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**Writing ethnicity/writing modernity: Autobiographies by
Jewish-American women**

Shollar, Barbara, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1992

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A

**Writing Ethnicity/Writing Modernity:
Autobiographies by Jewish-American Women**

by

Barbara Stollar

**A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City
University of New York**

1992

c 1992

Barbara Shollar

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

**Writing Ethnicity/Writing Modernity:
Autobiographies by Jewish-American Women**

by

Barbara Shollar

Adviser: Professor Jane Marcus

The thesis introduces the scope and substance of the study as part of a multi-cultural practice and frames it as a rhetorical and historical mode of inquiry. Jewish-American women's autobiography is an ideological genre that represents the modernity of their writer's lives or, conversely, inscribes the new lives ethnic women were creating for themselves into the definitions of modernity and literary modernism. The work by the Russian-Jewish Bella Chagall originally written in Yiddish serves as an "old-world" contrast to the "new world" versions represented in the texts of Mary Antin and Elizabeth Gertrude Stern; the thesis argues that Chagall's choice of "the mother tongue" determines the structure and tropes of the text. Her text replaces the patriarchal liturgy with an alternative matrilineal heritage in its re-presentation of a specifically female spiritual calendar/women's time. Antin and Stern refashioned this Yiddish heritage into

gendered ethnicity. Chapter 2 argues for a more complex reading of Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* than critics have given it, defining a geographical poetics as the basis for mediating between the claims of individualism and the demands of collectivity. Chapter 3, devoted to Stern, shows the Jewish-American women's autobiography as a guide not merely to assimilation but to bourgeois acculturation, with its implications for making oneself over and over. This capacity for infinite renovation is evidenced in part by Stern's writing two different versions of her life, in which the text of one undoes, repudiates, or otherwise complicates the other. Rebekah Kohut and Hannah Solomon specifically sought to rewrite the role previously designated for women within Jewish religion at the same time that, to varying degrees, they rewrote Jewish religion from a feminist perspective. The chapters devoted to them show the relationship of their texts to masculinist theological writings representing women as well as to those texts representing women within secular progressivism. (Jane Addams's *Hull House* is used as an exemplary comparative text for the latter.) Pauline Leader rewrites autobiography according to modernist rules while exemplifying the ethnic sources of modernism and reflecting the differences that gender and class make in its re-presentation.

Acknowledgements

Many friends have provided nurture and support of all kinds--telephone calls at the right time, interest-free loans, home(s) away from home, intellectual engagement and interest, r&r. I feel fortunate to have been so favored. Francoise Burgess, Rona Weiss and Fred Curtis, Sue Leopold and Josh Karan, Carol Meyer, John Stipanella and Charles Troob--I love and thank you all. There are others who belong to the past, as well as those who are part of my future who contributed to making this come to fruition: I want to acknowledge Jim Kraus and Gerald Hudson, and Tanya Kravath here.

For their dedication, especially in seeing me through the last months of this project, Jean Gallagher, Ellen Doherty, Ken Krauss, Lois Kuznets, Dawn Esposito, Deborah F. Glazer, and, above all, Jane Marcus have my remembrance.

I also want to acknowledge with thanks the support provided by the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation for the early stages of this dissertation.

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Introduction

Like many names for groups, the word Hebrew was originally used as the general word for people; only by contrast, or in relation to other groups, did the name come to signify a particular collectivity--that of the Hebrew people. Literally, the term means one who comes from the other side--in other words, the immigrant. The word embodies the history of the Jews as a people, territorializing their temporal journeyings; in their name inheres their identity as a people living in the diaspora. The name, by association, refers synecdochally to the project of inscription, particularly its extension in the autobiography as the form through which each Jew might record his or her individual version of this experience, the text part of a chain of portable signification. Implicit in this meaning is that the Jewish people's identity is constituted by their understanding of themselves as the other. Another way of understanding the name is by pointing to its sense in referring to s/he who crosses borders, one who breaks through traditional boundaries, developing or articulating a perspective that comes from being on the outside.

