution in American modern culture, or its preservation by means of the scrupulous adherence to Judaic law and the abolition of intermarriage. Since both tactics are exclusive in character and fail to satisfy a wider audience, the narrative foregrounds a different version of American Judaism in its feminist variety. In order to ensure the survival of Jewishness, the narrative resorts to its total exposure to non-Jewish influences in a manner that supports an open mixing of ideas and beliefs, deriving from various ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. The fact that this pick-and-mix method is not only voluntary in character but also grounded in trusting the human, or should I say female, mind, the narrative claims might be enough to ensure its substitution for the traditionally prescriptive and dogmatic approaches to faith.

An unrestricted flow and amalgamation of ideas, which privileges no particular strand, is an apt description of the postmodern world, which resists institutionalized and doctrinaire hierarchies. What Goodman's prose proposes is its conditional acceptance on the protagonist's own terms. In Mayer's words: "the long course of Jewish history will be shaped less by inexorable demographic trends than by voluntary responses that individuals, families, and the community as a whole make to those trends" (277). Insistence on the importance of personal autonomy in selecting the desired values might ensure the continuing appeal of Judaism to the next generations of American Jews. There is obviously a danger that a strategy based on egalitarianism will only further corrode the surface of American Judaism. Belief in American indulgence and self-satisfaction may promote only those elements of Judaism facile or exotic enough to titillate the mind over-stimulated by postmodern reality. Janet Handler Burstein expresses a similar concern,

> [t]he novel restores its protagonist to her sense of herself as a Jew, but that self-designation seems arbitrary, provisional, beside the vision of Leviathan, drawn from an ancient source to sustain the sense of divine power and presence in a confusing world. (192)

Goodman's epigraph at the beginning of the novel alludes to the Augustinian search for truth via self-examination, which has served as a model conversion narrative for Christian spiritual seekers. Sharon's numerous attempts to appease her restless heart, however, seem a humorous parody of the original itinerary. The difference between the two experiences is that in Augustine "the self is known only through knowing God; Sharon must find herself [...] only in relation to the human, and Jewish, community" (Grauer 277).

Chapter III The Female Body in the American Jewish Literary Imagination

3.1 Discourses of the Body

The human body, especially the female body, has long been an object of interest. Having been the focus of passionate praise, or on occasion, the target of ardent criticism, the female body has often been approached with passion, and rarely with indifference. In order to escape biological reductionism, as well as the confinements of Cartesian dualism between the body and mind, sociologists, philosophers, and literary critics have examined different contexts in which the female body functions: religious, cultural, historical, economic, and social. Constructionist and anti-constructionist epistemologies provide various conceptualizations of the body. Each of them adds another angle to organically founded and socially structured characterization; however, none can claim privilege since all of them have their own limitations. The centrality of the body in constituting the human has led many to explore its boundaries alongside sociocultural development. The struggle for bodily integrity involves the influence of social codes, on the one hand, and the lived experience of the self, on the other. The human body publicly displays social status, family position, gender, age, wealth, lifestyle, and other stratification systems. Body metaphors such as "body politic," "the head of state," and "corporate culture" draw comparisons between the working of the human body and the social system. The woman's body is often seen as a synecdoche for the whole nation; the figure of Marianna, for example, represents the people of France. Diverse representations of the body provide a diagnosis of social life, highlighting those areas that are particularly sensitive to pressures of gender. What emerges from this brief overview is the complex nature of the body, which appears simultaneously as a constraint and as full of potential for revealing its diverse representations. With the ongoing discussion in progress, one may claim that the following observation has not lost much of its veracity, "in the sociological field a detailed list of references (Berthelot et al. 1985) for the period since 1945 based on over 500 texts reveals that sociology of the body [is] in a state of dispersion, evanescence, precariousness and discontinuity" (Berthelot 390).

Western thought on the body has been largely influenced by Hellenized Christianity, for which the body symbolized passion and desire. In Greek thought, the human body signals the contrast between form and desire (between

Apollo and Dionysus), whereas in Christianity it demonstrates the division into spirit and flesh, with the latter signaling moral corruption and symbolizing the Fallen Man. The early distinction between *carne* (the physical body) and *corpo* (bodily inclinations and needs) informs later discourses about the body. In most Abrahamic religious traditions, it is the person's immortal soul that is the center of his or her being, whereas the body is regarded to be just its temporary vessel. The urge to control and refine the body was especially evident in societies in which the boundaries between religious, political, and cultural influences were fluid. A medieval shifting correlation between body and spirit renders the male body as more of flesh, the female one more of spirit. This claim resonates with the mind–body dichotomy, which is often applied to distinguish, or rather justify and maintain, differences between female and male experience. When the age of Enlightenment introduced the vision of man as rational agent, mind-body dualism continued to form the framing assumption for epistemology. One of its implications was that

> those whose bodily demands interfere with acting independently and 'rationally' (as was assumed to be the case for women, racialized minorities, people with disabilities, and others) are incapable of fully meeting the criteria for competent agency, and, hence, legitimately denied some of the privileges of agents. (Campbell, Meynell and Sherwin 5)

A significant change of perspective followed the "secularization of the body in which the body ceases to be the object of a sacred discourse of flesh and becomes an object within a medical discourse where the body is a machine to be controlled by appropriate scientific regimes" (Turner 2008, 38). This shift from sacred reverence to objectified calculation records a significant change in historical and cultural discourse of the human body.

In the nineteenth century, the body was seen as an organic reality threatened by industrialization. That is why in the social literature of the epoch, the industrial body was equivalent to sickness and degeneration. The twentieth century brought the notion of the hedonistic body, i.e. the body that is devoted to sensual pleasures. Economic growth and notions of leisure altered the social representation of the body. Sociocultural requirements exercise control over human sexuality and demonstrate mechanisms whose character changes together with shifts in gender perspective. Widespread consumerism, together with the democratization of culture and morality, results in a commercial interest in the body, especially in the ways of keeping fit and in delaying aging. Various wasting diseases such as anorexia and bulimia are also symptomatic of those changes, as they show how difficult it is to keep up with the demands of modernity. The greying of the human population is a fact that attracts economic and political interest worldwide. Medical provisions, demography, and

economic implications for the labor market are strictly connected with the human body. Scientific developments in medicine, which aim at the preservation of the human body, on the one hand, advance our knowledge, but, on the other hand, pose ethical and philosophical questions concerned with the definition of the human body.

Western discourse on the body is enshrined in dualisms, among which the mind–body dichotomy seems to occupy a strategic place. Cartesian dualism pronounced the body a trap from which a rational mind tries to escape. Therefore, bodies that are associated with the mind become dominant over subordinate ones associated with flesh; this division is conducive to hierarchical order in a society. Durkheim's concept of *homo duplex* also presents man as a dual being:

> It can even be said that although the body and soul are closely associated they do not belong to the same world. The body is an integral part of the material universe as it is made known to us by sensory experience; the abode of the soul is elsewhere, and the soul tends ceaselessly to return to it. This abode is the world of the sacred. (326)

Most historical conceptions view the body as set apart from the self, also referred to as the soul, spirit, mind, or will. The body may be regarded as an impediment to the soul: "[t]hat which is not-body is the highest, the best, the noblest, the closest to God" (Bordo 5).The spirit is an active and guiding force that is imbued with reason and trumps the body's passivity. It is the body that hinders and undermines attempts of the self to attain its highest form of being. As it may be seen, the division into body and soul has produced a plethora of cultural expressions and results in a constant struggle between the two elements of human nature, which render a human being never a complete whole.

Initially, the body was located on the nature side of the nature-culture divide, yet, over the years its position has shifted, just like everything else human-related, to the realm of culture. Turner tries to marry the nature-culture dichotomy by "conceiv[ing] of the body as a potentiality which is elaborated by culture and developed in social relations" (1992, 16). The human body, on the one hand, reflects a person's identity; on the other hand, it is subjected to various pressures coming from moral, religious, and cultural imperatives, which tend to uphold a scaffold of social structure. Mary Douglas, an anthropologist, has accounted for this duality with her concept of "two bodies," mediating between the individual, physical body, and the social body, which is designed by our culture:

> The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories, through which it is known, sustains a particular view of the society. There is a continual

> exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other. (72)

Hence, in order to understand the experience of embodiment, one also needs to look at the culture, in which the process is happening. The body's appearance communicates various ways in which the culture puts its imprint on its representation. For example, if a (wo)man performs her/his identity according to societal expectations, s/he is a welcome member of the culture, whereas, any violation of the normative rule results in her/his criticism and, consequently, social exclusion.

3.2 Discourses of the Female Body

The history of the female body reflects the changing status of women and their relationship to patriarchal relations, which have largely been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters. Biblical representations of the female body mark it as a source of moral corruption and pollution; hence, women are presented as a threat to men's morality. With the ascendency of science, theological knowledge does not lose its validity, but is complemented by medical authority. Malson and Nasser argue that

> [a]n affinity between medicine, culture and politics was particularly marked in the nineteenth-century cult of "female invalidism," with its hallmark diagnosis of "hysteria" frequently represented as a manifestation of women's natural propensity to mental health problems. (8)

Studies devoted to the diversity of the female body's symbolic significance in Western culture, refer to the patriarchal tradition as an important factor in shaping the contemporary discursive position. Changes in the understanding of the female body are often attributed to the transition from feudalism to capitalism, which prompted the sexual division of labor. The reorganization of capitalism has resulted in the transformation of social positions and roles of women. What followed was the growing separation of the sexes along the private/public line. At the same time, a bigger participation of women in the public sphere enlarged their awareness about the interconnectedness between the private and public domain.

A key ideological tenet of patriarchy sees the male as equal to "the human norm, the subject and referent to which the female is 'other' and 'alien'" (Millet 1969, 46). The fundamental distinction between female passion and male reason provides the ground for patriarchal social order. The male body is seen as stable and clearly bounded, whereas the female body is regarded as unstable and porous. Men are the active agents, whereas women are the passive recipients of sexual pleasure. Patriarchal mythology has constructed two

opposing images of the female body: the sexualized body of a dangerous and evil seductress, and a pure and sacred maternal body. Cultural representations of women have often depicted them as seductresses who cannot control their biological drives and, thus, pose a threat to the patriarchal order, no matter how that order is defined. On the one hand, patriarchy has regulated women's access to contraception and abortion; on the other hand, an idealized form of the female body has been objectified and exploited by various means for male consumption. It is the female body, being key to power, which must be placed under control. Therefore, the control of female sexuality, and subsequently the physical repression of the woman's body, has become a vital element of patriarchy. For example, shame attached to menstruation has pushed this subject to the realm of social taboo. We can say that the way female bodies are represented produces judgment not only about women, but also reflects social expectations representative of a given historical moment.

Michael Foucault redefined the idea of power as something possessed by one sovereign group in order to be used against the other, by means of an intricate network of practices and institutions that sustain positions of dominance and subordination in a particular domain. The balance between personal desires and societal constraints, individual and collective conscience, is made possible by the use of such an apparatus as law and religion. In *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, Foucault elaborates on the concept of "disciplinary power" (1977), which brings together the concepts of power, the body, and sexuality. He writes, "a machinery of power that explores [the body], breaks it down and rearranges it [...] thus; discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies" (138-139). But this power no longer derives from any external regulation or supervision; it is the consequence of greater self-control. In other words, the body's docility results from the power of an individual mind and will. The body regulated by the norms of cultural life becomes a "*practical*, direct locus of social control" (Bordo 165; italics in the original). To use Bourdieu's words, culture is "made body," through a series of habitual routines, rules and practices (94). Societal disciplinary practices subject the body, especially the female body, to constant surveillance in case individual conduct might deviate from the prescribed norm. Foucault recognizes the body as a target of power; attempts to control the female body have long been accompanied by various forms of discrimination. In *The History of Sexuality* (1978), Foucault defines sexuality as a cultural construct by means of which power is gained and maintained. He further claims that sexuality is not a specific quality of the body, but the result of historically and culturally specific power relations. In other words, expectations about the desired form of the female body are deeply socialized. In Foucault's view, the body is a malleable

and historically contingent product of the interplay between changing mechanisms of power/ knowledge and different forms of political investment.

The human body has been approached by a variety of scholars with various tools, it has been persistently measured and analyzed. Modern psychology battles the Cartesian mind-body dualism and tries to conceptualize the body as a meaningful whole. Psychoanalysis "considers the body as a frame for the inscription of a discourse, which though rooted in the unconscious, nevertheless is expressed socially and spontaneously via the Id and the Super Ego" (Berthelot 394). Ethnology looks at the body "as a means of communication: communication with the physical, ecological and social environment and communication with others on different levels of ritualization and expression" (Berthelot 394). The body as a mirror, as an expression of difference, or as a text reveals where the social is directly linked to the individual. Elizabeth Grosz explains how the human body functions as a corporeal text:

> The body becomes a text, a system of signs to be deciphered, read, and read into. Social law is incarnated, 'corporealized,' correlatively: bodies are textualized, read by others as expressive of a subject's psychic interior. A storehouse of inscriptions and messages between external and internal boundaries [...] generates or constructs the body's movements into 'behavior,' which then [signifies] interpersonally and socially identifiable meanings and functions within a social system. (198)

The body as text is gazed upon by viewers whose ideological perspective is influenced by race and gender. Socio-historical, political, and differential gaze exposes dominant and subordinate bodies. Oyewumi further observes:

> Differences and hierarchy, then, are enshrined on bodies; and bodies enshrine differences and hierarchy. Hence, dualism like nature/culture, public/private, and visible/invisible are variation on the theme of male/female bodies hierarchically ordered, differentially placed in relation to power, and spatially distanced one from the other. (7)

Being the site of interface between various domains: biological and social, individual and collective, freedom and control, subject and object, structure and meaning, the body reflects the laws of different cultures at different times. A plethora of diverse representations of the body shows how it is socially ordered and segregated.

3.3 Feminists Deconstruct the Concept of the Female Body

Feminism challenged androcentric social theory by demonstrating how women's bodies are trapped in social relations of oppression and inequality. In reaction to the phallocentric nature of Western philosophy, feminists put the female body in the center of political and philosophical debate. In the 1960's and 1970's, women demanded greater autonomy, making the woman's body the locus of their struggle for control and power. Feminist critiques of the "politics of the body" referred to the body as a site of political dispute, with issues such as birth control, abortion, rape, and women's labor signaling topic areas where a woman's control over her body needed to be re-examined. Between the 1980's and 1990's, feminist interest shifted from the material body to cultural and philosophical representations of the body. Tracing the evolution of the diverse representations of the female body in Western culture, feminists highlighted their oppressive nature. Deriving from the fundamental mind-body dichotomy, which has continued to inform Western philosophical thought, is an overtly negative perception of women in all areas of cultural activity. Postmodernism provided feminists with new tools to talk about the body, viewing it not as a natural entity, but as a social construct. Employing Derrida's theory of the body as a text to be read, and Foucault's assumptions, which reveal the body to be controlled and shaped by social practices, fostered the appearance of fresh ideas, which helped augment the ongoing discussion.

Gender is an important category as it introduces another dimension of power differentials. Gender differences have long been viewed in terms of binary oppositions, with female difference defined in relationship to male normality. Construing the masculine as subject and the feminine as object has been the basis of contemporary constructions of gendered bodies. However, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's words regarding the body's metaphysical structure signal a more complex relationship: "the body is both an object for others and a subject for myself" (194). In Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, the body in its own complexity is what constitutes consciousness, not isolated, but in close relationship to other bodies. Even though the second-wave feminist distinction between gender, as self-conception and behavior, and sex, as anatomy and physiology, has somewhat lost its viability, it offered a challenge to the hegemony of biology, opening wider opportunities for the members of both sexes. For a short time, androgyny became an alternative for human development in a liberated society, where a person's life is no longer conditioned by categorically distinct forms of embodiment. Furthermore, the

concept of androgyny was to broaden the existing definitions of gender, simultaneously, freeing people from the limitations of biological sex.[1]

By locating subjectivity not in the mind but in the body, phenomenology posits that the body is an active participant in the creation of self. Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) introduces the concept of the lived body, which offers an alternative to the Cartesian dualism of body and soul. His argument challenges the empiricist thesis that the body exists as an object among other physical objects in the world. Perception, he posits, does not only function on sensory and cognitive levels, but makes meaning by bringing subjects into being: "in and through perception 'the world' is made to mean, and comes to be" (Murray 148). "Bodily being-in-the-world" combines the personal experience of the body with ways in which it comes into interaction with the lived-in world. So, bodily being-in-the-world, just like meaning, is constituted in and through action. In order to render the fluidity of culture, the body constantly redefines its relationship to its changing biology, on the one hand, and to shifting cultural conditions, on the other. Drawing from the context of existential phenomenology, the concept of the lived body offers an alternative to the categories of sex and gender. It is "a unified idea of a physical body acting and experiencing in a specific sociocultural context; it is body-in-situation [...] where *situation* denotes the produce of *facticity* and *freedom* (Young 16, italics in the original). Facticity refers to the specific social, historical, and cultural context in which the person lives:

> crowded by other people [...] surrounded by buildings and streets with a unique history, hearing particular languages, having food and shelter available, or not, as a result of culturally specific social processes that make specific requirements on [the person] to access them. (Young 16)

Yet, at the same time, it is having "an ontological freedom to construct herself in relation to this facticity" (Young 16). Hence, the lived body is enculturated by habits of behavior specific to a certain group. It is through one's own specific features, the expectations of others, and the interaction between the two that a unique body is lived.

Feminists have explored the ways in which women perceive their own bodies. In accordance with poststructuralist thought, Helen Cixous seeks a new language, *l'ecriture feminine*, to harmonize with the feminist writing practice. In her famous essay, "The Laugh of Medusa" (1991), Cixous advocates for women to

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[1] See Ann Ferguson "Androgyny as an Ideal for Human Development," in *Sexual Democracy: Women, Oppression, and Revolution*. Westview, Conn.: Allen and Unwin, 1991. 189-210.

> write through their bodies [to] invent the impregnable language that will wreak partitions, classes and rhetorics, regulations and codes [...] If woman has always functioned 'within' the discourse of man [...] it is time for her to dislocate this 'within', to explode it, turn it around, and seize it: to make it hers. (229)

The female body, closely linked with sexuality, is where the roots of individual subjectivity are located. Moreover, the term "subjectivity" is not defined as a set of stable traits, but characterized by plurality and fluidity. In this way, Cixous hopes to avoid the frameworks of patriarchy and Western phallocentric logic, which conceptualize women as "Other."

Since female sexuality has been theorized on the basis of masculine parameters, the feminine, according to Luce Irigaray, is recognized as an absence within the real, imaginary, and symbolic orders. In other words, what the woman lacks is penis, phallus, and the Father's name, respectively. Irigaray posits that the female body cannot be reduced to one sexual organ, but is expressed in its plurality. In order to disband any kind of binary thinking, including feminism, Irigaray postulates the idea of self-referential feminine sexuality. Her thesis in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977) battles hierarchic patterns of thought. Irigaray points to the diversity of female desire and female language, which "involves a different economy [...] one that upsets the linearity of a project, undermines the goal-object of a desire, diffuses the polarization toward a single pleasure, disconcerts fidelity to a single discourse" (*This Sex* 30).

Through the work of Judith Butler (1990) and Susan Bordo (1993), feminism challenged the belief in the fixed biological body and put a claim to its constructed nature, with historical and cultural components at work. In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Judith Butler questions the logic of the sex-gender distinction, arguing that gender is a social performative: sex

> is not a simple fact or static condition of the body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms. That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled. (1-2)

Thus, the body is a system that simultaneously produces and is produced by social meanings. In the process of reiterated gender performance, some bodies may be constituted outside of the heterosexual binary; not yet subject, but "abject beings who do not appear properly gendered (8) [and] in failing to qualify as the fully human, forty[fy] those regulatory norms" (16). In *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (1993), Susan Bordo demonstrates how culture has a "direct grip" on the body "through the practices and bodily habits of everyday life" (16). Bordo focuses on the female

anorexic body in Western culture and discusses the factors that pathologize eating behaviors. She also examines the ways in which anti-abortion legislation affects the female body autonomy. Her discussion shows how female bodies come to frame the way women are perceived in society, a perception largely informed by the male gaze.

In *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994), Elizabeth Grosz discusses "sexed" bodies in a way that tries to escape reductive and mutually exclusive categories of mind and body. In her view, the body is "a site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production, or constitution" (23). She allows the notion of corporeal feminism to include a variety of models by rejecting one sex, one type of body, and one race as its foundation. Using the Möbius strip as a metaphor for the psyche, in which inside becomes outside and vice versa, she explains how the body and mind work together. This dialectical model enables her to see

> bodies and minds [not as] two distinct substances, or indeed two attributes of a single substance, but somewhere in between. The Möbius strip points to the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, and the ways in which [...] one side becomes the other. (Williams and Bendelow 129)

Susie Orbach's *Hunger Strike: The Anorectic's Struggle as a Metaphor for Our Age* (1993) argues that women have been taught to view their bodies as commodities: "the receptivity that women show (across class, ethnicity, and through the generations) to the idea that their bodies are like gardens–arenas for constant improvement and resculpting–is rooted in the recognition of their bodies as commodities" (17). The fact that women's bodies are constantly evaluated compels women to practice self-surveillance, especially as their social acceptance depends on how well they conform to the current cultural ideal. Gloria Steinem's *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* (1983) comments on the instrumental treatment of the female body, which constitutes the basis for sexual oppression. She points to the ways in which cultures regulate women's access to food, arguing that "food is the first signal of our inferiority. It lets us know that our own families may consider female bodies to be less deserving, less needy, less valuable" (191). Steinem demonstrates how the idea of femaleness is frequently redefined to suit the expedience of male power. For example, in poor societies, where food is scarce, men tend to fatten their wives so that their large bodies come to represent the husband's superior wealth. In richer societies, however, where obesity is a sign of a cheap and unhealthy diet, men give preferentiality to women with slender bodies. The lack of a consistent view on the female body shows women to be nothing but pawns in a man's game of power: "[r]ich or poor, feminine beauty is equated with subservience to men" (195).

Feminist theorists of embodiment challenge dualist legacies, such as those of body/mind, society/biology, culture/nature, sex/gender, male/female, and self/other. They question the existing philosophical frameworks advocating the need for female subjectivity to substitute the male gaze in the process of self-creation. In order to escape dualistic constructions of gender difference, feminist scholars propose alternative interpretations for the ways in which gendered realities are produced, communicated, and experienced. A feminist perspective helps to express a gender-specific subjectivity, which is, however, not alienated from the experience of the flesh. Drawing from different constructions of sexual difference, feminist scholars show the body both as a cultural medium and as a site of social control. They make a connection between the female body and cultural, i.e. largely male-dominated, ideals of beauty, which assign social value to a woman's appearance. Those women who fail to internalize this sociocultural discourse risk the feeling of alienation from their bodies, and those who do it might have invested their time and energy in more productive and self-enhancing activities, such as, for example, education, political activism, or physical activity. In fact, the viability of the active and fit female body, however much it may involve the reshaping of the curvy, female body into a likeness of a muscular, male physique, communicating control, has been debated as a viable vehicle for personal empowerment, Being the site both of oppression and empowerment, the female body continues to inform various feminist discourses that make an attempt to account for its ambivalence.

3.4 The Body in Racial and Ethnic Discourse

Even though Jews as a distinct group have largely disappeared from the contemporary American racial and ethnic discourse, some of the basic tenets of this perspective will supplement my discussion about the body. To a large extent racialization relies on bodily attributes when physical differences not only signify but also provide, often visual, evidence of racial differentiation. In the context of ethnic literatures, a more universal female characteristic is augmented by its racial and ethnic component; this fusion demonstrates how cultural narratives determine a particular form of corporality. Race and ethnicity provide important elements to a discussion about the female body, revealing its social, economic, political, and religious agendas. It is difficult to argue for one of these positions to be more accurate or explanatory than others, but as a whole, these interlaced politics create an environment that allows for a certain pattern to take shape. Race is commonly manifested through body imagery, especially when the body is gendered. Notably, there are differences in theorizing the "raced" and gendered body, which take into account the fact that "race" is mainly a sociopolitical category.

According to Hall (1997), racialized discourse is structured by a set of binary oppositions: civilization/slavery, white/black, culture (associated with intellectual development, knowledge and reason)/nature (associated with feelings, instinct and ritual), and racial purity/racial pollution (242-243). Biological (understood as resulting from nature) differences in bodily characteristics are important elements in this configuration, which strengthen and rationalize the distinction between the white and non-white races. Hall argues that

> [t]he body itself and its differences were visible for all to see, and thus provided 'the incontrovertible evidence' for a naturalization of racial difference. The representation of 'difference' through the body became the discursive site through which much of this 'racialized knowledge' was produced and circulated. (244)

It is especially relevant in the case of people who, through various historical upheavals, happened to have found themselves at the cross-roads of colonial and imperial differences.

The gender dimension, which informed colonial imaginary, helped to establish the hegemony of European masculinity. Gender was used not only as a metaphor for the presentation of new lands (*vide* the expression of the "virgin land" that must be possessed/colonized, just like a woman is "possessed" by a man), but also as a way to exercise colonial control and power. This is why colonized males were often portrayed as closely associated with non-rational nature, which was also linked with metaphors of femininity. The issue of sexual violence, which has long been a common strategy of conquest, marks where gender informs and helps to maintain racial hierarchy. Tlostanova claims that "[a] non-White body (both male and female) comes to be signified by an excessive cruelty and eroticism, justifying the desire of the dark other–both sexual (the desire to possess) and destructive (the desire to kill)" (38). The non-White woman is basically defined by her biology, according to which her hyper-sexuality (linked to lower evolutionary status) and the reproductive drive take priority: "she is seen as sexually available from the start and exposed to the raping gaze of the White man" (Tolstanova 39). Hence, the category of gender was used to communicate and legitimize the white man's difference from his racialized and gendered Others.

Particular features of the body may become obstacles or may even dwarf, if not entirely prevent, a woman's participation in the social structure. As far as representations of Jewish women are concerned, these are their noses and hair, which used to draw most criticism for deviating from the normative model. Other characteristics such as weight, height, and build also invite criticism, even though they are not regarded as typically Jewish. Color has long been the

obvious denominator of a person's social status, with lighter shades of black enjoying more power than darker. In order to offset itself, "whiteness" needs "blackness," and vice versa. Tlostanova explains:

> The White European woman has been always regarded as a normative manifestation of femininity in social and cultural senses, while the colonized women have not been simply below the Western ladies. They have never belonged to the sphere of gender remaining entirely in the realm of biological sex. (40)

The most visible attribute of racial difference–the color of the skin–acquires an additional meaning when it begins to signal a characteristic pertaining to racial identity. In other words, skin color and, by proxy, the body become the locus of racial identity.