The word may serve as an ironic complement to the Greek *ethnikos*, which originally referred to a gentile

or heathen, in other words, to a non-Israelite (used in the Greek translation of the Aramaic of the Scriptures to render the Hebrew *goyim*). Only in English did the term come to refer to any non-Christian. Thus both *Hebrew* and *ethnic* may be equated with one another and understood as reciprocal categories. They are alike in coming to mean the reverse of their original definitions, and, in having their original meanings reversed, taking on the signification of the other term. Further, the history of their meanings trace shifting power relationships; their changing definitions constitute a miniature allegory of the impact of social and political hegemony in defining the terms of cultural reality. At the same time the coupling or twinning of these terms permits us to savor the irony that in meeting the immigrant other, we have met ourselves. In this context, I paraphrase Oscar Handlin's statement with regard to the writing of history: Once I thought to write about the immigrant and ethnic literature of America. Then I discovered that immigrant and ethnic literature was American literature.¹

Under the aegis of both terms, this study seeks to break the traditional boundaries established for

¹ What Handlin said was: "Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history" (xii).

American literature by earlier generations of critics; and to cross and recross the borders of traditionally constituted disciplines to develop a mode of inquiry best suited for making these texts more accessible than they have been to a wider audience than they have previously had. In other words, this project is a contribution to the reconstruction of American literature (See Lauter, *Reconstructing American Literature*). It is therefore also necessarily a methodological contribution, indicating bibliographical tools and critical and rhetorical techniques that render the texts under consideration more readable, offering interpretations that revitalize them. Moreover, these methodological innovations derive from perspectives outside the discipline. Finally, the dissertation contributes to redefining the master literary narrative that will encompass the diverse literary productions of our culture. It seeks to expand the practice of a multicultural criticism in order to guarantee a multicultural literary canon.

The reconstruction of the American literary canon had its initial impetus in the feminist politics of the seventies. Critics such as Annette Kolodny, Deborah

Rosenfelt, and Nina Baym focused on the ways in which definitions of the canon operated to exclude the works of women;² they, along with others, saw it as their goal to redeem our literary mothers from the past--that is, to recover those texts that had been lost.³ Further, the logic and activity of their literary excavation also demanded a concomitant activity: on one hand, theorizing a feminist criticism, to which scholars such as Lillian Robinson and Elaine Showalter made significant contributions, and emphasizing or engaging in a literary practice that offered new readings, or interpretations that drew from a different sort of knowledge to privilege new texts (see Donovan; Tompkins). In significant ways, these critics sought to dethrone the male canon by accepting the implica-

² The key articles include Kolodny's "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism," originally published in 1980; Rosenfelt's "The Politics of Bibliography: Women's Studies and the Literary Canon," originally published in 1982; and Baym's "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors," originally published in 1981. In this introduction I am generally restricting myself to references related to the United States canon.

³ See, for example, Erlene Stetson's "Black Women in and out of Print" and Paul Lauter's "Working-Class Women's Literature: An Introduction to Study," as well as Nina Baym's own *Woman's Fiction* (1978); the former especially were bibliographical, rather than analytic.

tions of feminist critique (aimed at male-centered texts) and using what Showalter had called "gynocritics"--one that focused exclusively on "the history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women . . . ; the psychodynamics of female creativity . . . ; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career;" and the evolution and laws of a female critical tradition--in order to establish a women-centered canon ("Toward a Feminist Poetics" 128-129).⁴ The canon was not defined so much as a competing canon, but rather as an alternate canon intended to supplant the previously existing canon comprised of male authors established by a male literary network and a phallogocentric criticism. Nonetheless, Robinson suggested, a ghettoized canon might continue to marginalize women's writing ("Treason Our Text" 105-21).

These critics sought the recognition of the biases and assumptions inherent in criticism; that is, they asserted that all criticism, not merely their own, is ideological in nature. At the same time, radical critics such as Robinson argued against a "*mésailliance* with bourgeois modes of thought" ("Dwelling in Decen-

⁴ Judith Fetterly had earlier initiated a feminist American literary criticism that focused on reading the male canon as a women in *The Resisting Reader*.