A woman's relationship to her body is often constructed by outside forces, whose aim is not to secure her wellbeing, but to maintain global regimes of power. Nowhere is the relationship between personal and political more apparent than in the way the female body traverses through networks of power governance. For example, "[i]n patriarchal Chicano culture, femininity is identified with the carnal body and so women must be protected against the power of their own sexuality" (Madsen 217), which is achieved by means of the traditional Hispanic family structure and the guiding principle of the Catholic Church. Postcolonial studies demonstrate how women have to deal with the complex traditions deriving from their indigenous customs, and at the same time to manage the challenges of colonial power. On the one hand, colonial women are expected to be the guardians of tradition, especially during nationalist disputes; on the other hand, they must be careful not to attract blame for hindering their society's progress, by holding on to old ways. Due to the patriarchal structures in which they function, they have little choice but to negotiate between either rejecting or adopting a given position. Postcolonial women's literature shows how, by means of creative compromises, they are able to perform the roles prescribed to them by society. Ketu Katrak provides examples of literary texts, which

> explore a variety of strategies of coping against traditional constraints: for instance, writing itself, particularly personal and autobiographical expressions; the use of silence and speech as portrayed by Lucia, Maiguru, Tambu, and others in Zimbabwean Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988); the uses of the female body in illness, mental breakdown, and 'madness' in Indian Kamala Das's *My Story* (1976) and in the Dominican Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966); finally, the concept of male oppression in Ampoma's 'willing' sacrifice (suicide), which means dying in her husband's place in Ghanaian Efua Sutherland's play, *Edufa* (1967). (157)

The burden of such struggles is often revealed in bodily traumas, the common one being the feeling of separation between the person and her body. Katrak observes: "[t]hey must mediate physically among the categories of belonging to their bodies, to their desired sexualities, and to traditional norms, or opting out of conforming, and thus facing serious consequences" (158). For example, a sense of bodily alienation often appears in the context of childbearing. Desired procreation finds support through economic and demographical arguments, often brandished on political banners, or used in scholarly debates, whereas a woman's needs are disregarded. What is more, the issue of procreation is habitually employed by religious groups to forward their worldviews. The reduction of the female body into parts, on the one hand, deprives the woman of her integrity and reduces her to the position of the object under analysis; on the other hand, it is a way to uphold the male subject's gaze. Iris Marion Young claims that "the modalities of feminine bodily existence have their root in the fact that feminine existence experiences the body as a mere thing–a fragile thing, which must be picked up and coaxed into movement, a thing that exists as *looked at and acted upon*" (39, italics in the original). She further explains,

> [a]n essential part of the situation of being a woman is that of living the ever-present possibility that one will be gazed upon as a mere body, as shape and flesh that presents itself as the potential object of another subject's intentions and manipulations, rather than as a living manifestation of action and intention [...] This objectified bodily existence accounts for the self-consciousness of the feminine relation to her body and resulting distance she takes from her body. (Young 44)

Nowadays, official discourses of multiculturalism have replaced "race" with "ethnicity." Ethnicity, generally understood as a cultural inscription of group identity, is believed to be more socially constructed than race, which constitutes an essential feature of the body. Sara Ahmed, for example, claims that

> 'race' is an effect of racialization, not its cause, and that 'the racial body' is a product of the process of racialization. Racialization involves the production of 'the racial body' through knowledge, as well as the constitution of both social and bodily space in the everyday encounters we have with others. (47)

With the white body serving as an unmarked point of reference, all other bodies are described in terms of their relationship to the white masculine subject of knowledge. Although not always successfully, *vide* the case of phrenology, scientific discourse has managed to assist attempts to constitute the norm, as well as to define any deviation from it. Thus, bodily differences are laid at the foundation of the concept of race. Furthermore, "[w]omen and 'the lower races'

were seen to be alike in their bodily difference from white men; an analogy which allowed women as a group to be racialized, and 'the lower races' as a group to be feminized" (Ahmed 51). The formation of bodily hierarchy on the basis of racial or ethnic Others has become a useful tool in enforcing and maintaining various forms of racial, social, and gender oppression.

In view of recent scholarship, the problems of women's bodies tend to intersect with matters pertaining to the nature of human body in general. Although it is not the focus of my discussion, the male body has unquestionably gained prominence in recent scholarship. The pluralization of terminology draws attention to various manifestations of hegemonic and subordinate masculinity, thus decentralizing the central hegemony of the male body. Instead, scholars talk about forms and practices, which support or challenge masculinity. Just as patriarchal societies tend to oppress women, men are also prone to suffer social injustice on the basis of their sexuality, class position, or religion. One such example is the case of homophobia and heterosexual masculinity. Queer theory, in turn, broadens the concept of sexuality beyond its origins in conceptualizing homosexuality, by exploring multiple ways in which a sexual identity may be constructed. In *The Lived Body Sociological Themes, Embodied Issues* (1998) Williams and Bendelow enumerate current topic areas connected with corporeal issues, such as an interest in children's bodies, the human body and the sociology of sport, adolescent bodies in the context of physical education lessons and science curricula, issues of health and illness and ways they affect the body, and our future–namely the problem of technological innovations and their influence on the human body.

3.5 The Concept of the Jewish Body

Bodies are endowed with ideological meanings; therefore, by tracing the way the Jewish female body has been depicted in literature, we can see how its perception has been changing. Following Douglas's research (1966:129) we can look at the body as a metaphor for social (dis)order:

> The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system and its boundaries can represent any boundaries which become threatened or endangered. Whenever the boundaries of a social collectivity or people are threatened, these anxieties are mirrored in the degree of care exercised over the physical body. (Williams and Bendelow 27)

So, the way the body is represented in cultural discourse reflects its current social standing; less control over bodily boundaries correlates with an environment of minimal social demands. On the other hand,

> [t]he more tightly controlled and rigidly hierarchized a society or sub-cultural group, the more strictly defined and the less variable bodily responses and expressions are likely to be. Natural expression is, therefore, culturally determined, and bodily control, in turn, is an expression of social control. (Williams and Bendelow 28)

The history of the Jewish body reflects the reciprocal influence of Jewish and non-Jewish ideas, which tend to highlight Jewish difference. Eilberg-Schwartz attributes the conflicting image of the body in Judaism to "a fundamental tension between being made in God's image and being obliged to reproduce" (7). This conflict is reproduced on various levels of religious and social bodily control; therefore, the discussion of the Jewish body is inevitably informed by existing political discourse. Antisemitism has been an influential factor in constructing the image of the Jew, making use of religious, as well as scientific rhetoric. In a book published in 1888, *The Original Mr. Jacob*, an informative chart titled "How We May Know Him" provides the characteristics of a typical Jew: "[r]estless suspicious eyes, curved nose and nostrils, ill-shapen ears of great size like those of a bat, thick lips and sharp rat's teeth, round knees, low brow, long clammy fingers, flat feet, repulsive rear view" (Konner IX). The belief in male menstruation, for example, has been a longstanding Christian argument about Jewish bodily difference: "male Jews menstruated as a mark of the 'Father's curse,' their pathological difference" (Gilman, *Multiculturalism* 123). The accusation of hermaphroditism links the male Jew to femininity, rendering him different from the Western norm of masculinity.

Nineteenth-century scientific developments helped explain the seemingly inherent difference of the Jewish body, the difference which hinted at its potential threat towards non-Jews. In accordance with the scientific rhetoric of that time, there are inherently better and worse races, the latter prone to diseases and degenerate illnesses. Jews were labeled as the race exhibiting pathogenic traits of the body, such as, for example, the Jewish foot. In his essay, "The Jewish Foot" (2000), Gilman discusses the origins of this particular patopsychology, which evokes images of the cloven-footed devil of the Middle Ages, whose feet are hidden from the world inside the shoe ("a sign of the primitive and corrupt mask by the cloak of civilization and higher culture"(356)). Thus, the impaired gait of the Jew was believed to be the consequence of a disease caused by demonic influence. Similar associations can be found not only in a religious context, as the alleged possession of flat feet makes a Jew unfit for military service and, consequently, deems him useless and unworthy of being a good citizen. The argument about the weakness of Jewish feet was later expanded to comprise the whole body, thereby marking Jews to be recognized by their frail physical constitution. Gilman explains that "[t]hese images aimed at a depiction of the Jew as unable to function within the social

institutions, such as the armed forces, which determined the quality of social acceptance" ("The Jewish Foot" 359). Attempts at theorizing the problem of the Jewish foot, by putting it in the context of other ailments of urban civilization, have not trumped its prevailing association as the proof of Jewish difference.

Jews have long been connected with various illnesses, among which those of the somatic type predominated. Excessive use of tobacco and the diseases that this addiction brought about was believed to be a sign of the Eastern Jew, which is interesting, because Jews were also the main traders of tobacco in Europe at that time. According to Gilman, "[i]n the nineteenth century Jewish men are assumed to be a group highly predisposed to specific forms of mental illnesses such as hysteria" ("The Jewish Foot" 106), and tobacco smoking has been widely believed to have a soothing effect on the shattered nerves. Discussing the Jewish protagonists of Proust's oeuvre, Gilman concludes that all of them are portrayed as somewhat diseased: "[t]he Jew's sexuality, the sexuality of the polluter, is written on his face in the skin disease that announces the difference of the Jew" ("The Jewish Foot" 114). Another malady, which was "understood as a Jewish disease as early as its first modern outbreak in the fifteenth century" (Gilman, *Love* 73) was syphilis. The syphilitic body, exhibiting visible deformities, was believed to be symptomatic of the corrupt soul of the Jew, whose aim was believed to be the moral and physical erosion of the Western society. But it is the Jewish woman, with her beauty and sexuality, who will serve as an agent of destruction among humanity. Jews had generally been claimed to be predisposed to certain bodily illnesses up to the twentieth century, a fact that had also been internalized in their self-image. Jewish acculturation was blamed for their proclivity for certain diseases. Gilman explains that

> [o]nly in the acculturated Western Jew (such as Franz Kafka) do the signs of disease (tumor, cancer, tuberculosis, syphilis) become immediately evident, for these Jews have shed their supposed immunity as they left ritual behind them. ("The Jewish Foot" 140)

Circumcision might well be the first thing to spring to mind when talking about Jewish bodily difference, even though this practice is not exclusive to Jewish communities. The discussion about the nature and consequences of circumcision has been long and complex, invoking religious, medical, cultural, and political arguments. Circumcision was regarded as a potential source of disease (syphilis and masturbation), as a prevention of STDs, or as their cure. The surgical removal of the foreskin from the penis was held responsible for Jewish male hypersexuality, or resulted in his image as "impaired, damaged, or incomplete and therefore threatening" (Gilman, *The Jew's Body* 96). Finally, in line with the theory of racial difference, it can be regarded as "the outward sign

of the immutability of the Jew within" (Gilman, *The Jew's Body* 204). According to Gilman, circumcision was initially seen as a primarily symbolic gesture, then as a form of medical prophylaxis, as a sign of a political identity, and finally as a remnant of early Jewish idol or phallus worship (*The Jew's Body* 91-92).

There is a close link between the practice of circumcision and the Jewish nose, the respectively concealed and visible markers of Jewish difference. "The image of the Jewish nose is a delicate anti-Semitic reference to the phallus. For the nose is the iconic representation of the Jewish phallus throughout the nineteenth century" (Gilman, *The Jew's Body* 116). In 1898, Jacques Joseph, a German Jewish surgeon, performed his first rhinoplasty on a male patient in his Berlin clinic. Even though the operation was not of a life-saving kind, Joseph emphasized the importance of the psychological element on the wellbeing of the patient. In a later report, the doctor stressed the value of emotional benefits that the facial change brought the patient, such as his successful return to social life. Even though there had been earlier and also successful attempts to correct the nose, "it was Joseph's procedure that dominated the field because his patient population among the Jews in Central Europe was extensive, exposed, and anxious about their nostrility" (Gilman, *The Jew's Body* 125). Biological differences in the build of nose and chin were claimed to be responsible for a distinctly Jewish speech mannerism called *Mauscheln* (Gilman, *Love* 70), which was used as another mark of Jewish difference. The nose signals smell, which is one of the most basic human and animal (primitive and atavistic) senses. Smell enables survival as well as is an important element (pheromones) in a sexual (procreative) act. As part of antisemitic discourse, a specific kind of scent (*foetor Judaicus*) was claimed to betray a Jew, whereas nose bleeding called attention to a medieval myth about Jewish male's menstruation, the proof of his ambiguous (not fully heterosexual) gender identity.

In early modern Europe, Jews were seen as not quite human. They were accused of having a distinct odor, which could not be cleansed with baptism. Their physique was often seen as reminiscent of the devil's: a dark skin color, horns (Michelangelo's depiction of Moses coming down from Mount Sinai exhibits visible horns, an image that has been widely reproduced), a tail, and a goat's beard. Circumcision made them sexually suspicious, hence the rumors of their lustful and corrupt predisposition. The characteristic shaking of the body during praying signals the importance of the performative aspect of the body. Other characteristic features attributed to being Jewish, which were a vital part of antisemitic rhetoric of the time, were protruding and elongated ears, "yellowish" skin, limping, and club feet. In the nineteenth century, Jews and Blacks were labeled as "diabetic races." Protruding ears, big noses, flat feet,

predispositions to hysteria, and circumcision have become racial markers, testifying to the Jew's failure to meet the requirements of successful citizenship. Examined by means of both hereditary and environmental factors, the Jewish body provides a starting point for discussions of Jewish physiological, and by proxy, psychological deficiency. Gilman notices the distinction made between the civilized and affluent Western Jews and their poorer and less fortunate Eastern European coreligionists: "[f]or Jewish scientists, whose orientation is Western [...], these qualities are a sign of the atavistic nature of the Eastern Jews and serve as a boundary between the degenerated Jews in the East and the Western Jew" ("The Jewish Foot" 370).

The relationship between Jews and physical activities has been marked by ambivalence. On the one hand, most sports were off-limits to Jews, who were forbidden to bear arms, ride horses, or take part in tournaments. On the other hand, until modern times, Judaism had promoted intellectual pursuits and the development of the mind over physical training. Eastern European Orthodox groups, in particular, adhered to strict religious and dietary rules, which prevented their members from the participation in sporting activities. America offered immigrant Jews new opportunities as well as bitter challenges. Physical prowess has always been a vital part of American culture and an essential element in the construction of a genuine American identity. For immigrants coming to American shores, sport offered a pathway to assimilation, especially since athletic success was based on talent, rather than ethnic or class affiliation. Representing a metaphor for American ideals of democracy, sport encouraged a belief in individual capabilities, especially when they were supported by hard work and determination.

Early immigrant literature presents Jews as people of the book, perpetuating the image of the Jew as a non-sporty type. It is their American-born children who begin to realize the importance of athletic sports for their assimilation. Anzia Yezierska's protagonist in *Bread Givers* (1925), Sara Smolinsky, for the first time encounters the idea of physical education in college:

> I had to stand with the rest like a lot of wooden soldiers. [The teacher] made us twist ourselves around here and there [...] I tried to do as the others did, but I felt like a jumping-jack being pulled this way and that way. I picked up dumbbells and pushed them up and down and sideways until my arms were lame. Then she made us hop around like a lot of monkeys. (215-216)

The way she recounts her first athletic activity leaves no doubt as to how she feels about it: "What's all this physical education nonsense? I came to college to learn something, to get an education with my head, and not monkeyshines with my arms and legs" (216). Sara is a ghetto girl and a daughter of the Old World

parents, and her doubts reflect the Jew's belief in the irrelevance of physical activities to Judaism. For her, physical effort and fatigue have acquired entirely different connotations than for her more affluent school friends, for whom sport brings joy and relaxation. "I've got to sweat my life away enough only to earn a living," [Sara] cried, "God knows I exercised enough since I was a kid" (216). It is not only Judaism, which gave little significance to bodily training, but also the experience of ghetto poverty, which required immigrant children to work hard in order to help their families to survive, that is responsible for Sara's appearance: she is clumsy and puny, her body is weak-muscled, and sickly, as her teacher notices: "[y]our posture is bad. Your shoulders sag. You need additional corrective exercises outside the class" (216). Sara embodies the typical features associated with the physically weak Jewish body, and her description mirrors the existing opinion of Jews as a frail and physically inept group. Supporting Yezierska's literary account, Jeffrey Gurock claims that "of all the attitude adjustments immigrant Jews had to make in their encounter with the new American world around them, coming to terms with this country's tight embrace of physicality proved to be among the most difficult" (46-47). Immigrant Jews valued hard work and education, of the religious and later of the secular kind; however, "sports and recreation, physicality, even at its best and purest, remained a disrespected frivolity, even if it might be good for them" (Gurock 48). It took some time before sport acquired a different meaning for Jews, becoming not only an avenue to assimilation, social inclusion and mobility, but also a favored way of spending leisure time. By participating in the common American experience, Jews made a claim to legitimize their place in society. With the ascent to middle-class affluence, Jews gained a new lease on American life, exemplified by an interest in the all-WASP-y game of golf. Nevertheless, whether they became participants or merely fans, they often faced dilemmas connected with the clash between tradition and the demands of sport practice, such as, for example, observing the Sabbath, or a kosher diet. In Peter Levine's words: "participation in American sport became both a measure of [their] success as well as a source of [the] conflict" (6).

The Jewish body has been placed in different ideological contexts among which conceptualization of the image of the muscular Jew was a turning point in its perception. In his speech delivered at the Second Zionist Congress in Basel on August 28, 1898, Max Nordau, a Zionist leader, proclaimed the need for a "new muscle Jew," the one who would be not only a symbol of a healthy and strong body, but "rather an acknowledgment of the older German tradition which saw an inherent relationship between the healthy political mind and the healthy body" (Gilman, "The Jewish Foot" 364). Nordau directed his appeal especially to Eastern Jews who "must rise up and reform their individual bodies in order to reform their people as a whole: the '*Luftvolk*' of the Diaspora must

become grounded as a '*Nationvolk*' (Presner 2). The idea of the muscle Jew links the Jewish past with the present by drawing from the heroic tradition represented, for example, by the Maccabees, and also by epitomizing the future ideal. It also defies the assumptions of social Darwinism, because "Jews, overcoming the extenuating circumstances that rendered them weak and adapting to the new challenges of nation building, could now become 'true moderns' in order to thrive" (Presner 59). In response to Nordau's plea, a whole network of sport clubs, called Bar Kochba clubs, was set up in Europe, attracting young male Jews. The image of the muscle Jew became the symbol of Jewish regeneration both on individual and social levels. Presner argues that

> in art [this image] is inseparable from the 'Hellenic" athletes that inspired Nordau's competitive muscle Jew; in medicine and eugenics, the muscle Jew represents a radically hygienic and racially charged counter-image to any form of Jewish degeneracy; and in Jewish colonial and military discourses, the strength of the muscle Jew is the prerequisite of a successful colonization effort in Palestine. (4)

The Jewish body also appeared as a crucial element of Nazi ideology. German propaganda propagated an ideal of the "New Body": a tall, slim, and blond athletic youth symbolized the new race of Aryan masters. At the same time, Jews were depicted as "misshapen, dark-skinned, ugly, malevolent 'sub-humans': the source of all Germany's problems, portrayed through metaphors of 'pollution,' 'dirt' and 'disease" (Williams and Bendelow 191). Bodily features were used to accentuate racial differences, which became the basis for the legitimization of Aryan supremacy. Nazi eugenics promoted racially based social policy, which aimed at eliminating undesired elements from the German social blood system, such as mentally ill, disabled, homosexual, and all non-Aryan groups, including Jews, Gypsies, and Slavs. Accused of international conspiracy and portrayed as racially inferior, Jews were considered the chief enemies of the German state. They were vilified and dehumanized, becoming easy targets of antisemitic actions. The extensive antisemitic propaganda fostered wider social approval for Nazi politics when the "Final Solution" began its implementation.

The bulk of Nazi propaganda incorporated androcentric images of strong and victorious German men, and weak and degenerate non-Aryan types. When it comes to depictions of German women, they are mostly portrayed according to their social roles, as wives and mothers, enablers and guardians of the family. Serving as examples of German womanhood that reflects the purity of the Aryan race, they look clean, healthy, and pretty. Jewish women, on the other hand, were defined solely according to the features of their bodies. The focus is on their biology: the sexuality and lustfulness of younger women, as well as the

aging and ailing bodies of the older. Their perceived sexual promiscuity signals a threat of sexually transmitted diseases, which is seen as a direct danger to the purity of German society and the Aryan race, in particular. All Jewish age groups are portrayed as ugly and ungainly. A study shows that

> Jewish women appear physically larger than Aryan women. This is intended to make Jewish women appear sexually less desirable than Aryan women and to add to their ugliness. This is especially true of older Jewish women who are often portrayed as being overweight with a haggard or weakened appearance. (Wehby 3)

Jewish women are not portrayed with children, which suggests their lack of maternal instinct. Their make-up and tacky clothes are shown to disguise their true conniving selves and to help them seduce innocent German men. Aryan women, on the contrary, are adorned by natural beauty and need no jewelry or fancy clothes to make themselves desirable. Nazi propaganda aimed at belittling Jews, and Jewish women's bodies were manipulated in images that perpetuated their image as

> ugly and brutish in order to scare Aryan men away from seeking them out as sexual partners. But, they are also shown as being sensual seductresses in an attempt to frighten Aryan women into holding tighter to their Aryan men. Jewish women are supposedly dirty and poor as they are a vermin to the Aryan people. Or, they are the rich and lazy elite who capitalize off of the efforts of the Aryan people. (Wehby 23)

What appears from Wehby's study is a stereotypical and conflicting image, whose consistency is informed entirely by the requirements of Nazi propaganda.

The victory of the Six-Day War of 1967 was an important moment in the formation of the Jewish state and Jewish identity. Since then, in popular imagination, the combat-ready warrior has replaced the bookish intellectual and gentle schlemiel. The physical training of the Israeli Army soldiers and the Mossad agents complemented Zionist ideology with an extensive athletic physical manifestation.[2] Military victory allowed Jews to believe that they

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[2] For example, the system of self-defense known as Krav Maga (contact combat), which was developed for the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in the 1940's by an Eastern European Jew named Lichtenfeld (Imi Sde-Or), has gained worldwide popularity. As Presner observes "the ideological history of Krav Maga is largely sidestepped or erased, especially in the United States. Krav Maga is not simply a form of physical fitness and self-defense; it came into being as a critical part of the founding violence of state formation; following the Israeli War of Independence, Krav Maga was supported and developed by the Israeli military in order to fight and suppress Palestinian opposition. It was introduced to the civilian population by way of the educational curriculum, and it quickly became a tool for extending Zionist ideology into everyday life" (XX).

might be important agents in world history. Images of strong and muscular Jewish males, which entered American culture, such as

> Jews fighting terrorism, Jews killing enemies in hand-to-hand combat, Jews infiltrating into Palestinian society, Jews squelching neo-Nazis–are not only meant to reflect but also to produce these very ideals and, thereby, lay the groundwork for a new, militant and decidedly masculinist Jewish identity. (Presner XIX)

Since then, the reception of images of strong and vainglorious Israeli soldiers has evolved due to the complexities of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Initially hailed as the source of the nation's pride and glory, they have been repeatedly criticized for ruthlessness and the harsh treatment of Palestinian civilians.

As Judaism follows creationism, Jews believe that God gives a person a body and expects him or her to care for it until his or her time comes. The rights of a person to his or her body are codified in the Torah, which expresses the word of God, and in halakhah, which is the body of laws developed by Torah scholars throughout Jewish history. Thus, a Jew has no complete authority over his body; he cannot commit suicide, endanger himself, or inflict any kind of self-injury, such as a tattoo, and should do everything to preserve his or her body in good health. It is believed that the Jew's duty is to maintain his body in good health. The body in Judaism is celebrated, but it is never the object of idolization, as the divine is believed to be beyond human understanding. That is why there is no visual (bodily) representation of the divine in Judaism.

The Jewish body functions in various contexts: as a locus of cultural difference and a visible symbol of assimilation, as a sign of individual difference and a metaphor for the nation. Modern representations of the Jewish body make an association between Jewish particularism, with special attention to bodily differences, and their social othering. In Sharon Gillerman's words: "the modern Jewish body was ascribed a set of physical and moral characteristics meant to render visible and permanent the curse of Jewish particularism and the moral and spiritual inferiority it entailed" (472). Howard Eilberg-Schwartz explains a sense of ambivalence, which surrounds discussions of Jewish bodies:

> On the one hand, Jews were told that they were inadequately embodied since their bodies had inherent defects which made them inferior to other kinds of peoples. Yet, on the other hand, Jews were accused of being too embodied, too close to nature, too reliant on gross bodily sense. (5)

Jews were also regarded as ethnic chameleons readily able to adapt to changing environments, while claiming allegiance to none. In Gilman's words: "[t]he Jew is, in his/her adaptability, the one who is most different because he/she can

become most alike" (*Love* 174). Mutability as difference poses a threat to the idea of nationality, which relies on a set of established characteristics, but lends itself well to descriptions of postmodern hybrid identity. Gilman offers two strategies that Jews came to employ to dissuade their conflicting image: the first was "to flee embodiment through the spiritualization of the tradition and, by extension, Jews themselves" (*The Jew's Body* 5), and the second aimed at the opposite, namely it advocated Jewish embodiment. The latter idea was, for example, adopted by Zionist thinkers such as Max Nordau, who believed that a return to agriculture would be a good way to restore Jewish bodily strength and mental vitality: "Zionists wanted to subject Jewish bodies to physical labor while other reformers labored to free Judaism of the subject of the body" (Eilberg-Schwartz 6). To establish bodily differences between groups is by no means a completed task, as it only opens up the discussion to other realms since the differences in the body imply differences in the mind. The point is that the body is a highly contested site of individual, ethnic, and societal discourses, as it offers commentary on socio-cultural issues and provides imaginative ways of thinking about gender.

3.6 Bodies as Tools for Creating an Assimilated Woman: Immigrant Clothed Bodies

The construction of the Jewish body has been closely connected with political agendas, which inform social life. In American patriarchal culture, women's bodies reflect the status and identity of their men. Men's access to a lavishly bejeweled female body was an important symbol of male economic success; whereas, a modestly dressed female may nowadays signal less material and more spiritual accomplishments. The process of assimilation and acculturation entailed the erasing of those racial and ethnic differences which failed to comply with Anglo-Saxon heterosexual expectations. Hence, the Americanization of the Jewish body started when immigrants stepped off the boat at Ellis Island and had their beards and side curls cut off, their wigs replaced with shawls.

When Jake/Yekl, the protagonist of Abraham Cahan's *Yekl and the Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories of Yiddish New York* (1896), is finally joined in America by his shtetl wife, Gitl, the first thing he notices is her appearance:

> his heart had sunk at the sight of his wife's uncouth and un-American appearance. She was slovenly dressed in a brown jacket and skirt of grotesque cut, and her hair was concealed under a voluminous wig of a pitch-black hue [...] she had gained considerably in the measurement of her waist [...] the wig

> made her seem stouter and shorter [...] It also added at least five years to her looks. (34)

In contrast to his wife's old-world appearance, his Americanized friend, Mamie, displays the latest fashion:

> she was powdered and straight-laced and resplendent in a waist of blazing red, gaudily trimmed, and with puff sleeves, each wider than the vast expanse of white straw, surmounted with a whole forest of ostrich feathers, which adorned her head. One of her gloved hands held the huge hoop-shaped yellowish handle of the blue parasol. (49)

As Jake was himself a greenhorn not so long ago, he is acutely aware of the cultural abyss that divides the Eastern-European shtetl Jews from WASP-y Anglo-Saxon ideals. In the New World, he suppresses all that may link him to his past in an attempt to pass as American. His wife is a bitter reminder of the existence of Yekl–the part of his identity that is rooted in the Old World and which might hinder his successful assimilation. This is why "[t]he consciousness of Gitl's unattractive appearance made him sick with shame and vexation" (Cahan 50). Jake is ashamed of his wife's shabby and unfashionable appearance not because he worries about her possible rejection by a more assimilated part of the American-Jewish community, but because his wife's image pulls him back straight to the world that he is so desperately trying to leave.

Throughout the end of the nineteenth century and during the first half of the twentieth, American Jews underwent dramatic cultural changes. Those customs and rituals that defined their religious identity (religious observance, synagogue attendance, Shabbat, and kosher kitchens) were largely replaced with American mores. Dress code, an important element of fe/male appearance and identity, signals affiliation to or exclusion from particular social groups. There is social significance around one's type of clothing and how it is worn, as it may indicate a person's gender, ethnic and religious affiliation, social status, and occupation. Sara Smolinsky, the protagonist of Anzia Yezierska's novel *Bread Givers* (1925), celebrates her college graduation and new teacher's diploma with a complete change of wardrobe. Her first steps, after arriving back in New York, are to the shops on Fifth Avenue:

> I considered a blue suit, a gray, and a brown, finally, I decided on a dark blue [...] I tried it on in a beautiful fitting room lined with mirrors. From all angles I could see myself. It was all I could do to hold myself in and not to shout out my joy before the sales lady [...] I went on to the millinery department and bought a hat to match my new suit. Then I rode up to another floor, and chose shoes, stockings, new underwear, gloves, and fine handkerchiefs [...] For the first time

> in my life I was perfect from head to foot [...] I [was] ready to be a teacher in schools. (239-240)

New clothes signal her elevated financial and social status, which is equivalent to that of an educated, professional woman. Clothes are also important elements of her successful Americanization, since, generally speaking, people are initially judged by appearances. Substituting immigrant garb with American fashion marks her symbolic shift from immigrant life on the margins to the American mainstream. While choosing the right outfit, Sara already knows what kind of styles she should look for: "I could choose now what I wanted [but] I must be plain as I am without ornaments [...] Plain serge only!" (239). She has already internalized the American definition of taste and knows that "[t]hat graceful quietness. That's what a teacher ought to wear" (239). Education and professional status entail economic advancement, and the fact that she can afford to acquire a modern wardrobe is an important step in her Americanization. What is more, the choice of a dress made from a traditional working-class fabric "serves as a metaphor of the reconciliation of her immigrant past with her Americanized present" (Goldsmith 43). Sara Smolinsky's assimilation is shown as a consciously planned process, not an easy one, but achievable by means of hard work and self-determination.

Apart from learning the English language, a change of clothes was for turn-of-the-century immigrants a visible sign of cultural intermingling. In America, the introduction of a mass-manufactured, industrial-scale garment industry enabled class passing, as clothes became widely accessible, regardless of one's social origins. The dominance of Jewish immigrants in the garment industry made them especially fashion sensitive. Since Jews came to America to stay, they eagerly embraced the American lifestyle. In an act of performative self-revision, a change of clothes allowed them swift identification with "real Americans," also serving as proof that the vast cultural gap between the Old and New World was in fact bridgeable. The emphasis on "looking American" is a unifying theme of many immigrant narratives. Clothing provided a means through which Jewish immigrant women could fulfil and validate their assimilative desires. This belief was a driving force behind the actions of *Shenah Pessah, the protagonist of Yezierska's short-story "Wings" (1920).* A young Jewish immigrant falls in love with Julian Barnes, a sociology professor, who rents a room in the building where she is the janitor. The young scholar makes this acquaintance with the intention of studying the immigrant woman as part of his work on "Education Problems of the Russian Jews." When Barnes invites Shenah to visit an American school library, she despairs about her looks:

> I'd give away everything in the world only to have something pretty to wear for him. My whole life hangs on how I'll look in his eyes. I got to have a hat and a

> new dress, I can't no more wear my 'greenhorn' shawl going out with an American. (17)[3]

So, she pawns the only valuable object she has got, her mother's featherbed, and buys herself a new outfit so that she may look beautiful, "[n]ot for myself, but for him" (21). Her choice of wardrobe highlights the aesthetic gap between an immigrant girl and the WASP-y scholar; "the greenest, crispest organdie" (21) and "a shining [straw] hat with cherries so red, so luscious, that they cried out to her, 'Bite me!'" (21) seem "bold and garish" (28) to Barnes. Shenah's transformation was a clumsy attempt at what she believed was style, and her new outfit, garish and distasteful, was a proof of her lack of refinement. During their trip to the library, Shenah notices other things that make her aware of class and ethnic differences between herself and the lady librarians, such as their simple attire and her calloused, rough hands, and dirty finger-nails. Even though the couple's moment of intimacy is brief, Pessah realizes that fashionable clothes will not win her respect in American eyes, since, as Barnes puts it, "[he] too like[s] to see a woman's face above her clothes" (26). It is through education and the pursuit of knowledge, and not through sartorial passing, that Yezierska's protagonist discovers her avenue of social mobility. The process of acculturation, as presented in "Wings," involves a re-examination of aesthetic norms and modes of self-expression. Nevertheless, for some immigrant girls, a stylish appearance was seen as a practical investment in the future, which might help secure a better job, or even facilitate advancement to a higher social class through marriage.

In a consumer-oriented society, the fashion industry is patriarchal in nature and supports the social hierarchy of power by exerting and perpetuating a dominant ideology through its consumers. For example, the bejeweled body of a bourgeois matron, Mrs. Cohen, in Michael Gold's novel *Jews Without Money* (1930), invites a critique of capitalist excess:

> a fat, middle-aged woman, lay on the sofa. She glittered like an ice-cream parlor. Her tubby legs rested on a red pillow. Her bleached yellow head blazed with diamond combs and rested on a pillow of green. She wore a purple silk waist, hung with yards of tapestry and lace. Diamonds shone from her ears; diamond rings sparkled from every finger. (217)

This caricature of a lady of leisure illustrates a transitional period for American Jews whose financial gains preceded successful acculturation. At the time when Jews were excluded from various occupations and gentile social institutions,

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[3] Anzia Yezierska "Wings." *Hungry Hearts*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920. 1-34. All references are to this edition and are cited by page within the text.

material affluence was one way to convey a measure of their achievement. Mrs. Cohen's appearance is that of a trophy whose purpose is to reflect her husband's affluence. Her incapacity to perform physical work is strengthened by the emphasis on immobility and consumption, the characteristic features of a leisure-class identity. Adornments such as jewelry, corsets, and long dresses signify a body that is unable to perform productive labor. The excess with which both the body and its decoration are depicted evokes an antisemitic rhetoric of alleged Jewish wealth. In spite of their avoidance of physical labor, the myth goes, all Jews are rich; the claim is supported by the ostentatious way in which they like to show off their material affluence.

Dress places itself between self and other, offering, on the one hand, an individualized experience of the body, and on the other hand, defining our relationship to the social world. In the public realm, a clothed body expresses a compromise between the desire of self-expression and a socially approved image, unless the desired outcome purposely aims at the subversion of the commonly accepted code of conduct. Aesthetics and techniques connected with the production and consumption of clothes are culturally and historically dependent. One may express herself through clothes, but at the same time the given choice of outfit informs about one's character; in other words, there is a dialectic relationship between self and dress. Our dressed selves play an important part in the identity-formation process. Being an essential aspect of social embodiment, clothes, jewelry and other fashionable accessories modify the image of the body, either by camouflaging, or enhancing desirable features. Specific clothes may also serve as key elements of the storyline, which facilitate or hinder the protagonist's pursuit, such as, for example, Sonya Vrunsky's dress.

Sonya's dress, in Anzia Yezierska's *Salome of the Tenements*, is an example of how clothes may be used to further the protagonist's goals. A Jewish immigrant, Sonya Vrunsky, is determined to make an impression on the rich and WASP-y John Manning. Using her feminine charm, she manipulates the Fifth Avenue designer Jacques Hollins (née Jaky Solomon) to make her a dress so that "men [...] grow blind with the shine of [her] beauty" (24).[4] But when she finally manages to win the stylist's attention, she almost forgets the purpose of her visit, stunned by his looks: "narrow face, with the hair growing low over the forehead, brushed back fastidiously; the full-lipped sensuous mouth, the nose with quivering nostrils. A thrill of aesthetic delight stabbed through her from head to foot, as her eyes were held in admiring awe. This was

[4] Anzia Yezierska. *Salome of the Tenements*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995. All references are to this edition and are cited by page within the text.

the god of clothes!" (22). The exotic and sensuous body of Hollins, the artist, gives her aesthetic pleasure in a manner similar to which she is later thrilled by beautiful fabrics and clothes. With the words: "only an artist like you can sympathize with a girl starving for beautiful clothes" (23), she invokes not only their shared experience of immigration, but also appeals to Jacques's professional success, which brought him from a sweat-shop on the Lower East Side to the Fifth Avenue atelier. Sonya manages to win Hollins' attention by means of "aesthetic empathy that evolves into a self-projection, penetrating into the man who is both her double and desired object" (Mikkelsen 375). Such terms as deprivation, hunger, starvation, ugliness, sorrow, and tragic abandon, which evoke the descriptions of hardships of the ghetto life, are used by Sonya to express another kind of deprivation that is induced by life in the ghetto–mainly its emotional destitution and the scarcity of beauty there. Her egoism and the desire for power resonate well with the tailor's artistic persona. What is more, they share a belief in the transformative power of art. By aligning herself with his image of a pursuer of artistic beauty, she tries to create a mutual bond that would help her achieve her goals. Hollins is an artist, and Sonya wants to be an object of his art.

Yezierska's protagonist has already internalized the American paragon of beauty, and that is why she cannot find what she wants on the Lower East Side, where the immigrant taste still prevails. Ready-made and mass-made clothes strangle her body, since they muffle her individuality. What she is looking for is an expression of a unique personality represented by clothes that would communicate her true and uninhibited self. She wants a dress in which she would be "released from the itching shoddiness of the ready-mades–the blotting out of her personality in garments cut in gross" (33). Her insistence on the dress which is made-to-measure shows her appreciation of the importance of individual craft, an artist's creation which is not produced, but designed and manufactured in only one model. She does not want to be "one of the ghetto millions–an object for charity and education, fit only to be uplifted" (41). On the contrary, she wants to have a distinctive and prominent appearance that would stand out from the masses of other young and pretty immigrant girls, and, she believes, the right clothes can help her achieve her aim. Being aware of the allure of her femininity, she knows exactly what kind of dress she wants–simple and beautiful, nothing like the tacky and vulgar merchandize on offer on Essex Street. Sonya is a poor immigrant, who cannot afford to shop on Fifth Avenue, so the dress is to be her ticket to the world of the rich. It also becomes a means of disguise, which will help her pass and blend among the upper-classes of American society.

Hollins, as an artist and man, is not indifferent to the plea of a pretty and enthusiastic young woman; he notices "with aesthetic delight her slender figure. Sonya's neck was like a stalk of a flower, and through the coarse serge of her shabby suit he sensed the bud-like breasts" (24). In Hollins' eyes, Sonya's youthful and vibrant body comes to represent art in its pure form. Her portrayal as a passionate soul inhabiting a beautiful body provides a stark contrast to the depiction of Mrs. Orden, one of his many rich clients:

> Hollins had been working mechanically that morning on the problem of Mrs. Van Orden's irrepressible fat that would take all his genius to veil, but now he looked with sharp distaste at the beefy shoulders and bulging bust across which the satin of her gown was stretched as she bent forward in aggressive self-importance. The body of this bourgeois was dead wood–not worth working over–he thought contemptuously!. (24)

Hollins wealthy clientele represent relationship between art and money: "the thick-skinned, rich women used his art as tinsel for their vanity" (25). Mrs. Orden buys her beauty, and the success of Hollins' business depends equally on her satisfaction and money. In comparison to Sonya's natural charm, however, the fashioning of Mrs. Orden's beauty seems like fraud, and Hollins' skill makes him a partner in such crime. Sonya cleverly uses Hollins' uncertainty–about whether to stay an impoverished but idealistic artist, or to become a wealthy but morally corrupted businessman–to further her own goals. Likewise, Hollins sees dishonesty in Sonya's attempt at self-creation: "[y]ou don't have to be a second-hand pattern of a person–when you can be your own free, individual self" (27). Clothes might give her an apparition of the Fifth Avenue lady, but inside she is still the same Russian Jewish immigrant girl from the Lower East Side. Through a change of clothes, Sonya creates an illusion that bridges ethnic and class differences, but she later realizes that a relationship based on deception is a lie. The idea of intermarriage, which was to be the fulfillment of America's promise of equality, posed other challenges to immigrant Jews who readily renounced matchmakers and arranged marriages. A cross-cultural romance turns out to be a much more complicated undertaking, and Sonya soon realizes that a closer bond is offered by a member of her own ethnic group with whom she shares memories and experiences.

Clothes may also illustrate the idea of social incompatibility (immigrant versus American aesthetics), which is best rendered in the clash between the sophisticated refinement of Manning's guests and the gaudy tawdriness of Sonya's. Sonya's Lower East Side friends provide quite a commotion among the elegant and stylish clientele of the Fifth Avenue boutiques: Gittel Stein's "skirts flapped awkwardly around her thin ankles and she was so flustered that

her hat, with its hard array of cock's feathers, had swung to one side" (123), and Mrs. Peltz wears clothes borrowed from her neighbors:

> This silk waist, Mrs. Finkelstein from the fish market lent me. And the diamond earrings is from the butcher's wife. Mrs. Smirsky from the second-hand store let me wear this hat to-day. But don't it all fit me together like I was a lady born? . (123)

Dressed to the best of their knowledge and taste, immigrant women failed to realize the gap dividing them from WASP-y, American ladies. The passage in the novel that describes the wedding reception also illustrates how one's choice of particular clothes may illuminate social class divisions and determine a person's economic standing. Until the beginning of mass garment production, appearance had been an important factor in determining one's social profile. The homogenization of culture and wider access to ready-made goods blurred those differences, but did not eradicate them entirely.

Sonya's new dress reflects her taste in elegant simplicity and, indeed, when she enters the restaurant, John Manning is dazzled: "[a] wave of magnetism! [...] A vision in grey, a glowing face rising above morning mists came toward him" (33). The dress is a perfect foil against which her beauty and passion are reflected, the color grey being the promise of timeless elegance, modesty, and stability. Her new image stays in stark contrast to how Manning and the American WASP culture perceive her kind: "Russian Jewesses are always fascinating to men [...] because they have neither breeding, culture, nor tradition [...]With all to gain and nothing to lose [...]They are mere creatures of sex" (128). Manning's amazement at Sonya's noble appearance comes from the clash between his expectations and her manipulated representation (apart from obtaining a free dress, she persuades her landlord to paint her room and the pawn-shop owner to lend her money to beautify it). Her act of willful deception results in the presentation of the Jewish immigrant as a poor, but virtuous and cultured woman, who is worthy of an American philanthropist's attention. Dress as a concept of bodily practice invokes the idea of performativity, enabling the protagonist to perform in accordance with the cultural demands for a specific social context. Put another way, the choice of a particular garment allows Sonya to control the representation of her identity in terms of social appropriateness.

Botshon argues that by showing an immigrant heroine, who is an active agent of her own fate, Yezierska

> inverts two popular ideas: the traditional narrative of assimilation, where the immigrant is almost passively subsumed within the dominant culture and the all-consuming appetites of the vamp, where the WASP male is tainted by the foreign woman. In a twist, this portrait portrays the female immigrant body seducing the

> male national body into accepting and, through marriage, incorporating her. (246)

Sonya skillfully manages her appearance by calculating her degree of accommodation and resistance to social norms. When her exogamous marriage fails, she finds a soulmate in Jacques Hollins, with whom she does not have to pretend to be someone she is not. Moreover, with his support and acceptance, she can stay true to her own ethnic and class identity. What draws them together is not only their common Russian-Jewish immigrant origin, but also a flaming passion for beauty. The art of design becomes a tool to express Sonya's passions, allowing her access to the art she craves so much in spite of her underprivileged immigrant status. Sonya is a producer and consumer of art produced by a collision of cultures. She is an artist whose yearnings are poured into the art of dressmaking, and her creations, which are bought by wealthy Americans, afford her indirect access to those parts of American society from which she is excluded. This time, however, she is not aiming at the highest echelons of American society, but at her fellow immigrant women whose clothes are often plain for the sake of practicality. As Goldsmith posits: "[i]n affording immigrant women access to beauty, Sonya gives them a form of agency that enables realizing of female desires" (39). On a broader scale, Babak claims, her creativity may enhance the lives of those women who yearn for the world beyond the physical and spiritual confines of the ghetto, and validate

> *both* the symbolic and material significance of clothes as the tissues of social organisms–both collective organisms (such as ethnicity, gender, and class) as well as more technical constructions of the nation that contributed to or challenged the myth of social mobility. (5; italics in the original)

3.7 In Pursuit of the "White" Body

The human body is a crucial site of identity construction, especially when it is subjected to the scrutiny of preferred cultural norms. Since its successful departure from immigrant status, which was burdened with Old World tradition, the Jewish body kept on answering other assimilative demands in order to conform to the dominant culture. Choices around feeding, clothing and grooming the body are mediums of culture. Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2007) use the term "the Lily complex," defined as "altering, disguising, and covering up your physical self in order to assimilate, to be accepted as attractive" (177). Even though the authors coined it to describe the racist legacy and its influence on American Black women, it also relates to the white beauty standards against which other ethnic women are measured. Jewish Americanization was a gendered process, which illuminated tensions within Jewish communities, as gender norms in the New World were different from those in the Old.

Downplaying one's ethnicity is an important part of the process of acculturation in the course of which Jewish women modified those features of their outer appearance that might have instantly indicated their ethnic origin. They wanted to vanish into the visual norm, a strategy that was especially popular among richer Jews with social aspirations. In Gilman's words, "[b]eing (in)visible is being intensely visible, but as a member of a group which defines itself as the norm, as beautiful and healthy" ("The Jewish Foot" 127). The fact that a large body of modern American Jewish literature has been devoted to the anguished reports of young Jewish women trying to attain the American paragon of beauty testifies to its importance in identity formation. Jewish heroines, who employ various methods of self-improvement in order not to look exotic in comparison to American standards of slim and fair appearances, confirm that bodily image is a vital part of the assimilative process. Seeing their own selves as less desirable in the eyes of Jewish men, as well as the American mainstream at large, prompted them to shed the appearance of ethnicity. By looking at different narratives, we can trace how bodily changes pulled Jewish women away from their ethnic roots, a process aimed at substituting looking Jewish with appearing American.

Increasing material comfort and social acceptance, together with the economic boom, marked American Jewish experience after World War II. With the annulment of antisemitic discrimination in housing, many Jews could enjoy suburban living. With women occupied with child rearing and housekeeping, and men working in nearby cities, these "gilded ghettos" remained Jewish in social representation and character. The new Jewish bourgeois wanted to transform economic privilege into cultural prestige. Hence, the upwardly mobile middle-class used female appearance as a means and affirmation of assimilation, with the attainment of an Anglo-American standard of beauty as the ultimate proof of Jewish belonging. Over the years, Jews have internalized tensions about those qualities deemed typically Jewish and undesirable in the eyes of non-Jews. By means of internal stereotyping the same qualities are then projected onto the members of the group, in gendered ways. Hence, we talk about Jewish women expressing anguish about their noses, hair, and weight.

What Betty Friedan called "female economics–beauty and physical appearance" (Raphael 217) was an important part of growing up as middle- and upper-class American Jews between the 1940's and 1960's. The desire to pass as un-hyphenated Americans prompted Jews to seek professional help. The proverbial nose job became connected with a certain phase in a Jewish girl's life cycle, often instigated by her caring parents who believed that it would secure her successful future. Schneider observes:

> Just as in some families a dowry or hope chest was prepared for a daughter, in other families the insurance of a happy wedded future was the nose job. And in some cases, as with dowries for poor girls, the extended family contributed funds toward the surgery. (245)

Even though nose jobs have become a sign of false acculturation, rhinoplasty assisted Jews in passing, just like changing their names and playing down their Jewish behaviors did at the turn of the century. "Change your nose and you will change your life!" was a common slogan for Jews until the elevation of the concept of ethnic variety in the 1970s. Aline Kominsky-Crumb's autobiographical comics memoir, *Need More Love, Drawings and Other Works 1971-2006*, sums up the anxiety of growing up Jewish in the 1960's: "Prominent noses, oily skin and frizzy hair were the norm [...] (No, we Jews are not a cute race!)." The narrator articulates exactly what young Jewish girls wanted: "[I just had] my nose+chin done. My hair straightened. I got blue contacts & I lost 20 pounds!!" What Kominsky's story demonstrates is that even a self-conscious feminist, such as the author, does not "dismiss the power of the internalization of a culture's sense that one not only looks different, but also ugly" (Gilman, *Love* 182). Being able to fit into American society is not defined solely on the basis of whether one has the right shape of nose or hair color, even if these are still elements of racially-charged debates. However, being able to afford aesthetic surgery is a sign of middle-class affluence rather than social inclusion, even though it may facilitate the latter.

In the novel *The Launching of Barbara Fabrikant* (1974)[5], Louise Blecher Rose portrays a young American Jewish woman who is obsessed with her bodily appearance. As the title suggests, the story concentrates on her debut as a marriageable woman and her subsequent launching into the matrimony market. Embarking on college life, away from her family's gaze, the protagonist begins to explore her freedom and sexuality. Complying with her parents' expectations, she believes that good looks are key to marital and social success. Barbara's parents instigate and perpetuate their daughter's fixation on her looks, at the core of which lies a desire not to look Jewish. The Fabrikants are a financially secure family that regard religion as a private, if somewhat overrated, matter. Even her father, challenging his own position as a rabbi, claims that he "likes [...] Judaism; Jews he can't stand. That's why he wants [her] to be 'finished'–then no one will know [she is] Jewish except when [she] light[s] the Sabbath candles" (11-12). Barbara's parents want their daughter to look American because looking Jewish is seen as an impediment to success

[5] Louise Blecher Rose. *The Launching Of Barbara Fabrikant*. New York: David McKayCompany, Inc., 1974. All references are to this edition and are cited by page within the text.

since it makes her less desirable, both in their own and American eyes. Knowing that Jewish men favor non-Jewish looks, they fear that being recognized as Jewish might dwarf her chances of a good match. The proverbial Jewish nose is the first focus when it comes to removing ethnic appearances. Barbara lightheartedly admits: "[b]y the way, I did have a nose job; even with it my nose isn't small, only manageable. At least now you notice there is something on my face besides it" (9). The casual and comfortable way in which she talks about a medical procedure that alters her body suggests that it is a common practice that has found general approval among American Jews. The change is welcomed by Barbara's father who proudly notices that now "[s]he looks like a shiksa." And [she] do[es], reddish-brown hair, blue eyes, and new Irish nose" (11). Even their rabbi shares this opinion, "[a]s [they] walk away, [Barbara] overhear[s] him [Rabbi Elman] say to Mrs. Green that [Barbara] do[esn't]look Jewish," and she proudly adds that it is, "[t]he highest compliment a rabbi can pay anyone, believe me" (102). The same expectations are directed towards Barbara's younger sister, Lisa, whose future happiness is also determined on the basis of successful rhinoplasty: "[n]ext year when she has her nose job she'll be magnificent" (31). The Fabrikants believe that the idea of a happy life results from the successful modification of a woman's body. In their understanding, a woman's passage from youth to adulthood is defined by love, marriage, children, and the comfort of a suburban household, in that order. None of this, the novel argues, is possible for a Jewish woman to achieve without her bodily transformation. However, the irony inherent in the family name "Fabrikant," which derives from the verb to fabricate, i.e. to create or make up in order to trick people, implies the lie behind such motifs. By means of a single bodily adjustment, Barbara's family creates an illusion, which is bound to surface in the next generations.

Alix Kates Shulman's *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen* (1972)[6] depicts her heroine growing up in an assimilated and affluent family in 1940's and 1950's America. With an attorney father and a glamorous mother, Alicia Alexandra Davis's (Sasha) only worry is to look beautiful; since she cannot climb the trees or run wild, she comes to realize that "there was only one thing worth bothering about: becoming beautiful" (22). Sasha sees beauty as a commodity, which can be bought with her parents' money. Being brought up in a secularized family, her prayer to God reflects her life priorities: "[p]lease God, [she] prayed, let me be beautiful at least until my money runs out" (6). With a nice dose of humor and irony, the narrative depicts a vain young woman as a typical product of middle-class, secularized upbringing. The nose job is presented as an

[6] Shulman, Alix Kates. *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*. New York: Alfred A.Knopf, 1972. All references are to this edition and are cited by page within the text.

indispensable step on her way to shed any vestiges of her ethnic look, the ultimate goal being the "prize-winning shiksa profile" (82). Having a nose job is a way to boost her self-esteem in the world of American values. Jewish daughters were expected to marry and raise children, not to look for professional careers or paid employment. That is why disproportionately less value was placed on their education than on material comforts. Conformity and the materialistic values of suburbia permeate the life of Sasha's family, at the same time demonstrating what it meant to be a middle-class Jewish woman in 1960's-70's America.

A suicidal note left by Shelia Levine, the protagonist of Gail Parent's novel *Sheila Levine is Dead and Living in New York* (1972), explains why she decides to take such a drastic step: she cannot find a husband. Matrimony is her life aim and obsession, but the problem is that "there are only about a hundred thousand other Jewish girls like me, all with hair that has to be straightened, noses that have to be straightened, and all looking for husbands" (Parent 8). Her parents' aspirations are at the roots of her anguish because as long as she can remember, they have always talked about her wedding. Sheila goes to college, but she is not too keen on an academic career. Neither are her parents who, "[a]s a graduation present offered [her] a nose job or a fur coat. [She] took the fur coat with a high collar" (Parent 26). Like other heroines, Sheila believes that the only way to find a husband is to appear pretty, which translates as non-Jewish. She also knows that Jewish boys "grew up hating/loving their Jewish mamas and vowing to marry a non-Jewish girl. So [she is] ethnically undesirable. Flat-chested blondes are in [...]" (Parent 8). This recurrent accusation against young, Jewish men is shared by the protagonist of *The Mind-Body Problem*, Renee Feuer, who talks about her lover Leonard Schmerz:

> He was worshipful, offering me again and again the highest praise of which the Jewish male is capable: You don't look at all Jewish. Our brothers always expect us to thrill at the words, because of course in their scheme of things there's nothing so desirable as a *shiksa*. (Goldstein 209, italics in the original)

So, in order to appear attractive in her potential husband's eyes, Sheila must alter her body to fit the profile of the Anglo-Saxon ideal of beauty. Her humorous, yet futile attempts at finding a husband are narrated in the first person, mingling self-criticism with fantasy when, for example, she imagines her future life as a married woman and a mother. In this way, she distances herself from the grim reality of what she experiences as a miserable life. Referring to herself in the third person and constructing passages in the style of camera shots are similar strategies, which add narrative distance to her characterization. The protagonist's self-image, though, is dominated by her appearance, the kind of clothes she wears, and where she lives (it has to be

Greenwich Village in New York). She believes these facts to be important elements of her persona, which are supposed to facilitate her hunt for a husband. Alas, instead to the chuppah[7], this reasoning leads her to a hospital emergency ward. Sheila survives, but whether this "unwilling captive of a marriage-obsessive culture, of overtly possessive parents, and of a materialistic environment" (Sochen 101) will ever find peace of mind is doubtful, as neither her family nor religion seem to offer to her any positive identification.

Apart from the stereotypical Jewish nose, dark and frizzy hair constituted another mark of difference employed in Jewish women's narratives. A change in head covering was often the female immigrant's first step towards Americanization. Shedding a married woman's wig, or refusing to have one's hair cut were seen as exercises in American freedom, or godlessness, depending on the perspective. Barbara Fabrikant summarizes the main problem with Jewish hair: "I set my hair not to give it waves, the curse of Jewish hair, but to keep them out" (Rose Blecher 71). Thick, curly, and dark hair had nothing to do with what Weitz defines as a common standard of white, American, beautiful hair: women's hair should be long and wavy (not kinky), preferably blond, and it should be styled so as to look feminine, which means different from a man's hair (672). Fair hair defines a true American, as was declared by Alexander Portnoy: "these blond-haired Christians are the legitimate residents and owners of this place [...] O America! America! (Roth, *Portnoy's* 152-153). As Jewish hair failed to match the prescribed norm, it had to be changed. Anne Roiphe in a fictitious memoir *1185 Park Avenue: A Memoir* explains why she wanted to have her hair straightened:

> I wanted to look like everyone else. I wanted silky straight hair even if it was Jewish black not corn-fed blonde. I did not feel that my curls grew from my head in ethnic joy but rather that they revealed a certain separateness, a shamefulness, a less-than-perfect quality. My dark head with its wiry hair was a mark of difference. (149)

A visit to the beauty parlor, where Annie and her mother are the only two white-skinned customers, results in the girl's parading smoothed wisps of hair, admired both by family and friends. In a comic twist, a week later, the hair begins to fall out, and "it was clear to everyone that my new straight hair was a temporary acquisition" (Roiphe, *1185 Park Avenue* 149). Annie's mother consoles her in a manner typical of the age of conformity: "At least your nose isn't Jewish, she said, be grateful for that" (Roiphe, *1185 Park Avenue* 150).

[7] A canopy under which a Jewish couple stand during the wedding ceremony. It symbolizes the home they will build together.