cies" 3) and urged an ideological criticism that would recognize the ideological basis of literature: literature was not merely "reflective" of a period but normative in establishing and upholding certain standards ("Modernism and History" 34). Consistent with such an aim, Robinson was also among the first white feminists to recognize the need to utilize the categories of race and class as well as gender for the purposes of critical analysis, arguing, in particular, against their treatment as "trans-historical categories" ("Criticism --Self-Criticism" 65; 60); Paul Lauter, too, was among the earliest to point to these categories as the very basis of exclusion from the canon and the ideological relationship of their exclusion to insuring the perpetuation of certain values; he also linked categories of gender, race, and class to the techniques of critical analysis ("Race and Gender" 19-44; see also "Caste, Class, Canon" 61-65)

Other critics created a textured and nuanced criticism that, in effect, made concrete and tangible the difference that such categories as race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality and gender make. Under this aegis, Barbara Smith, Elizabeth Ordóñez, and Bonnie Zimmerman, to name only a few, published groundbreaking work. In the process they also privileged genres that had previously not been considered worthy of aesthetic

valorization. Arguing that the nature of the standards had themselves pre-empted certain generic categories, their criticism necessarily involved developing new standards, suggesting alternative criteria for the inclusion of certain materials in the canon.

Inevitably, controversies arose not only over the individual texts, but the criteria themselves, and the theories (or theoretical assumptions with which practitioners worked) that might be most valuable in insuring the resurrection of these texts.

The debate that has centered on the kind of criticism to be practiced has been quite heated. In general, the evolving controversy has polarized two different traditions: male vs. female, written vs. oral, and European-centered vs. ethnic-centered (see Lauter, "Caste, Class, Canon" 69-73; Ortega and Sternbach 3-4, 8; Bataille and Sands 22-24). One might assume that polemical salvos were fired by feminists against traditionalists and vice-versa. However, the most likely suspect has not always been the critical "enemy." The battle has as often as not arrayed those who have been in agreement with regard to the subject of the canon and at odds with regard to how that canon might best be retrieved or rendered canonical. With regard to Black literary texts, for example, Steven Henderson (identified with the Black Arts Movement) was

among the first artist-critics in this most recent phase of literary production to argue for a nationalistic criticism rooted in Afro-centric traditions; conversely, Barbara Christian, in a now-famous article, "The Race for Theory," argued *against* the use of a criticism rooted in western philosophical tradition that spoke "in terms alien to and opposed to our needs and orientation" and which she believed was an inadequate substitute for a real knowledge of the "'other'" (52; 55; 56-57). Henry Louis Gates Jr., supported Christian's position, though he opted for a synthesis of apparently antithetical perspectives. He believed it might be possible to redefine theory "from within our own black cultures" drawing on a critical black vernacular that has its sources in African and Afro-American culture ("Authority 44-45").⁵

Similar debates have evolved in the discussion of other ethnic literatures: Arnold Krupat sees the combination of Native American and Western perspectives as fruitful; he has argued that structuralist and post-

⁵ See also Gates's slightly earlier essay, in which he specifically recants: "I once thought it our most important gesture to *master* the canon of criticism, to *imitate* and *apply* it, but I now believe that we must turn to the black tradition itself to develop theories of criticism indigenous to our literatures ("Writing 'Race'" 13).

structuralist theory makes it possible to develop "a genuinely heterodox national canon," with both theory and canon shaped by or rooted in a dialogic rather than a hierarchical mode of inquiry (7). In contrast, Gerald Vizenor argues that such a combination of perspectives "is a euphemism for linguistic colonization of oral traditions and popular memories" ("Socioacupuncture" 187). Tey Diana Rebolledo and Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano may be seen as the Christian and Smith, respectively, of Chicana criticism, the one rejecting an alien and alienating critical language in favor of a text-centered criticism, the other seeking to graft a feminist-Marxist tradition/class critique onto indigenous (oral) traditions. Norma Alarcón, on the other hand, draws from a more esoteric western literary poststructuralist (feminist) theory to enrich her reading of the texts of Helen María Viramontes and Cherrie Moraga, as Gates has done with regard to Black-American texts.

In addition to political questions of power raised by these divergent critical vocabularies, and the ways in which such theories seem once again to valorize those with specialized linguistic skills available only with difficulty and at some cost to broader constituencies and to students, the structuralist and post-structuralist theorizing has been seriously trou-

bling on another account. These theories seem to jeopardize and undermine the subjectivities--and thus the agency--of precisely those individuals and collectivities, who have only recently been empowered by a feminist and ethnic politics. Efforts have been made to answer this, but the answers have not always been comprehensible or satisfying (See JanMohamed and Lloyd; Deleuze and Guattari). On one hand, JanMohamed and Lloyd argue that minority discourse is "a strategy for survival, for the preservation in some form or other of cultural identity, *and* for political critique"; on the other hand, they insist that "minorities . . . must begin from a position of objective *non-identity* which is rooted in their economic and cultural marginalization vis-à-vis the 'West'" (8; 12). In contrast, Deleuze and Guattari theorize a minority literature but, then apparently assailed by the "minor" nature of "minority" talent, install Kafka as their exemplary text/author.⁶ (The problem would seem to lie in the

⁶ For another critique of their argument, see Renza. This is not to let "practical" critics off the hook. Often, the latter choose illustrative texts that justify relegating ethnic literature to minority status. See Chapter 2 for an extended discussion of this matter with regard to Mary Antin's work; the chapters in Part II are also intended to provide another perspective on this issue of ethnic canonicity, or rather, canonical ethnicity.

minority's failure to meet the ideological expectations of the minority critic.)

The contradictions in radical theory have continued to render the relationship between theory and practical criticism problematic. As Gregory Jay has noted, many ethnic critics see the post-structuralists as gaining an ascendancy at precisely the moment that ethnic literature was gaining a foothold in the academic canon. On one hand, such a strategy seems to pre-empt the ethnic agent--as critic or as artist--from speaking for herself; on the other hand, it continues a long rhetorical tradition, whereby more powerful figures, usually white males, who consider it their obligation to provide testimonials that assure the authenticity, aesthetic value of, and worthiness of the document their introduction frames. They serve as textual mediators, common to the first reproduction of most writings by Native Americans, Blacks, and Chinese-Americans.

Gradually, the use of differing critical strategies and techniques has come to seem inevitable, and the discussion has become somewhat less polemical: dichotomies have given way to the synthetic efforts of critics such as Jules Chametsky, William Boelhower, Jane Tompkins, Werner Sollars, Mary Dearborn, Paul Lauter, Thomas J. Ferraro, and Gregory Jay--all critics

who have sought to valorize a multicultural canon or validate theory through an enlivening praxis. Editors like A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff and Jerry Ward, Jr., Marie Harris and Kathleen Aguero, and Di Pietro and Ifkovic, by combining examples of literary and critical practice or by bringing different literary traditions within American literature into critical dialogue, have also provided "critical challenges" to the existing canon or the assumptions underlying that canon.⁷

Not surprisingly, these critics use the very parameters established in previous debates to achieve a new synthesis. Gregory Jay, for example, drawing on the theorizing of Adrienne Rich and that of the anthropologist James Clifford, develops criteria for a new American canon based on a dialogue among "socially constructed bodies and subject positions" (265). Thus in discussing specific genres/texts, he notes the value of examining the autobiographical narratives of Benjamin Franklin and Frederick Douglass in relation to one another who both see the "achievement of literacy as the key to freedom," but for whom there are enormous material differences in the degree and means of realiz-

⁷ The phrase in quotation marks derives from the subtitle of the anthology of critical articles by Harris and Aguero, *A Gift of Tongues*.

ing that freedom (273). Thomas Ferraro seeks a relational strategy as well. In his case, he defines ethnic realism as against what he calls ethnic modernism as dual modes of critique--one written from the perspective of class/society and the other from the perspective of the individual psyche (6-7; 9-10). While he privileges what he calls the narrative of "ethnic passage" (6), Jay argues for a series of "problematics" around which literary study might be organized, including that of origins, power, civilization, tradition, assimilation, translation, bodies, literacy, and borders (277).

Each of these critics has accepted the need for re-defining theoretical assumptions, developing methodological parameters, synthesizing perspectives that make the literatures that previously seemed marginal visible and accessible. Such ideological concerns have led both to the new historicism and a criticism that emphasizes the rhetorical situation of literature. These in turn have brought about what Wai-chee Dimock has recently identified as "a broadly relational mode of inquiry; elsewhere she refers to it as a decentering of the text "offering in its place a new and expanded frame of reference" (132).