Karen Brodkin explains how important this problem was for a Jewish girl growing up among people whom she calls "blonde-people"–

> a species for whom life naturally came easily, who inherited happiness as a birthright, and I wanted my family to be like that, to be "normal" [...] My childhood divide was between everyone I knew and the blond people, between most of the real people I knew, whether in the suburbs or in the city, and the mythical, "normal" America of the then-primitive but still quite effective mass media–radio, magazines, and the new TV. (*How Jews Became* 10-11)

Second-wave feminism introduced a new type of Jewish heroine, such as Sasha Davis, Barbara Fabrikant, Sheila Levine, or Isadora Wing (the protagonist of Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* (1974)), who break cultural restraints and are not afraid to explore their sexual desires. The new protagonists reflect changes and expectations in women's approach to life, which were prompted by the advocates of the women's liberation movement. Still looking for love and marriage, like their mothers wished, they are able to meet the trials and tribulations of a single life with a large dose of humor and self-irony. The use of first-person voice signals an individual account, but the value of those narratives lies in the common threats that define the position of young, Jewish women at that particular time in American social history. The novels under discussion provide a valuable commentary on Jewish life and family in 1970s America, pointing at possible disruptions. On the one hand, young Jewish heroines have to respect family values and become what is expected of them, but on the other hand, they are eager to probe the world through feminist lenses and to look for personal fulfillment. The difficulty to successfully combine the two influences is the source of their anxiety, hence a large dose of irony and satire, which characterizes the narratives. What is more, the1970's narratives question what the protagonists of the novels were believed to take for granted, namely that love will result in marriage, and marriage will guarantee their economic comfort. If one of the elements of the sequence fails, then the promise of happiness that it carries becomes illusory, resulting in the character's frustration. Devoid of the central markers of post-war middle-class life, Jewish female protagonists feel uncertain as to how to re-construct their identities. "My mirror image always had to be interpreted. And for that I sought my reflection in someone else's eyes" (Shulman 19), says Sasha Davis. Doubting her own instincts, she sees her worth only when reflected in the gaze of others. In other words, she is the product of her parents', friends', and boyfriends' gaze. These protagonists' quest for love is paralleled by their pursuit of a validating gaze; notably both are male gazes. Even though the narratives in question are written by and portray American Jewish heroines, their Jewishness consists of ethnic rather than religious identity. The narrative context is that of a secular American Jewish culture, in which a sense of Jewishness is attributed not to the whole, but

to certain elements of the fictional world, such as bodies, noses, hair, certain kinds of clothes, consumer items, and upscale addresses. Probably the most significant feature signifying their sense of Jewishness can be related to the idea of middle-class consumerism. In Riv-Ellen Prell's words: "[t]he Jewishness of these novels' women rests on their unshakeable sense that their own Jewishness must be anchored in the middle class" ("Jewish Woman in Postwar" 135).

Unruly female bodies, reviled and blamed for life misfortunes, populate American Jewish post-war fiction. Sasha Davis hates her body: "I loathed it. It frightened me, it was so unpredictable. It was nothing if not trouble. People were always ready to make fun of it [...] What had my body to do with the me inside?" (Shulman 42). Bodily obsession starts at home, usually initiated by Jewish mothers who instill bodily anxiety in their daughters' adolescent minds. Barbara Fabrikant's mother gives her one piece of advice for her life, saying that "[a]ll she needs to do is lose a few pounds and she'll be perfect" (Rose Blecher 2). Bodies are either altered by means of surgical procedures, or controlled by clothes designed to give the maximum impression of thinness. Barbara Fabrikant has a whole wardrobe solely dedicated to ensuring control over her body:

> I unpack underwear first and put in a top drawer a bunch of bras so wired and rubbery they stand by themselves, something my heavy breasts are unable to do, and rubber girdles of all kinds–with pants to squeeze my thighs, without squeezing everything else; a "merry widow" to whip my waist and middle into shape (Rose Blecher 37).

The type of clothes she wears are aimed not at comfort, but at molding her body into a desirable shape, which substitutes for aesthetic merit: "[a]t this very moment I'm wearing a bra that cuts deep into the skin underneath my breasts whenever I sit down and a "long-line" girdle that pushes the flab up" (Rose Blecher 37). All imperfections of the body have to be hidden or masked to give the semblance of slimness, which is synonymous with the idea of control. Karen Brodkin observes that

> [t]he struggle to control a body out of control, or one that always threatens to become so, is a struggle to contain one's Jewishness so that it conforms to whiteness. Mostly it doesn't work. These heroines are imperfect, uncontrollable and unlovable by their own cultural double, the Jewish male. (*How Jews Became* 166)

Until the nineteenth century, the idea of body size was closely linked to the concept of social class: upper classes maintained a slim form, since they felt no need to publicly express their wealth. Middle classes, on the other hand, needed a sense of assurance while passing off their social position, which afforded them more than enough bodily nourishment, hence the more corpulent

body form, which signified their departure from the undernourished lower classes. Susan Bordo explains how the ideal of corpulence slowly deteriorated when the middle classes gained more control and began to manage the work of others. A slender figure began to be associated with control and success, whereas the heavy body implied laziness and lack of self-control. A muscular body was connected with "manual labor and proletarian status, and [has] often been suffused with racial meaning [...] Muscles have been associated with the insensitive, unintelligent, and animalistic" (195). Bordo concludes, "as the body itself is dominantly imagined within the West as belonging to the 'nature' side of the nature/culture duality, the *more* body one has had, the more uncultured and uncivilized one has been expected to be" (195; italics in the original).

Women have been encouraged to adapt their bodies to the changing cultural ideals, from foot binding to physical exercise. Western culture has produced the image of the female body that conforms to what Sandra Bartky calls "the cult of slenderness" (85). Slenderness has come to be associated with health, youthfulness, success, social acceptability and being in control, not only over one's body but over one's life. Being overweight, on the other hand, signals laziness, sluggishness, a feeble mind, unhealthy lifestyle, and generally being out of control. For men and women alike, "excess flesh came to be linked with low morality, reflecting personal inadequacy or lack of will" (Grogan 6). It is clear that physical attractiveness is closely linked with those personal qualities, which are regarded as positive. Biologists claim that preferences for a slim and toned body are biologically grounded, whereas cultural theorists argue that slenderness is mainly learnt. It is furthermore consequential that achieving and maintaining a slender figure makes upward class mobility possible: "the ability of the (working-class) heroine and hero to pare, prune, tighten and master the body operates as a clear symbol of successful upward aspiration, of the penetrability of class boundaries to those who have 'the right stuff'"(Bordo 195). However, a belief that slimness can be achieved by anybody is misleading, because the process requires economic power to make various resources for body maintenance available.

3.8 Bodily Desire and Orthodoxy

Orthodox Judaism, distinguished for its stringent observance of Jewish religious law, has a specific relationship to the body. Even though both men and women are required to cover their bodies, the relationship between male and female bodies is informed by the dominant patriarchal discourse that places emphasis on covering the woman's body, as a symbol of righteousness and community purity, on the one hand, and a means of protecting men from sexual thoughts, on the other. Orthodoxy provides a conflicting image of female bodily

covering, in which the noble idea of female piety conflates with the shameful image of the sinful seductress. In order to make sure that men behave decently, women must remove their sexuality from the public presence; they must be covered and sequestered so that men do not have licentious thoughts: long skirts, wigs, hats, handkerchiefs, opaque stockings, and dresses that do not emphasize feminine parts of the body are to guarantee the modest look. Sartorial segregation is a fact in Orthodox communities, and women are prohibited from wearing any clothes originally designed for men, such as, for example, pants. Distinctive clothes, which uniquely but characteristically identify women's outer appearance, separate the Orthodox world from the rest. Haberman explains that

> [b]y contrast to men's clothing obligations and accoutrements that uplift spirituality and inspire divine connection, women's clothing obligations aim to cover up immodesty from male viewers. This combination of exemption and obligation constantly reinforces the message of the female body as an unworthy and impure object of the "male gaze" and control. Many women internalize this view to such an extent that they submit themselves to it willingly, even desirously. (92)

If we heed the feminist claim that modesty norms are a manifestation of patriarchal oppression and a means of controlling women's bodies and sexuality, we can look for literary representations that utilize this statement. Tova Mirvis provides a glimpse into the world of Orthodox Jews in *The Outside World* (2004). As "[b]oys and girls lived in separate physical worlds, and until marriage, there was no way to cross from one to the other" (60); their first contacts are full of contradicting tensions. For example, during the engagement party, Tzippy and Baruch touch for the first time:

> She was scared of what she would feel and scared of how he would react, scared that he would pull away in horror and scared that he would not [...] She ran her fingers across his hand, and her body tingled with the shock and pleasure of actually touching. (124)

As Tzippy gets carried away by a pleasant sensuality of this new experience, Baruch's proximity to a woman's body makes him feel uneasy. Having reminded himself of the teachings of his rabbi, he becomes alert: "[j]ust as his lips were about to find hers, a looming figure appeared in Baruch's head. It was the face of his rabbi, who whispered in his ear, 'So you haven't changed after all'" (125). Baruch fears that the sheer force of his carnal desire might trump his religious piety and prove his conversion futile, so he pulls away. The character of their close encounter exemplifies the stereotypical way in which a woman is represented as natural/sensual and man as rational/scholarly. In accordance with the patriarchal discourse, it is the man who manages to control his carnal

cravings and withdraws in time, so as not to commit a sin. The woman, on the contrary, is presented as the one who possesses a feeble mind that easily succumbs to the wants of her flesh. In this scene, the stereotype of the gendered mind/body dichotomy is re-enacted, thereby reinforcing the typecast roles assigned to men and women by patriarchy.

Even though in the Orthodox world the woman's body remains hidden from public view, it still remains under constant scrutiny. Special attention to the female body is paid when the girl approaches a marriageable age, because her looks play an important part in the matchmaking process: "[b]efore a first date could take place, so many questions had to be answered. Is Tzippy thin? Is she pretty?" (4). Prioritizing the features of the girl's outer appearance automatically downplays the qualities of her mind. The fact that the potential suitor appears to be more interested in her looks than in her worldview or personality implies the limited scope of her future social role. The Orthodox upbringing prepares girls to fulfill the roles of wives and mothers, but in order to get there, they must marry. Therefore, "[t]hey knew that a girl needed to be thin if she wanted to find a husband" (18). Repeated allusions to body weight make it an important factor in the pursuit of matrimony. It is her future husband's gaze that decides whether she is thin enough, reducing her whole persona to the image of her body. The woman's body is depersonalized when it becomes an object of male appraisal. Revealingly, young women are expected to be slim, but not for the sake of athletic fitness, as sports are of no value to their community–"the idea of a Jewish school with a basketball team was strange enough" (64). Once the aim is achieved, however, i.e. she gets married, bodily concerns cease to define the girl's worth: "[t]hey also knew that she was allowed to gain all the weight she wanted once she was married" (18). As there are no publicly respected avenues of social involvement for Orthodox women other than marriage and family, they have no alternative but to decline their autonomy and submit to the patriarchal rule. In return, they are guaranteed a secure place in Orthodox society.

Ilana, the young protagonist of *The Outside World*, represents a challenge to the strict Orthodox custom. In Orthodoxy, dress-code infraction provides an accessible area for rebellion. The change of attire allows one to probe various configurations when a young person is still unsure about her identity. Ilana questions her parents' modern Orthodox practices and experiments with clothes, makeup, and new friends. Using the word "masquerade" to define the requirements of the Orthodox dress practice, Ilana points at its play-like quality, which allows one to disguise oneself and pretend to be somebody else. The idea of playfulness questions the seriousness and validity of the strict dress code and suggests that at least some of its participants follow the rules with certain

reservations. Even though Ilana's outfit may indicate that she abides by the communal rules; in truth, she does not fully accept them. On hearing the rabbi's words about the new school dress code, she thinks that they "had little to do with her life" (198). Ilana does not identify herself with the world that is defined by her rabbi, and the necessity to abide by the strict code of conduct makes her only feel more alienated from it. Clothing is just one element of many that helps to define the self in relationship to society, and as Ilana suggests, it may be a misleading one. The choice of clothes signifies both outer and inner changes in her but may also have broader consequences, as it blurs the boundaries between inside and outside groups. Desexualized and humble clothing is clearly a marker of belonging, whereas transgressive dressing destabilizes norms and threatens its viability. Ilana conducts her process of finding and styling herself in the safe environment of a summer camp, where she is surrounded by like-minded teenagers, away from home, where she would be exposed to her parents' unwavering and scrutinizing gaze. Ridding herself of imposed parental and social discipline allows the rejection of the fixed gender roles. Thus, Ilana's sartorial experiments are small steps in the construction of her personal and social identity. In her case, a change of clothes functions as a demonstration of and a vehicle for identity shifting.

Sartorial restrictions become an especially debatable issue during puberty, when young people begin to question the established order and embark on quests for personal identity. Ilana's sexual awakening becomes a cause for confusion, as she finds herself trapped between normative behavior, represented by the rabbi, and her own bodily comfort. When the principal of the school–the rabbi–lays out a stricter dress code, he invokes what no Jew is expected to ignore–the Judaic tradition: "[h]e cited the Talmud and the later commentaries to explain why their skirts needed to reach the knee, why their shoulders needed to be covered" (198). Contrastingly, Ilana's choice of skimpy clothing not only fosters her awareness of her sexuality, but it also brings an unfamiliar kind of pleasure. She becomes acutely aware of bodily sensations, of which she was oblivious: a flash of her bra strap, a fleeting baring of her thigh, or the palpable attention of her male schoolmates. Therefore, the rabbi's disciplining words feel

> like arrows, [that] landed on various parts of her body. She became nothing but an assemblage of forbidden parts: legs, elbows, arms, thighs [...] She felt trapped under the principal's gaze, suddenly, excruciatingly aware of her body. Her body felt naked and exposed. (198)

Gender-specific clothing is a means to discipline the body and to exercise control over sexual urges, which in Ilana's case culminates during a relay race, in which she runs wearing only her bra. Baring her body in public, intentionally or accidentally, is a symbolic gesture of personal disobedience directed towards

the stifling and suffocating rules of the Orthodox school. In this moment of freedom, "something inside her sprang free, and she felt like she was flying" (210). Just as her body is liberated from constricting clothes, by analogy, her mind longs to be freed from restricting laws. Ilana's anxieties are not necessarily ethnically or religiously specific but signal puberty as an important phase in human life, during which the established norms come under a young mind's scrutiny. Their manifestations, though, are located in the particularity of the Orthodox milieu.

Rachel Benjamin, the narrator-protagonist of Pearl Abraham's novel *The Romance Reader* (1995), grapples with the religious constraints of her hasidic background that clash with her budding womanhood. As the rabbi's oldest daughter, Rachel is expected to set a moral example not only to her numerous younger siblings, but also to the whole community. Living in an insular environment, however, does not protect her from the temptations of the secular world. The restrictive, but at the same time comforting world of the hasidic community seems too small for her. She craves the world outside, which is available to her only through the pages of books read in English. Rachel is a rebel who longs to live a passionate life, she wants her heart to be torn by emotions and to have exciting adventures, just like the heroines of her favorite romance novels. The limited social roles imposed on her by the hasidic community–those of daughter, wife and mother–appear stifling to her boisterous and adventurous mind. She suspects that there is much more to life, and she wants it. When her mother leaves to visit relatives in Israel, Rachel uses the opportunity to update her wardrobe with forbidden clothes. She devours English books from the public library, and, together with her younger sister Leah, enrolls in a course to become a summer life-guard. Her mother's return begins a series of family arguments, which address the viability of tradition in the face of modernity. The imminent failure of Rachel's arranged marriage only confirms her conviction that she desires a life different from her mother's.

Abraham's novel offers a unique glimpse into the insular world of the hasidic community, which imposes many restrictions regarding the female body. Rachel's father constantly reminds the girls that Jewish survival depends on three things: "Name, dress, and language" (137)[8]. Using English instead of Hebrew and Yiddish, changing Ruchel into the English-sounding Rachel, and violating the traditional dress code are regarded as threats to the survival of the community. First of all, a girl must be modest: she must keep her body covered (a safe blouse is one with long sleeves and the right color) and wear thick,

[8] Pearl Abraham. *The Romance Reader*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1995. All references are to this edition and are cited by page within the text.

opaque tights with seams; she is not to be seen in a bathing suit in public; she has to shave her hair after marriage and cover her head with a wig or a kerchief. Even when they are on a deserted beach, her mother "sits on the sand [...] she doesn't even take off her black stockings; she's worried about someone seeing her" (84). When Rachel takes off her tights, lifts her skirt and goes into the water, her mother expresses strong disapproval of her behavior: "[i]t's a matter of modesty. A girl who can lift her skirt like that is a pruste meude [crude girl]" (85). In an act of rebellion, Rachel diversifies her wardrobe: she buys sheer panty hose, platform shoes that make her look taller, and a soft and flat bra, not the "pointy" type, which mother buys for her. Even when her mother comes back, Rachel is not eager to give in: she wears tights over her sheer panty hose and takes them off at school. These small instances of parental disobedience demonstrate Rachel's will not to follow in her mother's footsteps and reveal her inclination towards independent thinking.

The consequences of sartorial disobedience and transgressive behavior may be serious, as they affect not only the girl herself, but the marital chances of her younger siblings; in other words, the reputation of the whole family is at stake. The problems start when people begin to gossip about Rachel's job as a lifeguard: "[p]eople are saying you swim in the bathing suit. I said I don't believe it. Not Rabbi Benjamin's daughter" (175), comments a nosy neighbor. This kind of badmouthing is not only intended to intimidate Rachel, but to embarrass her mother, by questioning her parental credibility. In this close-knit community, everyone knows that a good (hasidic) mother would not allow such behavior. In another episode, the matchmaker informs Rachel's parents that the gossip about her not wearing seams may reduce her chances of a good marriage, since no respectable family wants a rebellious daughter-in-law. Rachel's mother is also worried that "they're all talking about you [Rachel]. Every husband will know that Benjamin girls wear bathing suits" (178). Rachel, however, remains deaf to her mother's pleas and confronts her father: "the law has nothing to do with being a Jew. It's all about people. What will people say? What will people think? That's what you worry about more than the Torah" (179), and he agrees with her. Life in an enclosed community allows little privacy, especially when everything happens under the scrutinizing gaze of neighbors, who monitor and discipline any transgression. Rachel's parents know that their social position is determined by how much respect they can garner from others. Likewise, the success of father's project to build his own synagogue depends on the support and generosity of his coreligionists. A daughter who openly violates communal rules undermines his parental and rabbinic authority and weakens his social position.

It is Rachel's mother who is the main guardian of the hasidic tradition at home and the first critic of Rachel's conduct. Although Mrs. Benjamin complains about her own difficult life and her husband's visionary schemes, which leave her struggling hard to feed a big family, she has no doubts when it comes to her children's upbringing. Her constant remarks about Rachel's immodest dress and unruly behavior draw the girl's body into the focus of attention. The way she reduces women's carnality to the source of sin instigates in Rachel a shame of her own body. When she visits Rachel at the pool and sees her in a bathing suit, her daughter's naked body seems to her obscene: "[s]hame your family [...] Like a whore" (183). Even when Rachel's father consents to her life-guarding job, on the grounds that it is a noble occupation to save a life, her mother's worries remain grounded in one aspect–the image of her daughter's body. Her disapproval of Rachel's wearing a swimming suit derives from her own experiences; she

> lifts the blue bathing suit and then the red one with the tips of her fingers. [...] 'If my mother saw me wearing a little nothing like this, she'd have pulled my hair out. She wouldn't have let me live. I wouldn't have dared. We went to the ocean wearing dresses.' (142)

Mrs. Benjamin believes that the sanctity of tradition and the unchangeable permanence of the old rules will guarantee the continuation and viability of their community. Since she has not been exposed to any other conceptual framework than the one in which she has lived, any violation of the existing norms threatens the foundations of her world.

Abraham portrays an adolescent girl who begins to discover her femininity. Young hasidic boys and girls are not educated about the working of their bodies: "[i]n the books we read, there is sometimes a baby but never anything about getting pregnant and growing fat and fatter" (8). Issues regarding human biology, and especially the topic of procreation, are a secret, which is revealed, however scantily, only to those on the brink of matrimony. An active sexual life and reproduction are recognized exclusively as parts of the married life. Living in a community with a strict dress code, Rachel has little chances to observe male bodies. Therefore, when the construction workers come to rebuild the house, Rachel is fascinated by their nakedness:

> Gil's friend takes off his shirt. His skin is dark and smooth and muscular. I watch his bones and muscles move in a diagonal, back and forth across the right side of his back when he lifts his arm and brings the hammer down on a nail. I want to put my hand on his back, feel the muscles move. His arms are large and strong, arms I can imagine carrying me over the threshold in a novel. (11-12)

As she has neither an older sister, nor wants to talk to her mother, she turns to peers for information. With her friend Elke, they experiment with their bodies: we

> take turns. We lock the door of her room, and Elke takes off her shirt, lies down on the bed, and closes her eyes. I tickle her breasts and nipples, and they become hardy and pointy. Then I slowly move down to her stomach [...] I know how good it feels this way. Slowly, lightly. (41)

They discover that their bodies do not only have to bring humiliation and embarrassment but may also be sources of pleasure. Therefore, Rachel continues to test her awakened desires: "[s]ometimes at night, under my covers, I do it myself. I go up and down my stomach" (43), but she quickly learns that "it's better having someone else do it: you don't know where her fingers will go next" (43). Rachel begins to pay more attention to her body, and when she feels her skin dry and itchy after swimming in the chlorine water, she decides to apply body lotion. She enjoys the cold touch that rejuvenates her skin:

> It feels good smoothing it over my whole body, being nice to my body, and I sit naked, stroking the lotion into my skin [...] There are things women do for their bodies that I never thought to do before. Moisturizing. Shaving. (124)

Readers can observe how Rachel is baffled by her own body. Under the influence of her mother's traditional ways, Rachel learns to look at her naked body as a potential threat to her moral integrity. The woman's body must be monitored and disciplined because it is the source of evil, which may affect both the victim and others around her. As a result, Rachel internalizes the belief that her body is unclean and dangerous, and she begins to fear and loathe it at the same time. On the other hand, Rachel is curious to see her body grow and ripen. She discovers that her changing body may be a source of unfamiliar yearnings, which offer new and surprising kinds of pleasures. No doubt this kind of anxiety is typical for her age group, yet the strict religious environment in which Rachel grows amplifies her worries. Both communal and parental enforcement of a negative and repulsive body image affects the way Rachel perceives herself. Her mother's destructive and degrading remarks leave her feeling "ugly, disgustingly grown-up and naked, fat and ugly" (185). Unsurprisingly, she adopts a critical view of herself: "My thighs are too fat. [...] I swing one leg in circles, slowly, searching for the one place where it looks its best, its thinnest" (187). Rachel's need for social and parental acceptance collides with the pleasure derived from her own bodily exploration. What she is told about her body is incongruent with what she perceives herself, creating a feeling of discomfort and confusion in her young mind. The narrative demonstrates that sartorial or social restrictions alone fail to resolve changes in bodily appearance

and sexual urges, as Rachel is determined to find her own way to handle adolescent stress.

Swimming, which is the only physical activity she is allowed to practice, becomes for Rachel a way to combat negative anxieties and bring bodily pleasure and satisfaction to her life. "Swimming hard, inhaling and exhaling, using my arms and legs to move me through the water, feeling every inch of my body, the water knowing every inch of my body, I'm more alive than ever" (176). While swimming, she experiences the exhilarating feelings of freedom and control, which are lacking in her highly regulated life. Aquatic activities awaken her muscles and put her whole body in motion. The water cleanses her body as well as her mind and, finally, she feels "purified" (185), regardless of what her mother claims. On a rare occasion when the family goes to the beach, all Rachel wants is

> to get wet. Wet, my clothes will stick so hard it will be like going naked. I can peel them off and let myself float away to the middle of the Atlantic. I can swim and swim with nothing on. I wonder what that would feel like, swimming naked. (84-85)

A hasidic girl, however, cannot undress and go for a swim as her father and brother do. By means of the familiar rhetoric of sinful female nature, her mother explains to her that men are different because "they're not ashamed of their bodies. They are not sinning Eves we are" (85). It is only during her parents' absence that Rachel and Leah can sign up for a lifeguarding course, something to which their parents would never agree. The girls learn various lifesaving techniques and improve their swimming skills, a kind of study they have never done before: "I have never studied anything like this, anything [that has] to do with my whole body" (114). Then, they can enjoy the summer job and the sunshine; Rachel "wants a brown body to walk around" (171), and Leah is proud of the white lines that prove how tanned she already is. An engagement in swimming activities gives both sisters a taste of freedom and autonomy. For a change, it is something that they choose to do, rather than are told to do. But their approach to this newly found independence is different: while Leah is grateful for the opportunity, she is careful to stay within the boundaries of her community, whereas Rachel sees it as only the beginning of her quest for independence. The new sensations, which are brought to Rachel's attention through her interest in physicality, question the veracity of the beliefs with which she has grown up. Her pursuit of carnal knowledge opens a new area of exploration that falls outside the confines delineated by her community, becoming a window into the outside world. Rachel has already ventured into that territory through the pages of romance novels, but employing the idea of

carnality locates her imaginative exploration in the material world around her, making it more palpable.

Rachel's attempts to battle the confines of tradition put the idea of patriarchy at the center of the hasidic world. Her father is the head of the family and, as a rabbi, a communal authority therefore "[e]verything always depends on what he wants. Not what anyone else wants" (179). Rachel criticizes the idea of patriarchy that silences and excludes women: father "went to Williamsburg to talk to a man about girls' stockings. Two men talking about what I should put on my legs. What do they know about girls' legs, about what's comfortable, what looks good?" (138). When she exclaims: "[i]t's my body, my reputation" (182), she expresses the desire for autonomy, which is unattainable in hierarchical religious communities. The clash between the idea of the woman's body as constructed in the hasidic imagination and the unique instance of an individual life lies at the heart of Abraham's novel. The purpose of the collective construct is to serve the group's religious and communal needs, thereby promoting only those women's roles that support the communal agenda. If a woman, such as Rachel, challenges the expectations and limitations that relegate her to secondary positions in her community, she faces social othering. Portraying an adolescent and rebellious protagonist, the novel explores the limits of tolerance in view of progressive Judaism versus its ultra-Orthodox variety, with the woman's body as a site of conflict. So far, Rachel has looked at the world either through her parents' eyes, or through the narratives of romance novels, but, as the story implies, they both fail to provide a viable framework of interpretation for the inquisitive mind. What she needs to do is to find a voice of her own.

Pearl Abraham's novel *Giving Up America* (1998) portrays how body awareness helps its protagonist, Deena Binet, to reclaim her identity. Deena, who comes from a hasidic background, marries Daniel, an Orthodox Jew, and adopts his way of life. Even though both of them come from more traditional branches of Judaism, their marriage has not been arranged by their families, but is rather the result of mutual affection. Her father, a scholarly hasid, opposes the marriage for Kabbalistic reasons: the sum of the numbers assigned to their names forms the Hebrew word for "pain." Although Deena is warned against their differences in observance–the hasidic emphasis on spirituality versus the strict following of rituals in Orthodoxy–she wants to give her love a chance. The married couple keeps a kosher home, observes the Sabbath, and enjoys financial stability (buyig a house), but their relationship lacks a spiritual dimension. When Deena discovers her husband's affair with Jill, his blonde, gentile, and bubbly co-worker, she is half upset and half relieved. Given the lukewarm intensity of their liaison, Daniel's betrayal does not come to his wife

as a shock. The choice of a gentile lover, who wittily represents a stereotypical Jewish male fantasy in the manner of Philip Roth, "seems to represent [her husband's] own rebellion against the authority of his parents and his Orthodoxy" (Burstein 154). As his affair develops, his habits become more secularized: he stops wearing a yarmulke, starts eating shellfish, fails to observe the Sabbath, and finally files for a divorce. In the meantime, Deena sublets a friend's apartment and discovers sexual passion in an affair with her lawyer. Confronted with the dissolution of her marriage, Deena must decide whether to join her family in Israel or stay in America. Her decision involves not only a choice of a geographical location, but informs her future: should she return to the familiarity of traditional Judaism, or pursue a more secular life in America? Put another way, the question is whether she should rejoin her hasidic family or continue life as an independent person.

Deena recalls the cracks in her marriage through different images of the body:

> It was how he worked her body, one hand in back of her head, the other cupping her hip. It was the way he handled tools, with knowledge and finesse. He was good at things [...] Even when it seemed that was all he ever wanted: to handle her body. (124)[9]

The words with which she chooses to describe their lovemaking–"work," "handle," "tools", and "things"–are devoid of sensual pleasures and evoke automatic action. However skillful she admits her husband to be in the techniques of lovemaking, this does not guarantee the sustenance of their mutual affection and understanding. Deena objects to being treated like an object to be handled, to be reduced to her body, while her emotional needs remain unanswered. The way she remembers her husband also involves images of the body; in this case, however, she concentrates on its defects:

> Daniel's [teeth] were long and crowded, one tooth bumped against the other and overlapped. The teeth of a carnivore. And she was married to this man. [...] Still, some mornings, when he was just out of the shower, his black hair wetly plastered down on his legs, he looked like a gorilla. (167)

Highlighting Daniel's bodily deficiencies diminishes his worth in her eyes. A humorous comparison to a gorilla dehumanizes Daniel and renders him incapable of higher emotions. The scornful image of her husband's body, however reductive it may be, helps the protagonist to come to terms with the facts of her failed marriage. Recognition of her husband's physical unattractiveness, amplified by her assignment of inhuman attributes to him,

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[9] Pearl Abraham. *Giving Up America*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998. All [illegible] this edition and are cited by page within the text.

signals the discrepancy between the way each of them values bodily and spiritual needs.

Bodily activity becomes for Deena a vehicle for redefining her life. When she learns that Daniel is cheating on her, she becomes restless: "[s]he went upstairs. She came down again. She couldn't stay still" (154). Her agitated body reflects the anxiety that is bubbling in her mind. Immobility is conducive to the passive acceptance of an undesirable destiny, whereas motion brings the promise of change. That is why Deena wants to be on the move: she wants to run away from an unfaithful husband and from the world that suffocates her. Her jogging trajectory maps the working of her mind: at first, unsure of what to do, "[s]he was running in circles, matching what was going on in her head [...] Running like that, until every bone ached, until there wasn't an ounce of strength left, was purging, like a day of fasting" (154). Trapped in her loveless marriage, and in a world with which she does not identify, Deena feels helpless, but the strenuousness of physical activities provides a temporary respite to her ailing soul: "[i]t was exhilarating going so fast, so automatically, her body something separate, moving without her [...] Life unhindered by mind. Mindless life" (88). The metaphor of running signifies Deena's mental dilemma, her urge to escape from the confinements of a numbing life towards the exhilarating feeling of freedom and new opportunities. Physical discipline gives her control over her body, something she lacks in life, and provides a sense of purposefulness and stability: "[s]he was running daily now, no off days. She ran with a purpose, a goal, and her body was responding" (174-175). She learns to appreciate her body in a way that erases memories of her husband's touch: "it was the first time she has sprinted and she was conscious of her legs and arms pumping like machines" (88), and in time, she comes to be satisfied with it:

> She was growing leaner and stronger. This was the cure for everything. A body stripped of extras, a body you could live in without shame made up for a lot that was missing. She was shedding slag and emerging minus the dross like a sculpture. (174-175)

The stronger her body, the stronger her mind becomes, so with every run Deena regains self-assurance and self-respect, which are necessary to face an unknowable future.

Not only is Deena escaping from an unhappy marriage, but also from the stifling life-style it offers. Her father warns her that "Orthodoxy without the delight of Hasidim [...] is a very dry thing" (38). The dispassionate stability of her marriage leaves no room for the random expressions of an unrestricted mind. In their home, everything needed to be under control, emotions as well as actions. Inertia, both bodily and intellectual, is for Deena hard to accept,

especially as she recalls the hustle and bustle of her childhood home. She remembers her mother's "swollen legs up on a stool" (58) and her father's and brother's studying and praying "fervently, high pitch" (58). Compared to her memories, her present home appears to be lifeless; she "sit[s] like that peeling eggplant and mending socks, and rise[s] now and then to stir and taste the soup" (58). Deena longs for action and an inability to express herself freely makes her life miserable:

> If only she were sweating. Along with sweat comes the knowledge that your body is alive; you feel your heart working, the muscles and bones in your body stretching and straining, your blood rushing. At her desk in her office she didn't sweat. [...] It was unnatural. She wasn't made for this. (58)

That is why she wants to "fight this half living with something" (58), and physical activity provides such an opportunity. An overtly intellectual and rational world divests Deena of the joy of spirituality, which she grew up with. The strict interpretation and mechanical observance of God's laws leaves little room for individual expression, and Deena longs for a sense of mysticism. Unable to recreate this missing aspect of her life, she seeks to find a substitute, which becomes running. In other words, "bodily pleasure and exercise [...] restore to her a sense of herself as both desirable and powerful" (Burstein155). Only then can the feeling associated with the divine presence manifest itself through her body, becoming an articulation of her life's inner dimension.

Deena's visit to Israel offers an opportunity to show different approaches to the woman's body. Brought up in a hasidic community, which does not stress the importance of individual looks, "[s]he'd dressed and fingered her hair without looking in the mirror, not because she didn't care how she looked. It was something else. She hadn't grown up with the knowledge that looks matter" (159). The traditional status of the woman's body is connected with her roles as wife and mother. Abraham demonstrates how different values of the Western and Orthodox worlds are juxtaposed through images of the female body: slim and athletic bodies subjected to dietary discipline so that they match the normative ideals of beauty, and fecund and robust bodies that enjoy the act of procreation, without despairing about its aesthetic consequences. Thus, what she notices in Israel are tired bodies of women like her mother, who

> didn't have their coffee brought to bed because they were out of bed before anyone else. They made beds, washed laundry and dishes, saw the hamper and sink fill again before they were entirely empty. The men had to eat. The children couldn't be sent to school without breakfast (160),

or the fertile bodies of younger women: "[h]er sisters, only in their twenties and early thirties, looked as if they were in their forties. In their childbearing years,

(307). Deena looks at their bodies through a lens of Western ideals of beauty, and wherever her critical gaze notices instances of bodily deformity, her Israeli relatives see the normality, which is instituted through tradition: "[t]hey laughed at themselves, at how fat they had become, but what can we do, we are only human and this is what happens when you bring life into the world. What else is there? What does one work for?" (307). The hasidic lifestyle defines a woman's life purpose in simple terms, something the Western emphasis on individual originality finds more and more difficult to grasp. Whether privileging the continuation of the traditional lifestyle of Deena's ancestors, or the materialism of secular life in America, Abraham's novel highlights the importance of an ethnic background to the way the protagonist perceives the concept of bodily being in the world.

Coming from a culture that looks at a woman's body through a restricted lens, Deena realizes the potency of her body only when she decides to transform her own life. When she exits a disappointing relationship, she discovers a new kind of pleasure, which is derived from physical activity. Running does not only help her to alleviate the stress connected with her divorce, but also gives her a feeling of confidence, with which she can face the future. When Deena asserts that "[s]he would continue running [...] She could continue running forever" (154), one may conclude that she will choose a life that offers her sovereignty and unrestrained freedom. Having a choice between American secular society and the Israeli hasidic community, her words lead the reader to believe that she will pursue the former. However, the title of the novel, *Giving Up America*, may suggest otherwise. Gaining a real and metaphorical command of her physical nature empowers her so that she is ready to pursue her personal happiness, wherever and whatever it may be. Only then can she be pronounced a fully autonomous person.

Both Tova Mirvis' *The Outside World* and Pearl Abraham's *The Romance Reader* show Orthodox practice as constricting, especially in regard to the female body. Both narratives illustrate how an androcentric culture dislocates women by means of detailed bodily restrictions and regulations, which become the focus of Ilana's and Rachel's rebellion. In a society in which women give more attention to motherhood than womanhood, two precocious protagonists embark on journeys toward self-expansion. Even though to outsiders their transgressions may seem petty–a dab of mascara, sheer stockings, or a library card–they nonetheless test the viability of the traditional way of being in the contemporary world. In both novels, images of clannish insularity are juxtaposed against the spontaneous performance of an individual mind. The characters' disobedience is directed not towards battling against the whole oppressive system, but rather engages in readily available, minute

instances of everyday life. A focus on the particular over the global gives individual authenticity to these protagonists' struggles. By challenging fixed norms, they destabilize the boundaries between belonging and exclusion, making room for new interpretations to take shape. Both narratives present and explore those problems specific to the idea of borderlands, to borrow Anzaldua's phrase, where sacred and secular understandings of feminism may combine. Neither Rachel nor Ilana fits comfortably into the mold that has been chosen for her; their rebellion, however, does not take them outside their familiar milieu. Both protagonists search for meaning between the familiarity of ritual and the hazardous pleasures of disobedience, journeys that take them home, whatever and wherever that is. What constitutes the narrative arc of both protagonists' characterization is the fact that they do not reject their heritage but try to carve their own place within it.

My discussion reveals two important aspects regarding the representation of the female body in contemporary narratives set against the backdrop of the Orthodox world: dress code and body consciousness. These two concepts are by no means the sole defining ones regarding literary representations of the woman's body, but in my view they complement each other, signaling important areas of conflict. *The Romance Reader* and *The Outside World* illustrate how the Orthodox culture's dress code becomes a site and vehicle for identity shift. In both novels, a deliberate change of costume plays an important role in identity performance. By choosing to don unorthodox clothes, the girls question the mores of their community but still stay under its influence. Clothing refers to and is representative of communal membership, especially in isolated communities. Wearing similar clothes is both comforting, by allowing an easy identification with the group, and limiting, when one is denied the expression of an individual style. Adherence to the dress code provides a visible manifestation of who belongs and who does not, defining a border between "us" and "them." Orthodox norms impose on women desexualized clothing, whose aim is to facilitate their adoption of only those roles that are socially desirable, such as a wife and mother. Following the latest fashion trends would only divert their attention from the communally expected behavior and, potentially, disrupt the social order, the implication being that what starts as petty deviations from dress code may end with complete renouncement of faith. Modesty norms discipline not only the body, but also influence the mind that learns to favor spirituality over materialism. As these stories show, breaking the dress code may have far-reaching consequences, not only to the transgressor, but to her family. Through this aspect, the authors draw attention to the idea of personal freedom versus social responsibility, which is especially complicated for female protagonists. Having been denied creative identity, they are expected to adjust

to social conformity. Breaking from the discipline of the Orthodox community, however, is only the beginning of their road to self-discovery.

The novels under discussion explore the idea of the female body as an instrument for self-discovery. Traditional contempt for the woman's body, which is perpetuated by the patriarchal social structure, is juxtaposed with an individual account of an awakening bodily awareness. The readers get a glimpse into the communities in which knowledge about human biology is limited, if not forbidden. Against the hegemony of such a restrictive approach to the female body, the protagonists embark on their private journey into the unknown. Whether it is an adolescent exploration of budding womanhood or newly found pleasures derived from an active life-style, these novels show women who discover their carnality. The idea of physical activity, represented in my discussion by such activities as swimming and running, serves different functions in the protagonists' development: it makes them acquainted with the functioning of the human body, something their culture denies; it reveals unexpected pleasures, contradicting the destructive image of the female body as synonymous with evil and sin; and, finally, it serves as a substitute for missing aspects in their lives, such as control over one's fate and autonomy. Overcoming bodily feebleness empowers the protagonists and grants them the feeling of success, which in turn urges them to continue their exploration. The challenge against one's bodily weaknesses, when successful, may translate itself into other spheres of the protagonist's life and, consequently, threaten the oppressive social order. Moreover, athletic activities bring physical pleasure, which is evocative of forbidden sexual pleasure. In restriahmedctive communities, in which human sexual behavior is regulated by taboos, compensation through athletic activities may function as a type of defense mechanism that relieves bodily anxiety.

What is interesting about Tova Mirvis' and Pearl Abraham's narratives is that they show the othering of the Jewish body not against non-Jewish types, like in the case of Shulman's protagonist:

> I had always despised my body. Slowly my contempt spread to all things material. For the only time in my life, I didn't care how I looked. Neither Leibnitz, nor Spinoza, nor Newton, nor Locke, nor Berkeley, nor Descartes' God Himself could bridge for me the growing gap between mind and matter (138),

but within the framework of traditional Judaism. Jewish bodily uniqueness is located within Jewish particularism, defined not by egalitarianism, but by ultra-Orthodox religiosity. In their textual examination of both collective and individual principles of the Orthodox world, Mirvis and Abraham concentrate on the Jewish family. The Orthodox context serves to question a general idea of individual freedom within the limits imposed by repressive systems. Through

the lens of bodily representations, my discussion demonstrates that the writers do not depict a nostalgic return to traditional visions of Judaism and its treatment of the female body, but offer its reinterpretation in the context of the post-assimilative age. We encounter protagonists who do not lose their faith, but who are attracted to the secular world, and the gendered lens adds a new perspective to a traditionally male-focused realm. What they prove is that in contemporary America the Judaism's boundaries are porous, thereby enabling Jews to move in and out of their communities, even though the exchange of religion for secularism is not an easy process. This fluidity is a mark of the protagonists' assimilation as well as a signal of a more general and contemporary trend, which claims that identities are not fixed but constructed. Ethnic, cultural, religious, and gender elements invite and enable the reinvention of the self. My discussion demonstrates that multicultural societies, such as that of North America, seem especially fertile turf for such hybridization.

3.9 Deconstructing the World of Binary Oppositions: the Mind-Body Problem

The title of Rebecca Goldstein's novel *The Mind-Body Problem* (1983) signals an overarching threat guiding the narrative, which is presented through a gendered lens. Set in the late 1970's, the novel tells the story of a beautiful and intelligent girl, Renee Feuer, who tries to find her place in the world of American academia. Even though the narrator-heroine comes from an Orthodox Jewish family, she does not follow in their footsteps, but leaves the world of restrictive Judaism for secular humanism. When her Princeton career, or rather lack thereof, makes her realize that she will never be an accomplished philosopher, she decides to resolve her crisis of self-confidence in another way. A marriage to Noam Himmel, a brilliant and acknowledged mathematician and a former prodigy, helps her carve space for herself in the insular world of the Princeton University faculty. And when her marriage fails, she finds comfort in the arms of a consecutive series of lovers. Only when her husband confesses the truth behind his aloofness–the decline of his mathematical genius–does Renee begin to show him empathy; however, it is not clear whether his honesty and her feeling of pity are enough to save their marriage.

Renee's interest in philosophy, focusing especially on the body's place in the life of the mind, constitutes an intellectual background for the plot. Philosophy, physics, and mathematics are commonly regarded as male domains, so the depiction of female scholars who try to penetrate this male territory reveals the tensions behind the façade of academic political correctness. The self-examined life of a scholar invites further exploration of the self; therefore

Renee tries to envision her life as a map, marking the areas of importance. As she grapples with the conflicting self-perceptions: as a woman, a daughter, a scholar, a wife, and a Jew, she tries to escape the constraints of each identity that hinder her quest for personal autonomy. The fact that the protagonist experiences the world as a woman makes possible the depiction of how that experience is informed by such gender-inflected binary oppositions as mind-body, rational-spiritual, male-female, Orthodox-secular, beautiful-common, intelligent-dull, career-family, success-failure, and happy-unhappy. In both humorous and constructive ways, the female lens directs the critical gaze at those details of the fictional world that might be otherwise overlooked from the patriarchal standpoint.

Orthodoxy plays an important role in the formation of Renee's identity, since it imposes various restrictions that tend to limit individual expression. The relationship between Orthodox parents and children is representative of patriarchal relations, and Renee's social position is strictly connected to her gender. As the only girl in the family, she is expected to wait on the men: "[t]he women–even guests–always got the last and the worst, the dried and the burnt. God forbid The Men shouldn't be satisfied" (135).[10] A boy's education is given priority, no matter how little academic promise he shows. Renee's mother would hide her school reports so that her brother Avram would not be intimidated by his sister's excellent grades. The only suitable path for the daughter–"after [mother] had prayed for nine months for the blessing of a male firstborn" (66)–is the one through marriage and motherhood; hence Renee's academic career is neither welcomed nor appreciated. Similarly, her scholarly achievements, such as a scholarship to Barnard College and an acceptance at Princeton, matter little to her mother, whose main concern is whether these accomplishments are in any way "going to help [her] find a husband?" (55).

Renee's father, a cantor, is presented as humble and virtuous; her mother fits the description of the stereotypical, nagging, and overbearing Jewish mother, who obsesses over Renee's chastity. In her mother's eyes, Renee's adolescent body becomes synonymous with sin; she criticizes the way Renee walks, sits, and looks, and she blames her for attracting boys' attention: "[y]ou should be a modest, clean Jewish girl who doesn't attract any dirty thoughts" (67). In the Orthodox community, there are "only two intersexual relationships recognized: potential marriage partner and actual marriage partner" (73); all other modes of contact between members of the opposite sex should spawn girl's feelings of shame and guilt. And not only the girl's, as her dishonor will

[10] Rebecca Goldstein. *The Mind-Body Problem*. New York: Random House, 1983. All references are to this edition and are cited by page within the text.

surely result in her mother's humiliation in the eyes of their neighbors. When Renee finally breaks the news about her marriage, her mother's first question is whether her fiancé is Jewish, and when she hears that he is, she is relieved. Little does she know what it really means: Noam's parents are secular Jews who "hated religion–the opiate of the people" (36), and Noam himself admits no apparent relation to Judaism: "I just can't connect to any of this. It's a world I can't make any sense of" (36). Only Renee's brother, Avram, follows in the traditional footsteps and after an arranged marriage to Tzippy–they "met once, approved one another, met again, and got married" (64)–is happy to pursue the life of a Talmud scholar. Susan Jacobowitz accurately describes Tzippy as a romanticized and idealized version of a happy Orthodox wife, one who is "ignorant intellectually but doesn't need education or access to power since she has faith and is very loving" (84).

Orthodoxy lends a Jewish counterpoint to the mind-body discussion and provides the commentary upon Renee's secular life as an adult. As an Orthodox girl, she is confronted with many expectations, which leave little, if any, room for self-exploration. An early marriage and motherhood are, thus, typically advocated for women who remain under parental, marital, and public control. Patriarchy is sustained in the Orthodox community, where women's oppression takes a different form, such as supporting a husband, housekeeping, and bearing and bringing up children. In short, "[h]ers is still the indisputably inferior position in those matters that matter in this society: the spiritual and intellectual, which are one and the same" (64). However limiting the socially approved path is for Renee, it still offers communal support and acceptance, which yet might not be enough for an independent and searching mind. Having been unable to satisfy her need for autonomy as an Orthodox daughter, Renee decides to leave a loving, but stifling, community for the world of secular freedom and opportunity. She is a transgressor who is not afraid to take risks. Just like she enjoys eating crabs because "they're seasoned with sin" (34), she tests different human connections and sets of values to see which fits her best. A clever mind enables her to escape Orthodox patriarchy into what she initially believes will be a life of personal autonomy. Undoubtedly, the secular world offers her access to opportunities that the traditional one bars, but at the same time reveals new limitations. The patriarchal hierarchy is replayed in Renee's relationship to Hillel–"[he]ignored [her] wants in typical Orthodox Jewish male fashion. We did what *he* wanted" (74)–in the world of academia, as well as in her marriage to Noam, who expects Renee to satisfy his mundane needs not because she is a woman, but because his genius mind is too important to bother with such trifles. Moreover, Renee's Orthodox religious background might be attributed to her failure to grasp a modern way of thinking by transplanting "the attitude of Awe Before the Unknown to philosophy" (25). Even though she physically leaves

her religious community, her story conveys a message that mentally she is unable to liberate herself entirely from the Orthodox frame of mind.

Renee's experiences are located in the patriarchal world both of her Orthodox Jewish home and American academia. When she leaves the first one in the hope of finding freedom in the second, she learns that both are guided by similar principles. Renee believes that education and knowledge will grant her freedom and autonomy that she lacks in the world of restricted Judaism. She enrolls in graduate studies in philosophy, which becomes her substitute for religious belief since both address similar issues, but provide different answers. What she learns, though, is that the insular world of philosophy departments is similarly hierarchic and patriarchal: "it was all old men tripping on their white beards" (14-15). At parties organized by the university faculty, Renee observes how guests conform to the patriarchal order, with men discussing scholarly subjects, "while the women spoke among themselves of children, grandchildren, travel and gardening" (39). Men's discussions were lively and energetic, whereas women were "all soft-spoken and sweet, cherishing, quite clearly, the appearance of unflappable exteriors" (39). Renee's own position among the Princeton intellectuals turns out to be problematic. In her own words: "[m]y first year there had been disastrous, and my second, just beginning, gave every indication of being worse" (12). The scholarly community incapacitates and terrifies her. Instead of a free exchange of ideas, she observes near-vassal relations between tenured professors and the rest of the faculty. When her friend, Ava, moves to Columbia to continue on for her doctorate, she has to write papers for her professor who signs them with his own name, at the same time refusing to read what she has written of her dissertation. Schismatic thinking is not tolerated, and the offender is publicly ridiculed, next time thinking twice before even opening her or his mouth. "Every time I hazarded a statement someone would hurl a counterexample at it, or else accuse me of meaninglessness or metaphysical tendencies. I couldn't get anything past them" (13), complains Renee. Using the pronoun "them" creates an emotional distance between the narrator and the world around. Renee can neither understand her colleagues, nor get her own views across, not only for the lack of cleverness, but as she explains, for the shift in methodology: "[t]he field had made the 'linguistic turn' and I [...] had not" (13). Renee is instantly dismissed when she proposes a more spiritual approach, asking questions about the meaning of things, about the mysteries of existence and consciousness. Her lack of self-assurance intensifies, making her doubt her choices:

> Here intelligence is the issue that draws the boundaries, provides the distinctions that make the difference; who are the somebodies and who are the nobodies; who the cherished and who the despised; who the heroes and who the misfits. (144)

Seeing herself fall into the latter category, she perceives herself as intellectually inadequate, both as a woman and a scholar.

While Renee struggles with the great philosophical questions of Cartesian Dualism, she is also puzzled by her own position in the insular and patriarchal world of academia, the examination of which provides a different aspect of the mind-body dilemma. Renee regards herself as beautiful, but wonders what that means for a woman who grapples with metaphysical problems. Does beauty add quality to her life, or is it rather a hindrance, she wonders. Trying to resolve these problems, Renee observes her female colleagues. Nora O'Shea, for example, one of the very few female members of the Princeton math department, "would never dream of putting a frivolous blusher to her aggressively intelligent features. Femininity is beneath her. She disapproves of all its manifestations" (236). Her college friend, Ava Schwartz, a physicist, representing another stereotypically male domain, is an embodiment of the idea of self-confidence and independence. Adopting a dominant position in her relationships with men, Ava does not expect "too much of them out of bed" (71), and she scornfully calls her boyfriends "elementary particles" (71), the referring to their inferior intelligence. At the same time, though, she does not want to look feminine and pretty, because it goes against the rules, which, she believes, state that

> the women in academia, the women who make their living from their brains– especially those in the so called masculine disciplines like math and physics [...] they're telling you with the way they look and dress, the way they hold themselves and speak: feminine is dumb. (194)

Renee's observations lead to a conclusion that in order to be taken seriously, a female scholar must appear serious, which means masculine. And the fact that there are women scholars at all is attributed to the success of affirmative action, rather than being the result of the consistent university policy in support of gender equality. After all, "[d]epartments all need their token woman" (147), she explains.

In her second novel, *The Late-Summer Passion of a Woman of Mind* (1989), Goldstein portrays a protagonist who might fit the description of such an exemplary female scholar. Eva Mueller, an émigré from Germany, teaches philosophy at an American university (Cornell?). She is not only a beautiful and seemingly unapproachable woman, but also an extremely popular teacher. Whether it is her personal allure, pedagogical skills, or the combination of both, the fact is that hers are the most popular courses of all. Eva's popularity among the students constitutes a stark contrast to her secluded and solitary life as a bookish scholar, mistrustful of life's sensual desires. Her only pleasures have

exuberant admirer of her work–Michael Field. Brilliant as the boy's academic mind may be, their meetings surprisingly arouse Eva's latent passions, which have nothing to do with her pedagogical talents. Her newly awakened carnal desires, the dismissal of which she had been so proud, force her to confront the conflicting claims of reason and emotion. An unsuspected feeling of infatuation dislodges her inner stability and compels her to reflect upon her own life and the passing of time. Moreover, her confrontation with the boy's youth reminds her of the complex story of her own childhood in Third Reich Germany.

Similar to Goldstein's previous intellectual heroines, Eva's portrayal is used in the novel to take issue with the distinction between the life of the body and the life of a mind. Unlike Nora or Ava, however, Eva does not downplay her femininity in order to be accepted by the predominantly masculine world of academia, nor does she pay excessive attention to her looks. She is presented as physically desirable: "she was painted in a pale and delicate palette, her hair ash blond, her skin marmoreally smooth and white. Her bone structure was elegant, and her figure, if anything, slimmer and more girlish than it had been in her softer, fuller youth" (7).[11] Aging adds a sense of refinement to her beauty, "a [kind of] purification which now left it perceptible only to those who were themselves of a certain spiritual development" (7). Apparently, her physical attractiveness is attributed to nature's gifts, rather than being the result of human intervention, even though she is conscientious in her choice of clothes: "[t]he simple straight skirts and blouses or sweaters she wore did not interfere with her natural style. Her only extravagance was shoes: always expensive, always European" (7). On the one hand, Eva appreciates her natural good looks, but on the other hand, she refutes attitudes of reverence towards the female body, the idolatrous adoration of the body in its prime, and the ensuing sense of tragedy when the aging body starts to lose its vitality. Cognizant of her priorities, she distances herself from women who mourn their lost beauty and despair about their loss of sexual allure. Applying her analytical mind, Eva perceives aging as a natural process and a welcomed liberation from the constraints of female biology. Women who "placed all their worth in the hollow uterus within and the flimsy flaunted integument without" (25) evoke her pity and confirm her conviction that a life of the body is a wasted life, not truly lived. What really matters to Eva is the life of the mind, "an empire of possibilities, dense with pounded promise, Anaximander's inexhaustible *apeiron*" (25), which is not bounded by the body.

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[11] Rebecca Goldstein. *The Late-Summer Passion of a Woman of Mind*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989. All references are to this edition and are cited by page within the text.

Eva wants rationality to guide her life as a woman and as a scholar. Not only does she find female sensitivity distasteful: "[t]his heaving, viscous pool of feelings and sensations, with nothing firm and ungiving to get a grip on" (18), but she proudly renounces the importance of activities typically assigned to women:

> I have not given myself over to that insidious spread of triviality claiming the lives of most women. Specks of pettiness, the dreary details of eating, dressing, housekeeping, shopping; blotting up whole hours and whole days; until they are no longer the minute particles they were meant to be, but rather the soggy substance of these lost paludal lives. (134)

Neither progeny nor relationships make the toil of family life worth enough for Eva to pursue. Instead, she finds value in the theoretical pursuit of knowledge: "[h]er place at the university was her refuge and her sanctuary, the blessed domicile of her truest self" (11). It is there that she finds peace and comfort, as "[s]he had no wish to be entangled in others' inner lives" (7). Following her life credo that

> to be mistress of one's own future means that others can*not* mean too much. That one's attachments should be loose and easily severed. Friendliness, not fervor. Detachment, not desire. That, or risk relinquishing one's inner peace, becoming a helpless hostage to the vicissitudes of others' attitudes (18; italics in the original),

she lives a self-contained and seemingly self-sufficient life. A sense of isolation, both physical and psychological, sustains the illusion that she is in control of her life. No matter how much she tries to find the balance between her rational and sensual selves, she cannot escape stereotyping, as the faculty's tolerance of Eva's eccentricities "had increased in proportion to their ceasing to think of her as really female" (8).

In a subversive way, her encounter with youthful and unabashed vitality, represented by Michael, disrupts her inner tranquility, making her rationality fade away. The realm of carnal desires, which Eva previously mocked and derided, overwhelms her and makes her vulnerable. To be fair, it is not only the young male body to which she is attracted, as Michael is also endowed with a receptive mind. Anticipating their tutorials shifts her scholar's focus from mind to body, giving way to stereotypically female and, according to the rational mind, undoubtedly pathetic musings about her looks. Eva wants the confirmation of her beauty in Michael's eyes, but this time she does not rely only on her natural allure: she buys a new swimming suit (though not the one that is "cut so impossibly high on the leg" (90)), has her hair, manicure, and pedicure done, has her body waxed and a facial applied. Not used to such pampering, she is surprised to realize that she actually enjoys this sort of

commotion around her body. The title of the novel, *The Late-Summer Passion of a Woman of Mind*, references a narrative that suspends the protagonist's belief that only pleasure "that's consistent with the life of reason is good and should be pursued" (102). Eva's summer fling, the season implying its ephemerality, confirms the insurmountable duality of her nature. Even if her chosen path champions reason, the novel demonstrates that there is still the physical side to her identity, largely muffled, but still extant. Eva's surrender to carnality is not presented as an epic failure of her intellect, but rather as a premeditated strategy that helps her to heal the wounds of her past. Budick observes:

> The novel ends in anguish, but it is a triumphant anguish, in which the physical, by which Goldstein means not only the sexual but the emotional as well, has reentered the equation of Eve's life and been given a place in the totality of her psychic being. (4)

Eva Mueller is another one of Goldman's protagonists who explores mind-body duality in an academic context. On the one hand, immersion in the life of the mind is for Eva an escape from her painful past, from her love affair that left her heartbroken and barren, and from the painful truth about her parents' support of Nazi politics. The life of a scholar offers a cocoon that shields her from the impact of the outside world, even though the seemingly unperturbed world of academia has its share of drama in the person of Eva's student, who is having an affair with her English professor: "a married man who was 'trying to decide' between the lachrymose narrator and his knowing, but forgiving, wife" (15). It is another, yet somewhat clichéd, example of the male-female, mind-body power struggle that shows a woman's emotions to be responsible for her vulnerability. Yet, in the protagonist's eyes, it is the ultimate validation of her strategy, which posits that in order to feel protected, one should rely only on one's rational mind. On the other hand, Eva's anguish around achieving balance between two seemingly irreconcilable elements of female nature resonates with the broader claim upon the category of "womanhood." Even if Eva's colleagues "regarded her as something of a perversion, the ultimate proof of the basic incompatibility between the life of the mind and the female state"–"For was it not obvious that the triumph of her reason had brought with it the desiccation of her womanhood?" (8-9), the narrative illuminates tensions that accompany her attempts at equilibrium. In rare moments of doubt, when her life reveals itself as incomplete, and "fearsome moods move in, massive and ponderous, like the shifting of the continents" (136), she simply waits for them to pass. And they do. Goldstein's narrative argues that the mind-body problem can never be resolved, but results in a constant struggle that engages various aspects of the protagonist's identity. As philosopher, Ava, carves her way in the masculinized world of academia; as

a daughter, her rationality defends her against the painful memories of her family's past; as a forlorn lover, she shuts her body off from the allure of desire; as a young woman, her ill-directed passion deprives her of the experience of motherhood; and as an aging woman, she mutes her mind while unfettering her carnality, maybe for the last time. The protagonist of *The Late-Summer Passion of a Woman of Mind* qualifies the idea of womanhood, illustrating how the mind-body tension constitutes an important part of female characterization, both affirming and unraveling the character's stability.

Hester Lilt, the protagonist of Cynthia Ozick's *The Cannibal Galaxy* (1983), also represents high-powered intellect. A prominent philosopher and scholar who can proudly declare: "I've become what I intended to be" (49)[12], she is a highly motivated achiever whose ambition is to "bring form into being" (64). Just like the professional women of Goldstein's novels, Hester pays little attention to her body: "she did not go to a hairdresser or contemplate her clothes. Her shoes were laced as well as old, and on this occasion she wore anklets, like an adolescent" (48). She has a man's voice and her signature is devoid of "frivolous slanting letters, the curves of the base strokes like perfume reduced to hieroglyph, the cosmetic artifice of writing given over to decoration; the trivialization of alphabet under a woman's fingertips" (50-51). It is difficult for Joseph Brill, the principal of her daughter's school, to imagine her in everyday situations like cleaning, cooking, and supervising her daughter's homework, because for him she is "[o]nly mind. She was free of event because she was in thrall to idea" (83). Because of Hester's intellectual prowess, "[it] was hard for him to think of her as a woman" (50). During their conversations, Hester would not talk about her daughter, so "you could almost not tell she *had* a child" (53; italics in the original), which for Brill was "the highest compliment to pay an intellectual woman" (Sivan, *Belonging* 93). The fact that Hester is unmarried but a mother articulates ambiguity towards the idea of "domesticated females"– "women whose minds appear to be subservient to the life of the body and whose bodies clearly belong, in the proprietary matrimonial sense, to men" (Sivan, *Belonging* 75). As in Ava's case, a lack of insistence on femininity does not seem to be a calculated strategy, since Hester's intellectual autonomy does not come at the expense of bodily compromise. Just as it is not stated whether she is married, divorced, widowed, or who Beulah's father is, Hester's outer appearance is presented as irrelevant to her identity.

The nature of Hester's profession and her reserved conduct lead Brill to believe that hers is mostly the life of the mind. It is during Beulah's birthday

[12] Cynthia Ozick. *The Cannibal Galaxy*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983. All references are to this edition and are cited by page within the text.

party that he is surprised to discover the maternal side of Hester's brilliant intellect: "[s]he *was* like the others: nature's trick, it comes in with the milk of the teat. Each thinks her own babe is goddess or god" (101; italics in the original). Brill himself dreads the dullness of marriage and looks at motherhood with pitiful contempt. When Hester sees his confusion, she confronts him: "[y]ou think I'm not like any of the mothers" (93), adding that her daughter is everything for her. Brill's reductive and sexist vision of motherhood derives from the stereotyped expectations of the patriarchal culture that cast motherhood into a familiar mold: "nature's creatures, by which he meant vehicles instinct with secretion: the pocket-mouth of the uterus, motherhood red in tooth and claw" (40). By way of contrast, he "felt himself their ruler; he was their god; their gleaming seated Buddha" (40). Championing reason over nature, mind over body, Brill upholds the expectations emanating from the stereotyped idea of motherhood. Hester subverts this platitude by endorsing the idea of power that is not connected to matrimony, as patriarchy would have it, but to motherhood. In Miriam Sivan's words: "the phenomenon of being a mother enlarges [her] woman's mind" (*Belonging* 76).

Brill represents a position within patriarchy that fails to see the woman's mind and body as a whole. If we heed Sivan's claim that "[he] cannot phantom the synthesis of mind and body and sees her in neo-Platonic light where the body is rejected in a mind so supple" (*Belonging* 91), we can see that Brill is incapable of a balanced view of womanhood. Hester's identity as an academic attracts Brill and challenges his sense of masculinity, since "[h]e could neither charm not intimidate her" (49). As much as he is enchanted by her intellectual powers, he also enviously recognizes in her what he always wanted to be. Especially that she strikes his soft underbelly by accusing him of "stopping too soon" (61), of trading his ideals for ordinary life. *Nota bene*, Sivan observes that

> [o]ne is tempted to apply this notion of stopping too soon not only to Brill's intellectual development vis-à-vis the world of philosophy, but primarily in his novel to his view of women in general, and mothers in particular. ("The Synthesis" 3)

Their confrontation shows that what she believes to be alterable, he sees as final. Hester's embrace of motherhood, however, annihilates in his eyes the validity of the life of the mind. What is left in his eyes is her fertile body, infused with carnal instincts, which he values so little. His realization of the existence of Hester's motherly instinct "liberates Brill from her intellectual dominance" (Friedman 153) and gives him more confidence to challenge her. Hester's brilliant and successful mind, which is evocative of masculine power, intimidates him, whereas her association with the maternal instinct diminishes

her status, revealing the questionable value of motherhood in society. Sivan explains:

> Restricted mobility stripped [mothers] of a significant source of power. Conversely, if they were not mothers, they were seen as deficient and ostracized. A key outgrowth of this double negativity was a traditional devaluing, both in Western and Judaic literary traditions, of the mothering experience and the mother/daughter dynamic. (*Belonging* 77)

A failure to accept Hester's challenging personality shifts the principal's focus to a new receptionist, Iris Garson, who represents the ordinary: "[a] nice simple little woman [with] a nice quick little brain [...] Not a deep thinker–she'll do very well for me" (110-111). Iris does not baffle or intrigue him like Hester does, but carries a promise of a simple and quiet life.

Hester's name provides another dyad that reflects the ambiguity of her female identity. Her forename is a direct reference to Nathaniel Hawthorne's heroine of *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), signaling the yearnings resulting from the conflict between art and life, between private aspirations and social constraints. Hester's passion for autonomy and individual expression challenges and intrigues the patriarchal power, represented in Ozick's novel by Joseph Brill. However, when Hester defies his convictions about womanhood, Brill evokes her surname, "Lilt," which refers to Lilith, the Goddess of seduction. Together with Eve, they represent another duality inherent in Judaism: two sides of a woman's nature that both entice and scare men. Once stripped of the qualities of the mind, Hester emerges as a dangerous seductress whose being is reduced to her sexed and fertile body. It is Brill's desire for Hester and his fear of her that guides their relationship. His internalization of those socially predetermined notions regarding womanhood prevents him from accepting her mind- and body-driven identities, which for him are mutually exclusive.

Renee Feuer, Ava Schwartz, Nora O'Shea, Eva Mueller, and Hester Lilt represent different realizations of the women of mind who are portrayed against the backdrop of the world of academia. Both Goldstein and Ozick employ a patriarchal notion of power that is linked with knowledge: the world of academia and the status of professor are emblematic of the life of the mind. Since women have historically been deprived of access to education, for various social, cultural or religious reasons, their originally disadvantageous position required measures that would enable them to bridge cognitive and factual gaps. In order to foster their acceptance into the echelons of modern thought, Goldstein's and Ozick's protagonists rid themselves of typically feminine qualities. Instead, modest clothes, plain make-up, assertive voices, handwriting characterized by wide block letters instead of narrow cursive, and a total devotion to scholarly pursuit become their signature traits. To be respected,

scholar-protagonists are expected to debunk the myth of female domesticity, refrain from public outbursts of untamed emotions, and promote rationality. Theirs are usually solitary lives, in which the pursuit of knowledge trumps the pleasures of the body, deeming them insignificant. And even then nothing can be taken for granted, as female scholars are constantly subjected to a scrutiny of not only their male, but also female colleagues. Academic life, as presented in those novels, confronts women with fundamental choices, which transcend the established opposition between a rational, male mind and the natural, female body. What emerges from the above discussion is the fluid nature of the mind-body balance, which affects not only the creation of an individual female identity, but exerts its influence on various other aspects of the protagonists' lives; they are daughters, mothers, sisters, wives, lovers, friends, scholars, colleagues, and members of religious communities. The character's identity, as shown in those narratives, functions as a self-regulating system where an attempt to promote one element results in the decline of the other, disrupting their sense of balance or completeness as they struggle to harness an unrestrained mind and a sexual body. Renee's words: "dreams of purity, of a body spare and a mind chaste, the waking dreams of sleepless nights" (89) portent the complex nature of mind-body dynamics, which makes the equilibrium between its elements unattainable. It is not the final solution to the mind-body problem that the narratives are expected to offer, assuming there was one, but the realization of the potential, both creative and destructive, each part of the divide may contribute to the construction of the female (scholar's) identity.

Since the academic path becomes more challenging for Renee than for other protagonists, she decides to divert her life and use her feminine beauty to elevate herself in the world: "If I couldn't find any affirmation of my worth in the mind, I would seek it in the body" (16). A failed scholar herself, she decides that she may as well marry one; one way or another, she seeks a way to establish her position in academia. "I was floundering, and thus quite prepared to follow the venerably old feminine tradition of being saved by marriage" (12), she admits. The choice of Noam Himmel is not accidental, as "the man had an extravagance of what I was so agonizingly feeling the lack of: objective proof of one's own intellectual merit" (12). It is not love that propels Renee to matrimony, but her own feeling of insecurity. Rationalizing her decision, Renee admits that she is only attracted to men who are brainier than herself: "[t]hey can be shorter, they can be weaker, they can be poorer, they can be meaner, but they must be smarter," and then she goes on to explain why: "if you gain power over them, then through the transitivity of power you too are powerful" (96). Her decision to marry may also be attributed to her traditional upbringing. Despite the fact that she left the religious world of her parents, the frame of

mind instilled by Orthodox teaching is still reflected in her thinking. Following the pattern of Orthodox women for whom marriage is the only acceptable social role, Renee seeks a solution to her own problems in a marriage. In a symbolic gesture, she takes her husband's name, becoming Mrs. Noam Himmel; however, it soon turns out that "[m]arriage–embracing a kind of fulfillment through the destiny of 'body'–does not seem to be the answer. It brings challenges and disappointments of its own" (Jacobowitz 88).

Renee's seduction of Noam is another play of the mind–body, male–female dichotomy. In a typical femme-fatale manner, Renee manipulates Noam to marry her: with a little help of wine, strawberries, and the sunny weather, she "took him by surprise" (41). A sexy woman exerts her carnal powers on a rational man, who appears oblivious to what is going on; intellect has no chance in confrontation with Mother Nature. Renee's remark, "[i]t takes more than a good body to be a *femme fatale*" (216; italics in the original), however, subverts this platitude by showing her to be in control of her actions. The protagonist's conduct mocks the stereotype of woman's nature as natural and man's as rational. She is conscious of the implied irony and aptly applies this knowledge to secure the victory of her conquest. During their lovemaking, Renee's pleasure draws mainly from the triumphant thought that she is doing it to Noam Himmel, the genius mathematician. Even if matrimony is not the accomplishment of her brilliant mind, but a triumph of her youthful body, she has reached her aim. And by proxy, becoming the object of Noam's attention, she believes, will elevate her own academic status.

Instead of allaying doubts about her academic aptitude, married life reveals other tensions along the mind-body axis. Renee is not a typical domesticated female, although she agrees to relieve her husband of household duties. Neither does her independent mind become subservient to the life of her body, nor does her body belong to her husband, even though marriage compromises her intellectual independence. Her marriage is not an ordinary one, in which the male-female relationship is informed by gender-specific social roles, but a liaison between a woman and a man who is a genius scholar. As Noam is brilliant, he is also socially awkward, his mind preoccupied with the mysteries of the mathematical universe, rather than the trifles of everyday life. The opening sentences of the novel introduce Renee's dilemma: she wonders.

> Should I radiate the faintly dazed glow of one who stands within sweating distance of the raging fires of creativity? Or should my features exhibit the sharp practicality capable of managing the mundane affairs of an intellectual demigod? (5)

A brief glimpse into a morning conversation between the spouses reveals the

"cannot be bothered remembering trivialities like that" (6), he expects Renee to help him, "[u]nstated premise, implied by the focused glare; that's one of the purposes of the wife" (6). Renee quickly realizes that her position in the social power structure has improved little: what she has gained is an unwanted load of duties and responsibilities, with little gratification, as Noam quickly loses interest in carnal pleasures. No matter how glorious the label of a "wife of a genius" (5) might be, Renee is still not taken seriously. Comparing herself to her husband's genius, Renee constantly worries that Noam might find her intellectually unsuitable and, then, he would leave her: "he'd see me for what I am, or what I feared I might be, awaiting final confirmation from others" (145). Her fears and lack of self-confidence are intensified by Noam's cruel words: "[y]ou have a lovely face and body, but in essence you are very trivial" (188). No wonder that Renee becomes disappointed on both ends: her intellectual life does not prosper and her bodily pleasures are not satisfied. It is ironic that she can relate to her husband again only when she learns his secret, that he is no longer intellectually fruitful. A brilliant mind is what makes him exceptional, without its power, his brain is reduced to being just another part of the body. Noam's ensuing humiliation de-mystifies him, revealing his human–meaning bodily–side and invoking Renee's compassion.

Whenever Renee cannot live the life of the mind in full, she switches to the life of the body. Bodily pleasure *per se* is never her goal, she explains, but rather the desires her body arouses in others: "[t]hrough it (my matter, so to speak) I mattered to others, and thus mattered" (89). The body, which is seen, touched, smelled, and clothed, provides a mode of human communication, which is located in its materiality. Trying to escape the disappointing limitations of her mind and the failure of her marriage to provide intellectual satisfaction, Renee turns her attention to the pleasures of the body and embarks on a series of affairs. Her sexual awareness gives her power, which is otherwise unattainable in patriarchal society: "[t]hrough sex a woman gains control over a man's body that he himself lacks [...] she invades and takes over his consciousness, reducing it to a sense of its own embodiment (see Sartre)" (96). Progressive as it may appear, Renee's thinking is deeply grounded in patriarchy. Even when she is unmarried, she acknowledges the impropriety of her loose conduct and feels the need to justify her behavior: "I dissociated myself from them, and from the body so acting. I remained untouched and unpenetrated, a bloodless virgin in spirit through all my promiscuity" (19). The mind-body dichotomy serves here to show the protagonist's battle between lust and love, between the material and spiritual parts of her being, and between individual desires and social expectations. Finding fulfillment in one spawns void in the other, however hard she tries to maintain the balance. The choice of a female narrator raises a question as to whether a male one would be expected to rationalize his sexual

exploits in a similar way. Renee defends her vulnerable position as a sexually liberated woman by assigning little value to physical pleasure, explaining that "what [she] was after was the feeling that [she] existed, that [she] mattered, if only to" (19) her ungrateful and ephemeral lovers. Had she openly praised the advantages of carnal pleasures, she would only succumb to a stereotypical notion of irrational and instinctive female nature. Therefore, even if her actions are representative of those of a forward-thinking woman, the rationale behind them is evocative of the patriarchal order. By the same token, Renee evaluates her own worth in relationship to men: "[i]f these men desired me, then surely I counted for something in their worlds" (19). Even though Goldstein's protagonist exercises her rights to personal and sexual autonomy, the narrative shows how her train of thought is still engrained in the tenets of patriarchy. Goldstein has Renee conclude that to gain approval in patriarchal society means to gain the approval of men.

Renee's friendship with Ava Schwartz signals one more aspect of the mind-body dichotomy. Daunted by her husband's aloofness, a disillusioned wife finds refuge in the cozy and trustworthy company of a female friend. Not only do they understand each other well, but they also offer each other compassion in times of emotional crises. Their acquaintance, however, encompasses the suppressed undertones, revealed in Renee's recollection:

> I did love Ava, loved her less selfishly, more trustingly, with less hostility than I'd loved any man [...] And she loved me, I knew, loved me deeply and acceptingly. She would, I think, have taken me that night had I thrown out my arms and embraced her as I longed to do–attracted by her warm receptivity, repelled by Noam's cold anger. (197)

Their friendship embodies all those emotions that Renee craves and Noam withholds. It is unclear whether it is Renee's unhappy married life that draws them together, or whether there has always been a homosexual attraction between the two women. Whatever the reason, Renee's words suggest the possibility of yet another configuration of the mind-body dilemma, implied within the homosexual context.

"Do I matter as a mind or do I matter as a body?" (190), asks the protagonist, introducing another perspective of the mind-body relationship. The description of the outer appearance is the first mark of difference, which helps the protagonist to negotiate her position in the changing social context. Images of the body serve to characterize, compare and evaluate various groups, offering a gender-specific perspective. Thus, contrary to her family's overtly Jewish look: "short, dark," (243) and puny, she stands out because she is the only one who is tall, lean, and blonde. At Princeton, one of her lovers pays her the highest compliment, saying that she could "pass [herself] off quite easily as a

scion of German Protestant stock." (18). Another lover, Len, offers her the highest praise a Jewish man can think of–that she does not look Jewish at all. Renee is aware of the fact that her non-Semitic looks allow her to align herself to the WASP-y standard of beauty. While her Orthodox mother regards it to be a danger to her morality, her daughter is happy to be able to exert her feminine charms on potential partners. Renee's numerous references to her own beauty and worries about imaginary wrinkles at the age of twenty-five make her relationship to her body an important part of her identity. Her dilemmas illuminate the conflicting interests that guide the protagonist's actions. On the one hand, she is proud of her looks and ready to use them to her advantage, but at the same time, she does not want her personality to be reduced only to a pleasing body, especially as she pursues an intellectual career, which favors the achievements of the brain.

What Renee learns is that the bodily appearances might be deceptive, especially when they offer an image constructed on stereotypes. The description of her colleague's body illustrates what she refers to as the concept of "a disembodied spirit" (26): Sarah Slater's

> face is a Puritan's, quite literally. Her ancestors on both sides go back to colonial England, where one was burned as a witch [...] Physically she's composed of lines and angles and planes: a tall, rigidly held body, long, straight brown hair, straight eyebrows stretching perpendicular to the straight outlines of her face. (26)

A pale and expressionless face and a colorless voice are for Renee synonymous with bodily purity. The austerity of the Puritan character is reflected in the contours of the body, yet, what Renee learns during their friendship is that this strict-looking façade houses an open-minded and tolerant character. Similarly, based on body images, Renee makes a distinction between two types of intellectuals: the Columbia and the Princeton one. The first kind is associated with a shaggy and Semitic look: "urban intellectuals, unkempt, graceless, morose creatures who walked around with eyes downcast, muttering to themselves" (13), while the second one dons the clean-shaven, refined, and sporty look of the conventional and predictable middle-class. Having been accustomed to the first type, both in her Orthodox neighborhood and during her college years, Renee's imagination associates a brilliant mind with the frumpy body. At Princeton, however, both the bookish mind and the athletic body are kept in best order. This discovery, which she calls a "new category of being, the gentile suburban intellectual, [throws her] into a state of cognitive dissonance" (13). Having associated nonchalance toward outer appearance with intellectual prowess, she is forced at Princeton to verify her convictions and realizes that these two categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive. These observations

have further implications, as they compel Renee to question the way she has perceived herself:

> The past few years I had gotten used to thinking of myself as an intellectual. I had assumed that certain properties of mind and body were entailed by this description and had designed myself accordingly. It's hard to discover you've constructed yourself on false premises. (13)

Adjusting her views about what an intellectual should look like broods her anxiety that maybe she is also wrong about other things on which she has built her life.

The gendered variety of the mind-body phenomenon illuminates different ways in which men and women perceive each other. A look at Renee's affairs provides insight into what attracts one sex to the other. During a rendezvous with Noah Himmel, Renee as scholar is worried that she might not be bright enough for him to talk to, especially as "[m]any stories about Himmel were devoted to his intolerance of stupidity" (27). Whereas, Renee as woman quickly realizes that what Himmel really sees is not her brainpower, but rather "a delicate-featured young woman with long legs and waist-length honey hair" (28). No matter how insecure she might be about her intellectual aptitude, she feels comfortable in her feminine body. "From that point of view I was acceptable" (28), she declares. The awareness of this realization enables her to promote what she considers to be her best attribute and play it to her advantage.

Juxtaposing images of her two lovers, Leonard Schmerz and Daniel Korper, Renee points at another aspect of mind-body fascination. She is initially attracted to Len because of his absent and sorrowful look that, she believed, carried a promise of a profoundly incisive intellect. In Renee's traditional understanding, Len's frail features signal a studious mind. On closer inspection, however, his alluring melancholy loses its grip and reveals a dull and shallow personality. With both his body and mind equally unappealing, Len becomes the embodiment of Wittgenstein's claim that "the human body is the best picture of the human soul" (207). Daniel Korper, in turn, challenges this conviction proving that a man's outer appearance has little to do with his desirability in the eyes of women. Renee becomes enchanted by his brilliant mind, at the same time turning a blind eye to the deficiencies of his body because "what makes a man sexy or not is his point of view, the way he regards *us*" (226). This attitude gives the mind precedence over the body, negating the conception of women as primarily physical objects of male desire. The narrator establishes the margins of mutual attractiveness, claiming that "men seem to lust after a beautiful hunk of flesh, while women crave to feel understood, liked, and interesting" (226). This claim is also communicated in Alix Kates Shulman's novel, *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*, when the narrator-protagonist

defines gender differences: "[a]s girls were divided by their looks and permissiveness, boys were divided by their accomplishments" (63). These humorous and ironic encounters show how such binary oppositions as male-female and desirable-undesirable define and shape the gendered perception of the world. Reductive though these sets are, switching easily from one position to another gives Goldstein's protagonist a powerful tool in handling her relationships and reaching her goals.

The Mind-Body Problem depicts a gender-based marginalization that is grounded in the patriarchy of modern society. The story explores diverse contexts that illustrate women's positions in religion, in the predominantly male world of academia, which could easily be substituted by the world of business, and in the family. By taking on the guise of an individual story, the novel illustrates how the contemporary social order tends to reproduce patriarchy on different levels. Each examination illuminates different levels of oppression, from those of the body–set within the succession of strict religious or cultural constraints–to those of the mind, which limits a woman's identity by othering it against male normativity. The narrative explores various sets of restrictive and reductive, yet still socially viable, binary oppositions. For example, Orthodox Judaism is shown as a religion that champions men and diminishes women's autonomy, whereas patriarchy imposes on women the socially desirable roles of wives and mothers, thwarting their opportunities of self-expression. This claim is also supported by Shulman's protagonist, Sasha, who mocks the concept of gender equality: "[t]hough we [Sasha and her first husband Frank] had agreed to study like fury till our money ran out and then take turns getting jobs, at bottom we both knew it would be he who would get the degrees and I who would get the jobs" (173). Even if Renee or Sasha find ways to escape one system, they soon find out that in another one, their own position is still disadvantaged. Put another way, the author acknowledges the existence of new opportunities for Jewish women who want a life outside their mother's kitchen, but also shows that the traditional structures of power that tend to restrict a woman's freedom are well ensconced in American society.

Renee's Orthodox upbringing teaches her to experience the world as polarized, a position that privileges the first part of the hyphen over the second. Through the inventory of rules and regulations, a young Jewish girl is instilled with the fear of her adolescent body, which is claimed to be the source of her and her family's potential humiliation. Then, unsuccessfully vying with her brother for her mother's approval, Renee's becomes aware of knowledge as a path to personal validation and fulfillment. She believes that if she does better at schoolwork her mother would appreciate it; however, her mother's reaction reinforces the traditional thinking: "You are pretty enough. Why are you always

trying to show off how smart you are? Why must you always outshine your brother?" (170). Not only does her mother fail to support Renee's education, but she sees it as a hindrance to her daughter's success as a pious, Jewish woman. Even her father, to whom Renee feels a strong bond, specializes in preparing unruly and slow-witted boys for their bar mitzvah, but denies the same knowledge to his own intellectually gifted daughter.

Against the backdrop of Renee's religious instruction, the idea of female autonomy is viewed as problematic. Traditional Orthodox upbringing is presented as a source of confusion about the significance, or lack thereof, of the female mind-body dichotomy in identity formation. The fact that Renee manages to leave her religious legacy without the necessity of breaking family ties testifies to changing attitudes within Judaism. Emily Budick, however, associates this break with the feeling of loss, claiming that "the world of secular humanism robs her of one of the most important features of her self-identity: her Jewishness" (66). Liberation thus understood results in the creation of absence that becomes a driving force behind her search. Goldstein's novel presents more than one way to be Jewish: Renee's parents and brother represent traditional Orthodoxy; her own idea of Jewishness is of the secular variety and infused by feminism; and Noam's Jewishness is mainly hereditary and devoid of religiosity. Whenever Renee recalls her Jewish legacy, it is through the memory of her father's deep sense of responsibility for the Jewish community. Even though Renee's emotional return to her husband is accompanied by her invocation of the *Kol Nidre* prayer, it does not automatically mean her own reconciliation with Judaism: "[l]ong after I ceased believing in these words, the sound of them had caused my spine to tingle and eyes to tear, as there is often a lag between one's rationality and emotive responses" (274). As Renee pursues life outside her religious community, the role of Jewishness loses its importance, yet does not disappear entirely, continuing to offer a counterpoint to her philosophical reflections. In Susan Jacobowitz's words: "it's much more difficult–if not impossible–for her to escape the value system she has internalized and which, in turn, she projects out into the world around her" (74).

Even though Renee's story starts with her break from Orthodoxy, the Jewish problem is no longer Jewish, but is presented as a problem typical of modern, feminist fiction. The world outside Orthodoxy does not dispel the protagonist's mind-body confusion, but reveals new points of contention on the mind-body spectrum. Shifting the focus to the world of academia as a context of her discussion, the author satirizes its paradoxical insularity and patriarchy. The novels under discussion have demonstrated that Goldstein's and Ozick's protagonists have been led to believe that they cannot be both feminine and intellectual. During her pursuit of the scholarly path, Renee becomes conscious

of the social expectations regarding a woman's features, which this time are not informed by religious practice, but by the male-centered hegemony. An aspiring scholar learns that such womanly attributes as fashionable clothes, bright-colored dresses and high-heels, make-up, and jewelry are synonymous with the feeble mind. Were she eager to highlight her feminine side, nobody would take her seriously. Renee faces a dilemma that may be decisive to her career and social position: whether to stay true to her womanliness and risk social ostracism, or resign from cultivating her femininity and succumb to the binding, male-oriented norm. In other words, she must determine which part of her identity, mind or body, should be given prominence, as the gendered dynamics of the social structure prevent their balance. This balance is disrupted when she falls in love with Dan Korper, who himself stays true to his sexed vision and is grateful for nothing more than a "good lay" (263). Renee's suffering, caused by her unrequited love for Korper, indicates a lapse in her perception of the mind-body relationship.

Goldstein's protagonist reveals the constructed nature of her identity. She says about herself: "I'm beautiful for a brainy woman, brainy for a beautiful woman, but objectively speaking, neither beautiful nor brainy. My very presentation is an illusion, a deception practiced on others even with no help from me" (144). Eluding easy classification, the narrative traces her changing perspective, oscillating between the life of the mind and the life of the body. The mind-body problem is the "essential problem of metaphysics, about both the world out there and the world in here. In fact, the dichotomy between the two worlds–the outer public place of bodies and the inner private one of minds–is exactly what it's all about" (152). Goldstein's novel demonstrates that the mind-body problem is not only a theoretical issue, but one which is closely associated with ordinary human life. Renee refuses to accept a "linguistic" approach because it entails the dehumanization of philosophy. Instead of adopting the linguistic lens, she postulates locating the validity of philosophy in examining the same grand, metaphysical questions with which the previous ethicists had struggled. That is why she is aptly named after René Descartes, the philosopher who articulated mind-body dualism in the 17th century, whereas her surname Feuer means "fire" and is evocative of her passionate nature. Her husband's surname, Himmel, means "heaven," suggesting his impracticality and lack of regard for mundane things. Joining fire with heaven seems a bad *omen* that deems their liaison problematic from its very start. Just as idealists focus on the mind, materialists on the body, and dualists proclaim their separate realities, Renee searches for ways to fit physical love and spirituality into her life. Her intellectual quest to solve the interminable philosophical dilemma involves questioning her former assumptions of what really matters in one's life. Notably, her final return to Noam is triggered by his loss of intellectual powers;

he is no longer a genius, but an ordinary human being. "People don't need justifications. They're people. That's enough" (267), explains Renee. Great philosophical questions about the meaning of life, or the mind-body dilemma, the protagonist claims, become futile if they do not celebrate the importance of everyday human experience. Put another way, the narrative concludes that one's worth as a human being cannot be identified merely through one's mental potential.

3.10 Representations of the Female Body–Final Remarks

Human understanding of the body has come a long way, from a fixed and central physiological reality to a historically and culturally mediated discursive concept. Feminism has contributed much to knowledge about how the body is constructed through various cultural practices. As Susan Bordo claims:

> we have no direct, innocent or unconstructed knowledge of our bodies; rather, we are always reading our bodies according to various interpretative schemes [such as] language metaphors, or [...] semantic grids that organize and animate our perception and experience. (288-289)

The complicated nature of this reading is exemplified by the case of assimilation, which becomes problematic when juxtaposed with female representations and socially constructed standards of beauty. Karen Brodkin recalls: "[d]ieting was about my and my mother's aspirations to blond-people standards of feminine beauty, but it was also about rebellion against my grandmother's control and her version of domesticity" (*How Jews Became* 17). When the woman's hair is straightened for employment or for social mobility, it can be seen as assimilationist, but it may also be a sign of her aesthetic creativity. As there is no "standardized" Jewish identity, there is no "generic" woman's identity, but a discursive construct, which is inflected by different categories, the body being one of them.

Constructing the image of the Jewish woman's body as an inferior Other is closely connected with the process of stereotyping. Stuart Hall (1997) argues that the process of stereotyping involves the reduction of a person's characteristics to a few graspable and recognizable traits, which are permanent because they are fixed by nature. Stereotyping helps to maintain the symbolic order by constructing a symbolic frontier between the 'normal' and the 'deviant':

> stereotyping [...] facilitates the 'binding' or bonding together of all of Us who are 'normal' into one 'imagined community'; and it sends into symbolic exile all of Them–'the Others'–who are in some way different –'beyond the pale. ("The Spectacle" 258)

Although Hall's definition refers directly to the Irish, its general outlines are applicable to any other excluded ethnic group. For example, stereotyped representations of Blacks in popular culture reduce them to the signifiers of their physical difference: dark skin, thick and big lips, dark and fuzzy hair, and a broad nose. Mammy, the prototypical house-servant, is always big and fat. Since "stereotyping tends to occur where there are gross inequalities of power" (Hall 258), the addressee of stereotyped images represents the subordinate group. The story of a famous Hottentot Venus (Saartjie Baartman) shows a woman reduced to her body, and her body was then reduced to her sexual organs. In 1930's Britain, according to Bronwen Walter, Irish women's bodies were

> implicitly present in stereotyping through their role in the processes of reproduction, especially their 'excessive' fertility [and accused of] lack of control over bodies, both their own and those of unruly, dirty and over-numerous children. (91)

The way contemporary American society envisions the idea of Jewish distinctiveness is reflected in the findings of the Morning Star Commission (1997-1998)[13]. The participants, who included Jews and non-Jews, were asked to identify "typically" Jewish traits. According to the survey,

> [s]emiotic indicators of Jewishness included (1) looking Jewish (noses and eyes); (2) sounding Jewish (voices); (3) acting Jewish (hysterical and domineering); (4) having Jewish attitudes toward money (men are stingy and women are compulsive consumers); (5) displaying Jewish modes of acquiring power (dominating and running things, lacking artistic creativity but buying creative influence with their vast funds). (Fishman, *Double* 109-110)

The participants of the survey also defined a characteristic Jewish look as

> the ubiquitous "big" Jewish nose, "heavy" rather than "chiseled" features, large amounts of dark and curly hair, striking dark eyes (either large or squinted), big eyebrows, short, buxom (for women), somewhat overweight, an appearance often accompanied by a kind of physical ineptitude. (Fishman, *Double* 110)

Such responses, mostly shaped by media representations, clearly reveal the viability of the stereotypical perceptions of what a Jew looks like in American culture. Not only do such reductive images introduce categorizing and hierarchy, which pronounces the Jewish look as inferior to its white, Christian rival, but by depreciating it, they may also give rise to antisemitic sentiments. Gender provides another degree of othering to perceptions of Jewish women,

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[13] The Morningstar Commission was founded in 1997 by Hadassah Southern California to advocate for a healthier diversity of portrayals of Jewish women in the media and entertainment industry. See more http:// morningstarevents.com

who were depicted as less desirable than common-looking, Christian women: "the image of sloppy, inelegant, undifferentiated rudeness seemed to attach itself to the image of the women" (Fishman, *Double* 110). In conclusion, what the survey communicates is that "[l]ooking Jewish diminishes personal autonomy, one of the most cherished conditions of American life, and can even be perceived as diminishing the individual's status as an American" (Fishman, *Double* 122), whereas donning a non-Jewish look is associated with belonging "to a superior caste" (Fishman, *Double* 121). How a person looks relates to the category of racial, not religious, differences, further complicating the concept of Jewishness, which incorporates both. Since bodily features play such an important role in the identification of an ethnic look, as my discussion has demonstrated, they become the first target of assimilative endeavors. Or, as Fishman claims, "*not* looking like a Jew becomes a protective device. For many, a non-Jewish appearance places one into a different category of Jew–the Jew who can pass–and is experienced as a badge of honor" (*Double* 121; italics in the original).

Anxieties about the Jewish female body are to be found in Alina Kominsky Crumb's *Need More Love, Drawings and Other Works 1971-2006*, the first series of autobiographical comics published by a woman. This confessional comic-book series portrays the trials and tribulations of the author's *alter ego* through her–1950's Long Island childhood and adolescence, her hippie days on the Lower East Side and in San Francisco, her relationships, marriage, maternity, and growing old. Her female characters self-consciously refer to their bodies while struggling to marry changing cultural demands to their Jewishness. Body imagery is an important part of Kominsky-Crum's characterization, together with other "female" problems, such as food; weight; looking pretty; sexuality; combining married life, motherhood and art; and aging. Numerous remarks, which guide the reader's gaze to the shape of the body serve various agendas. A young Jewish girl wonders about life and love: "Maybe if I had straight blonde hair..." (*Ask Dr. Bunch*, 1988). Goldie (*Hard Work and No Fun*, 1973), a neurotic woman, introduces herself: "Me, I'm a fat ugly nobody," mentioning numerous cosmetic interventions that she has undergone. Goldie's portrayal is a far cry from the catwalk ideal: a heavy, plump body, small breasts, curly hair, big teeth and lips, and an aquiline nose. She admits that she needs "more beauty." When her husband tells her that she is looking "Especially attractive. Very female," she reads it her own way: "Womanly? That means fat ass+blimpo tits. Disgusting,", and then bursts out, "Don't touch me... pleeze!? I hate my body so much. I can't stand you paying attention to it" (*Ask Dr. Bunch*, 1988). In *Evolution of Hotsy Bloato* (1981), the author presents how pregnancy changes the female body "from sexpot to brood sow," yet, amidst all the stress the heroine assures herself, "But still I know this

is one of the most meaningful experiences in life. Right??" The pregnant heroine-cum-artist suffers from a lack of inspiration, as "[a]ll [she] c'n think of is cute baby stuff" (*Mister Bunch Takes a Sabbatical*, 1981). The author devotes a whole section to discussing the Jewish nose. The catalogue informs that

> [o]ne of the comic drawings included in the exhibition is the three page story *Nose Job*, 1989, a typically densely packed and tightly rendered drawing that is filled with the artist's painfully humorous, self-deprecating observations about the advantages the nose job might bring to a teenager growing up "Jewish" on Long Island in the mid 1960's. (Kominsky-Crum)

Body issues are passed on to female progeny: Blabette, the grandmother, casually asks her daughter on the telephone: "How is your weight?" (1976). The distinctive features of the Jewish body serve to differentiate between Jews and non-Jews: "He is not Jewish, but he has a big nose, bad posture an' bad eyesight plus he can whine an' kvetch better than me" (*Heeb*, 2006).

Kominsky's insightful sketches demonstrate her awareness of how much her Jewish body is responsible for her self-perception of difference, at the same time asking questions about the origin of stereotypes. Using mockery and exaggeration in her depiction of bodily differences, she "insist[s] on the multiple perceptions or subjectivities at work in any instance of self-representation" (Most 22), regardless of whether they derive from Jewish or non-Jewish standpoints. She demonstrates that Jewishness, and by proxy femininity or any kind of labeling, is never complete. In other words, there are many ways to be a Jew just like there are many ways to be a woman. The differences between their many different realizations result from a shifting perspective. "Where do these stereotyped perceptions of the Jewish woman reside, this comic book asks–in the minds of Jews, in the self, in the other, or in all three?" (Most 23). Even though she is focused on her Jewishness, Kominsky's panels highlight the problems of perception and representation, acceptance and othering in relation to any ethnic group in postmodern society. Moreover, the choice of womanliness as her subject matter, makes her work transcend ethnic, religious and class lines, forwarding the instability of representation as its main focus.

The central tenet of my discussion is the relationship between the external world and the physical body. Narrative discussions of the mind-body problem demonstrate how the construction of a gendered identity is dependent on the power structure, informed by religious, cultural, and social factors. Women protagonists express covert rather than overt means of power, which enable them to survive in a male-dominated environment. Instead of directly confronting or overthrowing the system, women characters employ various strategies, which work from within the institutionalized structures. If on the

surface they seem to conform, a careful examination of how they fulfill traditional roles reveals gaps and silences, which nonetheless are indicative of their resistance. Scholarly protagonists construct a self-conscious intellectual pose, which is constantly challenged, either by their own shifting perceptions, or by societal expectations. They reposition themselves in relation to the essential questions connected with the construction of Jewish identity, such as religious practice, group identification, or an engagement with the outside world. The protagonist of *The Mind-Body Problem*, for example, rushes back and forth between her mind and her body looking for appraisal. Those two concepts demarcate the parameters of her experience and signal the core of her cerebral inquiry. The human body, which is given and may be subjected to only limited amounts of human intervention, defies the idea of complete freedom in the construction of one's identity. With the growth of intermarriage and ethnic hybridization, however, physical dimensions of Jewishness tend to lose their viability. Notwithstanding, physical standards for cultural and social judgment continue to shape the fate of ethnic cohorts in American society.

Conclusion

In contemporary America, Jews have become accepted as part of the white mainstream, and this position has freed them from constraints that other marginal groups might still address. This is probably why American Jewish authors tend to manifest a large degree of freedom in presenting different expressions of Jewishness, which may refer to religion, ethnicity, group membership, or a specific kind of universal morality available to all. Jewishness may define the whole community, as well as characterize private worship. Harriet and Moshe Hartmans' definition of "Jewishness" shows how complex the concept is: one may be Jewish

> by being identified as a Jew (e.g., by being born to a Jewish mother and/or father, depending on who is doing the identifying), by identifying oneself as a Jew, by affiliating with other Jews in an organized setting (synagogue, voluntary organization, community center, youth group, etc.), by exhibiting ethnic and/or religious behaviors that are Jewish in nature (the identification of which is itself controversial), by holding beliefs or attitudes that are considered Jewish, or by any combination of these. (121)

As Jewish distinctiveness from the general population has decreased, divisions among Jews still exhibit how varied their experiences may be. With the private sphere gaining considerable significance in expressing and maintaining Jewish identity, gender has become an important variable of the definition of "Jewishness." Contemporary American Jewish literature, as presented in my discussion, reconstructs this definition, demonstrating how it both strengthens and weakens the formation of Jewish identities.

Female representations of American Jews are especially interesting because they are grounded in an oxymoronic dilemma: Jewish women were both praised and criticized through various cultural venues. Having been stereotypically depicted as repositories of Jewishness, such as the case of the Jewish mother of the ghetto, they were charged with the responsibility of maintaining and passing the traditional values on to their offspring. Yet, when they were too ardent in this task, they were blamed for becoming the obstacles to Jewish men's full Americanization. Both claims were authored by Jewish men who, in this way, mediated their own uncertain and insecure positions in American society. Not only did literature perpetuate this image, as Fishman claims, but

> Hollywood portrayals of Jewish women (which are usually created by Jewish men) are often reflections and vicarious re-enactments of American Jewish men's rejection of their alien status, their projecting of that alien status onto Jewish women, or at the very least their unresolved relationship with their own ethnic and religious identities" (*Double* 104).

Therefore, my discussion of the stereotyped representations of the ghetto mother, the ghetto girl, the Jewish mother, and the Jewish American Princess informs both sides of the gender division.

Contemporary female representations of Jewish women differ considerably from their earlier portrayals, not only in depiction but also in authorship. These changes helped to assuage concerns over gender bias. Due to the fact that those images were constructed during earlier historical periods, they help to demonstrate developments in the representation and reception of images of Jews in American culture. Because of the successful assimilation and acculturation of American Jews, complexity surrounding the portrayals of Jewish American women has largely waned, giving way to other concerns. However, contemporary depictions of female Jewish characters introduce new points of contention, which evidence the present-day American Jewish setting. My study addresses two such concerns: the question of spirituality and the female body. The biggest change to be observed is that contemporary American Jewish female characters have a voice of their own, one no longer bound to offer only ripostes to their biased portrayals, but instead free to communicate their own agendas. In the realm of spirituality, I have shown various positions that stem from an early desire to assimilate, represented by Anne Roiphe's fictional memoir *Park Avenue 1185*. Once this need is fulfilled and American Jews cease to be seen as ethnic Others, they begin to enjoy a full participation in American society. However, the question of their religious identity comes to the fore in the American Jewish cultural imagination, evoked by such issues as inter-faith marriage and debates about the place of traditional Orthodoxy in contemporary American Jewish life.

The narratives of my choosing demonstrate different generational responses to the concept of Jewish identity. The assimilationist–essentialist debate, which revolved around the shifting boundaries of American Jewish identity, oscillated between the fear of traditional Jewish values' decline and the costs of preserving their distinctive ethnicity. Sylvia Barack Fishman proposes the transformationist-based concept of coalescence as a way to sustain and revitalize American Jewish culture and escape the danger of isolationism. Social and occupational achievements of American Jews are no longer weighed against a potential loss, or the rejection of Jewish identity altogether. By merging cultural values, American Jews are able, for example, to interpret their

educational accomplishments as a continuation of the historically grounded Jewish emphasis on religious instruction. What was seemingly incompatible–the preservation of group identity and simultaneous inclusion in mainstream American society–has found its realization in Fishman's argument. It does not mean that the old assimilationist dilemmas cease to be problematic, but that they are no longer viewed as irreconcilable. As Fishman asserts: "internal aspects of Americanness and Jewishness–the contents of liberal American and Jewish cultures–appear to many American Jews as almost identical" (179). Long-term anxiety about the categorization of Jewish identity has lost its grip on the post-assimilative generation, allowing ethnic-free factors to shape individual autonomy. Thus, claims to Jewishness come not as demands or as a sense of obligation, but as acts of free will. What will follow, Fishman argues, is not the imminent demise of or the return to a more essential Jewish identity, but its further hybridization.

My discussion demonstrates that nowadays American Jews need not resign from their distinctive ethnicity, nor from traditional religious obligations in order to enjoy a fulfilling and free life. In this respect, America has delivered its promise to the Eastern European immigrants who, at the turn of the century, fled persecutions and local outbursts of antisemitism to seek refuge across the Atlantic Ocean. American Jews as a group have successfully climbed socioeconomic ladders and, thus, have been pronounced as exemplars of an American success story. The introduction and implementation of the American policy of multiculturalism has shifted a cultural hegemony by white Christians to a variety of racial and ethnic traditions, none of which is mandated to claim control and authority over the other. Jews, just like other ethnic groups, are encouraged to explore and celebrate their ethnicity, hence the renewed interest in Judaism and traditional forms of worship, especially among the younger generation. Growing attention to more conservative religious practices, however, is not a specifically Jewish phenomenon. Sociologist of religion, Robert Wuthnow, observes a similar trend within Christianity:

> The major divisions in American religion now revolve around an axis of liberalism and conservatism rather than the denominational landmarks of the past. The new division parallels the ideological cleavage that runs through American politics. (178)

What is noticeable, however, is that with the advancement of social inclusiveness and the decline of ethno-religious distinctiveness, the religious dimension of Judaism has ceased to be central to the core of Jewish identity.

Emerging from my debate, contemporary Jewish female characters are so diverse that it is no longer possible to discuss them in terms of stereotypes; they simply elude clear classification. Even if ethnic affiliation is a result of

matrilineal descent, it is often depicted as a matter of individual choice, rather than an ancestral obligation. Judaism has ceased to be a *sine-qua-non* factor in defining the contemporary idea of Jewishness, although it still serves as a foil against which protagonists can gauge the value of their own ethnic and religious bond. Similarly, keeping a kosher kitchen, celebrating Shabbat and various high holidays, and learning Hebrew and the history of the Jews are now regarded as the requisites of a more traditional type of Judaism, as opposed to its more secularized forms, which deem those activities irrelevant. Labels such as Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative continue to define concepts of Jewishness, even if they significantly expand and simultaneously obfuscate the scope of the definition. Jews are no longer recognized as a distinctive cohort, easily distinguishable by language, locality, immigrant or middle-class status; they can nowadays be found in all walks of American life. As Jews have largely vanished as a separate ethnic group from literary anthologies and surveys of American life, they are now included in the white category and enjoy all the privileges of the dominant group. Similarly, (stereo)typically Jewish professions, such as those of peddler, shopkeeper, doctor, lawyer, or accountant, have largely ceased to be associated with this ethnic group, even if cultural portrayals of Jewish characters still tend to be linked to them in media representations. The problems addressed in works by contemporary authors of American Jewish origin are not limited to those strictly connected with ideas of Jewishness, but also focus on global concerns, which crisscross ethnic and religious boundaries. For example, literary explorations of the role of religious identity in a multicultural framework, the question of religious zealotry in the context of modern democracy, or family relationships, are focal points that may appeal to contemporary audiences regardless of their race, ethnicity, and religion. As may be concluded from my discussion, Jewish female protagonists are not that different from their white Christian counterparts; they also seek happiness and individual fulfillment in their lives. What appears innovative is that gender has apparently replaced race and ethnicity to become the main common factor to inform their experiences. What is commonly referred to as women's issues–such as the ambivalence of motherhood, single motherhood, divorce, abortion, the female body, love and sexuality–contemporary fiction presents in an ethnically-inflected context.

Jewish routes to social acceptance differed according to social and cultural milieu: Jews living in Western Europe often turned to apostasy, which opened avenues to upper-class Christian worlds, and those living in Eastern Europe often abandoned all religion and pursued ideological movements, such as socialism and communism, which aimed at the redistribution of economic power and the abolition of capitalist exploitation of the working class. Coming to America opened for Jews new paths of social inclusion, which did not require

a renunciation of their ethnic heredity. As Fishman argues, "Jews in the United States, unlike Jews in France, Germany, and England, are not required to take on the protective coloration of secularization or non-differentiation as a ticket to acceptability" (*Double* 138). The proliferation and acceptance of mixed marriages in contemporary America testifies to the victory of individual desire over the traditional practice of halakhic and pragmatic arrangements, necessarily sanctioned by the community. A marriage for love is one of the achievements of assimilated ethnics, who can freely discard familial and communal preferences and follow their own hearts. Interfaith marriages have become possible, because socio-psychological borders, which used to determine group inclusion and exclusion, have lost their significance, allowing outside influences to infiltrate the character of the group. Conversely, an increase in exogamous marriages erases group differences by concentrating on commonly approved markers of ethnicity. In present-day society, as Fishman claims, "[b]oundaries between American Jews and non-Jews have now become so permeable as to be virtually nonexistent" (*Double* 4). Mixed marriages are emblematic of tolerance, they celebrate the triumph of free will and independent minds over instances of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. Generally, such marriages are seen as offering more to individuals and to society at large in terms of cultural legacy than are endogamous ones. Religious syncretism in a mixed-married household is nowadays presented as a cultural ideal and the model behavior for young Americans who can collect the fruits of the American policy of religious tolerance and multicultural diversity.

In the case of Jewish interfaith homes, there appears a question not only of ethnic, but also of religious heritage. As rates of marriages across religious lines have increased and parents are encouraged to celebrate diversity rather than convert, there still remain reservations among American Jews about inter-marriage, since its negative consequences can be easily blamed on religious differences. Deemed synonymous with cultural betrayal or a lack of concern for the future of Judaism, inter-marriage still appeals to the Jewish imagination. Therefore literature becomes an important platform where those anxieties may take shape– from positive depictions, which valorize the idea of intermarriage, such as the early films *The Jazz Singer* (1927) or *Abie's Irish Rose* (1929), to more complex portrayals such as Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* (1978), which account for the potential drawbacks such a union may spawn. The historical study of Jewish attitudes to the issue of inter-marriage shows how these sentiments have changed under the influence of societal expectations: during immigrant beginnings, endogamous marriages were the norm, and unions with non-Jewish spouses were its transgression. In post-war America, exogamy became a more acceptable and encouraged behavior, whereas Jewish-Jewish marriages implied conservative attitudes, which were synonymous with failed

assimilation. Contemporary choices are no longer grounded in such social contexts, nor is the Jewish communal approach to inter-faith marriages unanimous; however, "exogamy is an accepted fact of life, and those who advocate on behalf of endogamy are often derided as reactionary or even racist" (Fishman, *Double* 148). Nowadays, responsibility around decisions to marry outside faith or culture is largely shifted away from the community and onto the individual.

There is still an important part of modern American Jewish literature that defines Jewishness as a distinct religion, rather than one of many ethnic identities discernible in American society. The fact that religious ideas inform literary narratives makes them no less valuable to academic scrutiny, even if only outside of religious studies departments. Constituting an important element of the American multicultural tapestry, these novels allow both non-observant Jews and non-Jews a glimpse into the Orthodox world. They show the characters' behavior in contexts whose symbols and practices inform the meaning of religious culture. In this way, literary narratives may clarify what appears ambiguous and familiarize what seems strange. Following the tenets of secularization and acculturation, up to the 1990's, North American Jewish fiction safely depicted the idea of religious piety as a thing of the past. Since then, however, there have appeared many works of fiction that put Jewish religious life at the center of the character's portrayal.

Anne Roiphe's 1970 novel, *In the Sandbox,* coined her reputation as a first-generation feminist. Even though her early novels involved Jewish characters, their plots and themes did not attempt to pursue solely Jewish issues. In an article entitled "Taking Down the Christmas Tree," Anne Roiphe openly admits her secular upbringing, her having a Christmas tree decorated each year and not celebrating Chanukah (86-88). Roiphe received angry responses criticizing her religious ignorance and deriding her assimilation as one of the factors that brings contempt for the Jewish way of life. This episode encouraged Roiphe to study Judaism and ponder its changing role within an assimilationist discourse. Her narrative explorations reveal how complex the relationship between Jewish, American and Israeli concerns is. Having examined her fictional explorations, Andrew Furman concludes that "the essential element of Roiphe's relationship with Judaism as it manifests itself in her fiction and non-fiction [is] ambivalence" ("Anne Roiphe's" 124).

In 1997, Thane Rosenbaum presented a series of essays in *Tikkun* under the title "The Jewish Literary Revival," using the phrase "the new wave" of Jewish literature, whose focal point is the return to Judaism (33). The term had already been used in 1980s and 1990s to describe such works as E. M. Broner's *A Weave of Women* (1978), or Rebecca Goldstein's *Mazel* (1995). With an

article entitled "The Observant Reader," Wendy Shalit started a debate criticizing the portrayal of Jewish Orthodoxy in contemporary American Jewish literature. The discussion involved the question of literary representations of Orthodoxy, the problem being between the authority of Orthodox and secular authorship (*New York Times Book Review*, January 30, 2005). Sara Horowitz challenged Shalit's position, arguing that Jewishness is not a rigid concept, but one subject to the rhythms of the changing times. In Horowitz's words, Jewishness involves "a heightened sense of the instability of boundaries of belonging and of ethnic, gender, cultural, and religious identity" (243), making any attempts at defining its character provisional. What is characteristic about the narratives of return is that different responses to Judaism are often contextualized in generational terms: it is the younger generation, usually the grandchildren, who reach for the values that their grandparents had rejected. Through dialogue with the Jewish past, these characters try to negotiate their own position both in the family and society, and by proxy, they contemporize Judaism. This process, in turn, reveals competing agendas, which are often satirized as too permissive or repressive.

The fact that a large body of contemporary American Jewish literature is devoted to the study of the relationship between Judaism and feminism testifies to its vital importance in American Jewish lives. The following works explore this relationship: Nessa Rapoport's *Preparing for Sabbath* (1981), Cathleene Shine's *The Evolution of Jane* (1999), Alice Bloch's *The Law of Return* (1983), Nan Fink's *Stranger in the Midst: A Memoir of Spiritual Discovery* (1997), Carol Matzkin Orsborn's *Return from Exile: One Woman's Journey Back to Judaism* (1998), Allegra Goodman's *Kaaterskill Falls* (1998), Vanessa L. Ochs' *Words on Fire: One Woman's Journey Into the Sacred* (1999), Tova Mirvis' *The Ladies' Auxiliary* (1999), and Lauren Winner's *Girl Meets God: On the Path to the Spiritual Life* (2003). The study of Jewish texts and participation in communal worship have been the buttresses of Jewish male religious experience. What contemporary novels show is the female lens, in which religious experience is more personalized. The symbolic silencing of the woman's voice in Orthodoxy is portrayed by Pearl Abraham in *The Romance Reader*. When Rachel and her sister Leah, as a gesture of support for their mother, break the rabbinic prohibition and join their father in singing a blessing at the end of the meal, their brother immediately hushes them: "sha. No girls singing [...] It's a sin" (22). But, when the girls even dare to raise their voices, "[f]ather stops singing and slams his hand down on the table. The plates and glasses jump and rattle, then there's silence" (22). The silencing, actual and metaphorical, applies not only to the girls and their mother, but to the next generations of women who are raised in Orthodoxy. Just like many women before them, they are denied a voice of their own, whereas the men of the

family, father and son, act as guardians and protectors of the patriarchal power structure of traditional Judaism. Rachel's words, "[n]othing ever changes. A new baby, a whole new room, a week in the hospital, and still things are the same" (23), suggest a disadvantaged and unalterable position of women in traditional Orthodoxy.

Contemporary spiritualism is not necessarily equated with the experience of traditional Jews; on the contrary, women's long-lasting exclusion from the most important aspects of religious life made them seek alternative ways to express their beliefs. Reform Judaism allowed Jewish women broader access to various aspects of synagogue life, but there were still many who adhered to traditional Judaism, or chose socialism, or Zionism as outlets for their ideological expression. My analysis of literary texts has shown various ways in which contemporary Jewish women may communicate their sense of identity. The legacy of the history-loaded Jewish past is represented as ambiguous. Even though Judaism has enabled and sustained the survival of the Jewish Diaspora, it has also come to be perceived as a burden and impediment to contemporary secularized life, which is portrayed as complicated enough in itself. My discussion entails characters who represent a variety of attitudes towards Judaism, from its rejection and denial to an intellectual rationalization and overall embrace of the Judaic tradition. Imbuing the collective repertoire of Jewish narratives with a large dose of humor and self-conscious irony, Roiphe's, Goodman's, and Abraham's characters address the vicissitudes of modern Jewish American life. The authors construct narratives that depict the spiritual chaos of postmodern America, demonstrating how a lack of an integrated and consistent conceptual framework makes it difficult for the protagonists to respond to the challenges that life brings. Narrative responses to such crises of faith show spirituality as integral to a Jewish woman's life. The authors investigate the intricacies of postmodern American Judaism in an attempt to articulate its new and viable legacy. Nowadays, when a growing rate of inter-faith marriages continues to blur the definitions of ethnic belonging, religion has become one of those traits by which one can identify his or her Jewishness.

Today, Jewishness is not only connected to dietary rules, the celebration of holidays, or inner piety, even though they still play an important role in shaping Jewish identity. Women have successfully reclaimed the right to pursue their own paths to spiritual growth and to articulate their own sense of Jewishness in the form of sermons,

> poems and prayers reflecting on such life passages as menstruation, pregnancy, miscarriage, giving birth, adopting a child, menopause, and widowhood, to newly created rituals and ceremonies for the birth of a daughter, weaning, aging,

> infertility, coming out as a lesbian, and separation from one's spouse, these varied spiritual expressions reveal a sense of spirituality that is to a great extent gender based. (Umansky 356)

American Jewish female protagonists are no longer the passive recipients of truth, but demand the right to determine for themselves what is religiously significant, and what not. Even though the exploration of one's spirituality may take a surprising course, these novels show the changing nature of Jewish religiosity, in which the ethical realm of moral values grows in prominence over traditional worship. However, as Ellen Umansky observes,

> A significant challenge facing contemporary U.S. Jewish women is to take advantage of new educational, ritual, vocational, and communal opportunities without devaluing or completely discarding the religious paths or insights of previous generations of Jewish women. (358)

My discussion demonstrates the fluidity of Jewishness, religious affiliation, and self-definition, highlighting pluralism as the quintessential feature of the contemporary American Jewish experience. We can observe how the protagonists' degree of identification with Judaism changes, recognizing identity as a process of becoming, not a fixed set of traits to be discovered. Modern-day America, as presented in my discussion, both accentuates and transcends ethno-religious differences, valorizing those elements that unite rather than separate the experiences resulting from its multicultural and liberal ethos[1]. Naomi, Mirvis' protagonist of *The Outside World,* embodies such an ideal:

> It didn't have to be one extreme or the other. For Naomi, being religious had never been such struggle. She had always known what she believed. She may not have investigated it or analyzed it or questioned it. She had just tried to live it. She had no trouble living in this ever-shifting middle ground, with its mix of sacred and secular. It was always a balancing act, but she had managed to walk tight rope over divergent worlds, all of which had become her own. She had always felt so much richer for it. The whole world was open to her, the whole world was from God. (222-223)

Religion's general shift from the public to the private sphere is emblematic of another trend in contemporary American Jewish literature, namely "a conspicuous shift from community to the isolated individual, from a communal sense of shared identity, shared past–if only an imagined one–to a disconcerting sense of isolation and fragmentation" (Aarons 23). It is true that contemporary female protagonists do not have to suppress their Jewishness as a

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[1] See the following website, which advertises mixed greeting cards, such as, for "Chrismukkah" and other multicultural and interfaith holidays (mixedblessing.com).

prerequisite to success. However, despite a prevalent focus on the idea of personalism, we can see that Jewish social networks remain an important part of American Jewish life. Even if the protagonists are brought up in secular households, Judaism seems to find its way back into their lives, whether enhancing or complicating them. A rejection of Judaism does not often result in subsequent adopting of another system of belief, but rather creates a spiritual void, which must be satisfied one way or another.

The last chapter of my analysis studies Jewish female protagonists through the medium of the human body. The fact that the body is the site of both human commonality and differences between human beings makes it an interesting locus of investigation. The female bodies in my discussion cannot be approached directly, as they are cloaked in a number of historical, cultural, and discursive veils. Being cognizant of the constructed and plural nature of their cultural representations, the focal point of my discussion is the task of identifying and exploring them, without making claim to their totality or finality. The dominant discourse construed different configurations of the male-female body dichotomy as hierarchically ordered categories of the sexes, or as horizontally juxtaposed opposites. My discussion shows how ideas about the body can control the process of ethnic recognition, individual identity, and social status. Mary Douglas' claim that the body's "boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious" (142) marries ideas of the individual and the social body. I have discussed the idea of the female body as a means of social differentiation and as a pretext to social exclusion and othering. Susan Bordo signals social control and gender oppression as responsible for the othering of the female body,

> the discipline and normalization of the female body–perhaps the only gender oppression that exercises itself, although to different degrees and in different forms, across age, race, class, and sexual orientation–has to be acknowledged as an amazingly durable and flexible strategy of social control. (166)

The feminist scholar's claim has also found its realization in real life, as Bordo recounts her own embodied encounter with the male-centered world:

> I once lost a prestigious job because (as I was informed later by one of the members of the committee) I 'moved my body around so much' during my presentation. I know this was not the only time that my expressive style–part Jewish, part 'feminine'–disqualified me as a serious philosopher; it was simply the one time I was informed of it. (284)

Sander Gilman also observes anxiety about the Jewish body as an element of present-day American culture:

> The pressure in the African-American community in the 1990s is no longer to "pass," no longer to look white [...] The age of hair-straighteners and skin-lighteners has past. (Though it is evident among Jews that the age of nose jobs has not). (*The Jew's Body* 239)

Gender and ethnicity operate through visual markers on the body. In a commodity-driven society, what is visible is real; hence, the body functions as a visible representation and a reflection of an individual self. "Visibility is both the means of segregating and oppressing human groups and the means of manifesting unity and resistance," argues Alcoff (7). In the past, bodily afflictions were believed to mirror the spiritual realm. Nowadays, the way in which we conduct ourselves affects our vision of the world. The way we see other people depends not only on our senses, but involves more tacit mechanisms, which are not directly expressed. We get to know a person on the basis of how she or he looks, which in turn affects the nature of our communication. In Murray's words, "[w]e internalize all the statements made about certain bodies by our society and live them out. These idea(l)s, or discourses, inform the ways in which we understand each other, and govern our experience of, and relations with, the other" (32). Susan Bordo's rhetorical question: "Does anyone in this culture have his or her nose reshaped to look more "African" or "Jewish"? (25) isolates two ethnic groups, which have suffered discrimination because of their, more or less evident, visual difference. Our reaction to visible differences is thus reinforced by the bodily knowledge we carry with us, asserting the body to be a vessel for consciousness.

Even though Jewish men were depicted as physically frail and Jewish women as hefty, the idea of a healthy and athletic body is not alien to American Jews. First Jewish health clubs, which were organized in settlement houses such as "Health Palace of Chicago," while advertising activities for women, stressed their assimilative effect: "[f]or girls in Chicago and elsewhere, it was deemed worthy that 'every girl be as slender as fashion demands' through calisthenics, swimming, and dancing" (Gurock 50). Judaism pays a lot of attention to sensual things in everyday life. There are also a lot of elements in Jewish culture that reinforce the realm of physicality, such as bodily rituals and the preparation of ritual meals accompanied by special prayers. American Jewish culture, however, seemed to be projecting conflicting messages in respect to the size of the female body. Growing up in an environment that encouraged force-feeding of children (eat this spoonful for mother, and this for father...) promoted an ideal of a plump and healthy child, whereas adolescent girls were confronted with the cultural imperative of a slim body. Being Jewish in a non-Jewish culture made women especially sensitive to the idealized physical features of the dominant WASP group, such as fair skin, blue eyes, and straight hair. Prell formulates their anxiety:

> The 1950s Jewish male feared entrapment in respectability. The 1970s Jewish woman feared that the source of her power–the grotesque body, with its ability to transgress cultural norms would deprive her of love, trapping her forever in a body given by God and her mother. ("Cinderellas" 131)

Cultural body ideals have been an influential factor in grooming the body to the changing standards of female beauty. Up to the twentieth century, the ideal of the female body was congruent with its image as a symbol of fertility: full body, rounded hips, and large breasts were both fashionable and erotic. Such aesthetic ideal was best represented in the 1600s, in paintings by Peter Paul Rubens and Rembrandt, and later by Pierre-Auguste Renoir. According to Sarah Grogan,

> the origin of idealization of slimness in Western culture [dates back] to the 1920's, and it is argued that the thin ideal is the outcome of successful marketing by the fashion industry, which became the standard of cultural beauty in the industrialized affluent societies of the twentieth century. (19)

A growing circulation of fashion magazines helped to spread photographs of models whose appearance became the target of their readers. Style magazines provided an example of how a fashionable woman should look, whereas mass-produced and readily available clothes enabled women from different backgrounds to pursue that glossy ideal. The flapper woman, with a flat chest and a straight, low-waisted dress, originated after World War I. Between the 1930's and 1950's, the curvy and busted figures were promoted, such as the ones represented by Jean Harlow and Jane Russell, with the unsurpassed ideal of femininity represented by Marilyn Monroe. But with cultural shifts from sensuality to sophistication, the woman's figure began to slim down. For example, a thin Audrey Hepburn epitomized the elegance and stylishness of the upper classes. An extreme example of this trend was the English model Twiggy, whose emaciated body image became an ideal, which was followed by many young women of the time. Since then, the slim body has become the common Western standard of beauty. The "waif" models who appeared in the 1990's and were represented by the remarkably slim Kate Moss, together with the marketing of "heroin chic" style, show where the thin ideal starts to border on promoting damaging body disorders. An anorexic body may signify an obsession with the existing standards of beauty, it might refer to an act of self-punishment in the form of masochism, be an example of feminine narcissism, or communicate a desire to become bodiless. Nowadays, there are computer programs that easily correct what neither strong will nor dietary supplements can. One may observe that photographs in fashion magazines have less and less to do with the real people that one meets in the street. The media offers an unrealistic phantasy, which, when internalized, poses a dangerous threat to

psychological and physical wellbeing. Bordo concludes, "[t]hese images are teaching us how to see. Filtered, smoothed, polished, softened, sharpened, rearranged. And passing. Digital creations, visual cyborgs, teaching us what to expect from flesh and blood" (xviii).

Language is one of the factors that influences the construction of an identity. Hence, it is interesting to note that the English language does not generally gender names of groups, such as Poles, Italians, Americans, the poor, or Democrats, but it distinguishes between Jew and Jewess[2]. One might obviously trace this distinction back to the European influence of la Juive, or die Judin. The term "Jewess" may be regarded as offensive, since it carries ethnic and racial markers, which, in turn, are often sexually charged. The Jewess is not the linguistically indifferent "Jewish woman," or the caring "Jewish mother," but an exotic and atavistic seductress. The fact that she is both desired and dreaded by the non-Jewish majority makes her social position confusing; "[a]s cultural icon and as anomaly, the Jewess is more than simply a cipher for gender roles, be they literary, historical, or both" (Amy-Jill Levine, "A Jewess" 151). Today, both "Jewess" and "Negress" are regarded as archaic, the latter signaling the experience of slavery and oppression in African-American history.

The focal interest for postmodern culture has been the study of identity, inflected through a constellation of competing discourses, such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality, bodily experiences, religious beliefs, and class. Ethnicity and identity are theoretical concepts, which are best explored in a specific context–American Jewish literature and culture–in this case. Linda Martin Alcoff explains:

> This locality and specificity is necessary because identities are constituted by social contextual conditions of interaction in specific cultures at particular historic periods, and thus their nature, effects, and the problems that need to be addressed in regard to them will be largely local. (9)

The claims of postmodernity have given rise to an articulation of American Jewish identity by means of contemporary works of fiction, in which the authors use the story line as a venue for working out unresolved issues. What emerges from my analysis is the representation of a multi-faceted Jewish identity, which appears unstable and contingent. Following the premise of its anti-essentialist nature, the contemporary idea of Jewishness enjoys diversity, which allows its many realizations to exist side by side. My discussion

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[2] The archaic term "Negress" referring to a Black woman is another example of how "the feminized designation applies to anthropological categories that are perceived by the dominant culture to be other, less desirable than, and potentially dangerous to, the norm" (Amy-Jill Levine, "A Jewess" 150).

demonstrates that the spiritual variable, which tends to embrace an individual's faith and the expression of one's religious/ethnic identity, has maintained its grasp on the formation of an American Jewish identity. Despite its many different, sometimes conflicting realizations stemming from traditional Judaism, a contemporary notion of Jewishness recognizes the need to address this issue, whether embracing, ignoring, or discarding it. Since such concepts as ethnicity and religion have become more voluntary in contemporary America, the Judaic religious practice has come to accept more elusive aspects of faith. As much as assimilation has altered the definition of Jewishness, liberating it from its traditional, religious burden, as some claim, postmodernism has enabled the next generations of ethnic and secular Jews to address the issue from a gender perspective. As presented in my discussion, the concept of religious/ethnic identity appears to be fluid, especially in moments of crisis when the boundaries become visible. Then, an individual faith or an expression of one's identity is tested, and the boundaries of communal acceptance shift, destabilizing what used to appear fixed.

The notion of "postethnic" identity, i.e. such that allows individuals a voluntary adoption and construction of an identity of their choice, has not been wholeheartedly embraced in contemporary texts of American Jewish fiction. Mirvis has her protagonist express skepticism about its illusive freedom: in the past, the Jews

> could go out into the world, but they were expected to carry their Orthodox laws with them. In his parents' generation, they had left their yarmulkes at home. They had tried to fit in. But in this day and age–when they could be anything, when they could go anywhere–they were supposed to have no trouble being different. They were supposed to move seamlessly, proudly, between their different worlds. (224-225)

Her use of the subjunctive mood emphasizes anxiety about the actual viability of postmodern claims to the invented construction of identity. As Andrea Levine argues: "race and embodiment remain [...] crucial markers for [Jewish] 'otherness' and often the vital source of a distanced, critical relation to U. S. national culture" (52). The same standpoint allows literary attempts to represent the Jewish self through the image of the female body, pronouncing not race or ethnicity, but gender to be a fresh lens through which its contemporary image is revealed. By tracing the changing representations of the female body, one can follow the shifting status of Jewishness in American culture. This examination informs not only the fate of one ethnic group, but locates the idea of ethnicity in a broader, multiethnic context.

Contemporary writers turn to diverse itineraries as a way of redefining their relation to Jewish tradition and contemporary culture. Based on the

fictional work of female, American Jewish authors, my discussion presents the problem of the Jewish self from within Jewish discourse. It explores how contemporary American Jewish women see themselves and what this image communicates about American culture in general, for a discussion about the nature of Jewish ethnic identity is also a discussion about the future of multicultural societies, in which racial, ethnic, and religious boundaries are increasingly blurred. Ezra Cappell claims that "[a]s a result of its inherent rootlessness and its perpetual state of exile and reinvention, Jewish literature might be perceived, [...], as paradigmatic of the postmodern condition" (10). Hence, the novels of my choosing function as multicultural texts and illustrate the present-day literary debate, which illuminates the effects of multiculturalism on American society and on American Jews in particular. The blending of racial heritages creates new subcategories of hybridized identities, which try to accommodate current changes in the social fabric of American society. Definitions of Jewish identity span from those based on halakhah (Jewish religious law) to individual self-identifications, showing how broad the spectrum of possible Jewish identities in a postmodern society can be. Whether it is the question of Jewishness, or any other identity, the dichotomy between the essential characteristics of the group and its susceptibility to outside influences, be they cultural, social, political, or economic, constitutes the core of my discussion. Since the concept of Jewish individuality often surpasses its commonality, it offers an interesting insight into the problem of transmission of values in a context that tends to combine ethnicity, religion, culture, and peoplehood. As the question of ethnic identification and nationalistic allegiance refers not only to American Jews, but to all communities marked by the experience of immigration, their example may serve as a springboard for a broader, comparative discussion.

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Stereotypy, duchowość i cielesność. Bohaterki kobiece w literaturze amerykańsko-żydowskiej

(Streszczenie)

Książka *Stereotypy, duchowość i cielesność. Bohaterki kobiece w literaturze amerykańsko-żydowskiej* poświęcona jest studium postaci kobiecych w wybranych powieściach pisarek amerykańskich pochodzenia żydowskiego: Anzi Yezierskiej *Salome of the Tenements* (1923), Gail Parent *Sheila Levine is Dead and Living in New York* (1972), Alix Kates Shulman *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen* (1972), Louisy Blecher Rose *The Launching of Barbara Fabrikant* (1974), Cynthii Ozick *The Cannibal Galaxy* (1983), Anne Roiphe *Lovingkindness* (1987) i *1185 Park Avenue: A Memoir* (1999), Rebeki Goldstein *The Mind-Body Problem: A Novel* (1983), *The Late-Summer Passion of a Woman of Mind* (1989) i *Rabbinical Eyes* (1993), Pearl Abraham *The Romance Reader* (1995) i *Giving Up America* (1998), Allegry Goodman *Paradise Park* (2001) i Tovy Mirvis *The Outside World* (2004). „Żydowskość" bohaterek analizowanych tekstów, w połączeniu z ich płcią, jest pretekstem do ukazania szerszego kontekstu badawczych dociekań, który obejmuje rolę odmienności w społecznościach wielokulturowych.

Punktem wyjścia do rozważań analitycznych jest zauważalna zmiana, jaka dokonała się w sposobie przedstawiania bohaterek kobiecych żydowskiego pochodzenia. Dotyczy to nie tylko ich większej liczby w porównaniu do literatury wcześniejszej, zdominowanej przed bohaterów męskich, ale też istotnych zmian w sposobie przedstawiania. Powieściowe portrety kobiet, w większości tworzone przez pisarki, ukazują zróżnicowane aspekty postrzegania inności rozumianej jako płeć, etniczność, czy religijność. W kontekście pluralizmu kulturowego rozprawa ta umożliwia prześledzenie drogi amerykańskich Żydów z peryferii do samego środka życia społecznego Ameryki, notując zdobycze i straty, które ten proces wymuszał, zwłaszcza na swoich żeńskich uczestniczkach. Awans społeczny i akceptacja okazały się doświadczeniem odrębnym dla żydowskich kobiet, które zmuszone były stawić czoła nie tylko zewnętrznym wyzwaniom, ale także tym pojawiającym się wewnątrz własnej grupy. Asymilacja i akulturacja, jakkolwiek pożądana

z punktu widzenia jednorodnej polityki kulturowej Ameryki lansowanej na przełomie dwudziestego i dwudziestego pierwszego wieku, ustąpiła miejsca kulturowej heterogeniczności, która promuje odmienność i indywidualność. Jak pokazują rozważania autorki, przesunięcie uwagi z racji zbiorowych na jednostkowe doświadczenie otwiera bohaterkom nowe drogi samorealizacji, ale także stawia przed nimi nowe wyzwania.

Próba zdefiniowania żydowskości pokazuje jak to pojęcie staje się coraz bardziej pojemne wraz ze wzrostem statusu społecznego Amerykanów żydowskiego pochodzenia i możliwością wyboru afiliacji religijnej lub jej całkowitym odrzuceniem. W ramach żydowskiej diaspory, ale też po utworzeniu państwa izraelskiego, potrzeba zachowania odrębności etnicznej i religijnej zawsze konkurowała z dążeniami asymilacyjnymi. Współczesne oblicze żydowskości umyka jednoznacznym i ograniczającym ramom wychodząc naprzeciw etnicznej hybrydyzacji i pluralizmowi myślowemu. Jednakże w analizowanych utworach nadal jest widoczne napięcie pomiędzy tendencjami uniwersalistycznymi i esencjalistycznymi, które wymusza na bohaterkach zajęcie stanowiska wobec tego problemu, bez względu na to jaką reprezentują postawę wobec żydowskości. Rozważania te w książce dotyczą szerszego kontekstu społecznego i kulturowego, dla którego żydowskość jest jedynie przykładowym parametrem w procesie budowania tożsamości bohaterek.

W rozdziale pierwszym zaprezentowano stereotypowe przedstawienia bohaterek żydowskich w literaturze i kulturze. We wstępie zdefiniowano pojęcia takie, jak role i stereotypy genderowe wskazując na ich biologiczne, społeczne i kulturowe uwarunkowania. Następnie autorka omawia literackie stereotypy kobiet żydowskich przestawiając je w porządku chronologicznym: egzotyczna Żydówka i zniewieściały Żyd, matka z getta, dziewczyna z getta, żydowska matka i żydowsko-amerykańska księżniczka. Ideologiczne uwarunkowania stereotypów odzwierciedlają strukturę społecznej hegemonii wskazując na inność, jako ważny element w tworzeniu dominującego dyskursu. Wykazując bezpośredni związek pomiędzy stereotypem, a zmieniającą się pozycją społeczną Żydów, zarówno kobiet jak i mężczyzn, w dziewiętnastowiecznej i dwudziestowiecznej historii Ameryki, autorka podkreśla te elementy stereotypizacji, których różnorodne przedstawienia odnajdujemy w późniejszej literaturze przedmiotu. Jako ważny punkt odniesienia dla dzisiejszych rozważań o kobiecej tożsamości, stereotypy genderowe są demaskowane i na nowo formułowane przez współczesne bohaterki.

Rozdział drugi poświęcony jest aspektowi duchowości i jego roli w procesie tworzenia się kobiecej tożsamości. Jako że żydowskość może być rozumiana synonimicznie z wiarą, na wstępie rozdziału autorka przedstawia na

tle społeczno-historycznym, zmieniającą się pozycję kobiet w judaizmie. Stosunek postaci powieści do religii jest dla badaczki papierkiem lakmusowym, który wskazuje na stopień zadomowienia się potomków żydowskich emigrantów w kulturze i społeczeństwie amerykańskim. Natomiast skupienie analizy na bohaterkach kobiecych umożliwia wskazanie tych elementów judaizmu, które wykluczają kobiety z uczestnictwa w obrzędach religijnych oraz tych, które mogą być adaptowane do ich potrzeb. Stosunek do religijności, która dotyczy zarówno prywatnej jak i zbiorowej sfery życia społecznego umożliwia bohaterkom wyartykułowanie ich stanowiska wobec żydowskości w odniesieniu do takich kwestii, jak: kulturowy konformizm, małżeństwa mieszane, powrót do ortodoksji, granica pomiędzy światem ortodoksów, a światem świeckim oraz konfrontacja judaizmu z postnowoczesnymi formami duchowości. Bohaterki krytycznych analiz zawartych w tym rozdziale demonstrują różne postawy wobec religii żydowskiej: judaizm narzucony przez własne dziedzictwo może być kultywowany, przystosowany do zmieniających się warunków lub całkowicie odrzucony. Odkryty na nowo, dla jednych staje się prywatnym i świadomym wyborem drogi rozwoju duchowego, dla innych zaś pozostaje synonimem wsteczności i zaściankowości. Autorka rozprawy zastanawia się, czy dla bohaterek pochodzenia żydowskiego istnieją alternatywne scenariusze osobistego spełnienia, które nie uwzględniają pierwiastka duchowego.

Rozdział trzeci koncentruje się na roli cielesności w kształtowaniu się poczucia przynależności grupowej, jak i indywidualnej tożsamości kobiecej we współczesnym społeczeństwie wielokulturowym. Punktem wyjścia do dyskusji jest zaprezentowanie kluczowych teorii cielesności w ujęciu ontologicznym, epistemologicznym, etnicznym i feministycznym. Osobna część rozdziału jest poświęcona zagadnieniu cielesności w kontekście tożsamości i tradycji żydowskiej i ujmuje w krytycznym świetle wątek ciała, jako metafory nie/porządku społecznego oraz omawia ideologiczne i polityczne motywy w pejoratywnym przedstawianiu żydowskiego ciała. Rozważania na temat specyficznych cech cielesności przypisywanych Żydom mających decydować o ich odmienności służą jako argument w antysemickim dyskursie. Zwłaszcza żydowskie kobiety były narażone na krytyczne spojrzenia kierowane na nie z wewnątrz, jak i zewnątrz grupy. Konformizm i potrzeba społecznej akceptacji sprawiają, że żydowskie bohaterki dostosowują swój wygląd zewnętrzny do obowiązującego anglosaskiego kanonu urody: zmniejszają nosy, prostują i rozjaśniają włosy i dbają o szczupłą sylwetkę. Śledząc ich losy można zaobserwować jak rytuały ciała uwidaczniają strategie, w ramach których staje się ono narzędziem komunikującym normy kulturowe, a także sygnalizującym ich transgresje. Kobiece ciało w ujęciu ortodoksyjnym oraz rozważania nad dychotomią pomiędzy ciałem i umysłem stanowią dalszą część rozdziału, która

wykracza poza granice wytyczone przez przynależność etniczną. Bohaterki, które zmagają się z ograniczeniami własnej cielesności, muszą ponadto zmierzyć się z dominacją patriarchalnego dyskursu. Literackie przedstawienia kobiecego ciała demonstrują jak uwarunkowania kulturowe mogą ograniczać i kształtować formowanie się niezależnej i autonomicznej tożsamości. W rozważaniach autorki kobiece ciało, jako obiekt percepcji sygnalizuje i poddaje dyskusji definicje etniczności, a także stanowi punkt wyjścia do refleksji na temat cielesnej odmienności.

Książka *Stereotypy, duchowość i cielesność* poświęcona jest przede wszystkim kobiecym postaciom literatury amerykańsko-żydowskiej, ale stawia też pytania natury ogólnej, które dotyczą społeczeństw naznaczonych doświadczeniem diaspory. Stereotypy genderowe posłużyły jako punkt wyjścia i kontekst do dalszej dyskusji, która ukazuje współczesne bohaterki pochodzenia żydowskiego wyzwolone z okowów odpowiedzialności za swoje kulturowe dziedzictwo. Żydowskość, a w domyśle jakakolwiek definiowana etniczność i religijność jawią się więc jako kwestia prywatnego i świadomego wyboru jednostki. Wnioski z książki wskazują na konieczność redefinicji takich pojęć jak tożsamość etniczna i religijna w kontekście współczesnego społeczeństwa wielokulturowego. Analiza krytyczna wybranych tekstów dowodzi, jak dominujące dyskursy wpływają na postrzeganie kobiecego/ludzkiego ciała i jakimi narzędziami dysponuje ono w procesie odkrywania własnej autonomii. Pokazując świat z perspektywy genderowej, książka stanowi przyczynek do szerszej dyskusji o współczesnym społeczeństwie amerykańskim.

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