On a political/practical level the goal of multiculturalism involves generating institutional support

and the development of an "accessible," "selective," "official," and "critical" canon.⁸ The multicultural canon is one that is central to our present concerns but also necessary for the future we hope to make, helping to create what Van Wyck Brooks called "a usable past" (1918).⁹ The subjects/texts of this dissertation are part of this usable past.

Gregory Jay has pointed specifically to Jewish-American writing as a focal literature for multicultural study, "since the Jew both belongs to the hegemony of European cultural tradition and has been the excluded Other within the body of that culture" (273). Even as a description that may be pertinent to the corpus prior to World War II, I question the adequacy of this justification. I would argue instead

⁸ These adjectives are drawn from Alistair Fowler's typology delineated in "Genre and the Literary Canon" *New Literary History* 11 (1979): 97-119, and quoted in Wendell Harris's discussion of canonicity. While Harris seems to denigrate the tendency for academics "to teach what they have been taught, what is easily available in print, what others are writing interestingly about, and what they themselves are writing about" and so on, it is difficult to imagine what else and why else one would teach otherwise; his resolutely non-ideological stance seems to me to lead to a canonical cul-de-sac. It is also noteworthy that this "academic recirculation," as he calls it, has been used as part of a myth/ideology of classicism to mask a canonical situation that is in fact in continual flux.

⁹ See also Paul Lauter's plea for an empowering canon ("A Comparative Discipline" 16-17).

that Jewish-American writing serves the useful purpose of helping to historicize ethnicity. To the above typology of canonry, in other words, one might add two others categories, specifying a *diachronic* canon, as well as a comparative one (as Paul Lauter has done).

To clarify the significance of a diachronic dimension in developing a comparative discipline, I would like to develop an analogy. Lauter has long championed working-class "texts," many of which were defined as part of an oral tradition (and dismissed or excluded from the canon on that basis). Consequently, he has thought deeply about the issue of the incorporation of that tradition into the literary canon. In developing his comparative theory of American literature, Lauter argues:

[A]ll written cultures represent the transformation and codification of earlier oral cultures: . . . What we are comparing are cultures at different stages in the process of transformation from oral to written. [Moreover,] the process through which oral forms pass into written forms differ substantially from culture to culture (24).

Looked at from this point of view, one might argue that Jewish-American writings are a useful part of the spectrum or continuum; the trajectory from oral to literate sources might be traced, most especially perhaps because the Jews have been reified as a People of the Book. Thus in reviewing this project, it seems more

important than ever to have begun with the work by Bella Chagall, the varied oral sources of which are as discernible as her transformations of them. The Jewish-American case, again, represents diachronically, the "process of transformation from oral to written," usable for understanding of or comparison with the very different relations between the oral and written traditions found, for example, in the Black-American literary tradition.¹⁰

I offer one last context for the discussion that follows. In placing the writings of the Jewish-American women before the reader as part of this newly evolving canon, I also hope to teach what historian John Higham, sociologist Philip Gleason, literary critic Werner Sollors, and social critic Jeffrey Escoffier have suggested are "the limits of multiculturalism." Sollors, in particular, has called for "postpluralist, post-ethnic" literary historical and critical approaches that will "increase our understanding of the cultural interplays and contacts among writers of different

¹⁰ Compare Valerie Smith writing about the Afro-American narrative: "Afro-American writers draw on both an oral and a literate tradition; their debts to the one shape them and distance them from the other. To focus on the texts' literariness, then, is to oversimplify their lineage" (6). She uses this idea to authorize a methodology/scholarship rooted in both traditions.

backgrounds. . . [and] the ethnic innovations and cultural mergers that took place in America" (277; 256). In effect, like Lauter, he wants to promote a comparative discipline, going even so far as to suggest that there can be no "pure" Black or Jewish or Native American writing, fearful of the ethnocentricity and racism that might contaminate literary study as much as it has contaminated the larger political culture and the economy.

In engaging in a monographic study, one can only take refuge in the idea that one is engaged at another level in the comparative study solicited by these critics. In other words, while appealing to a concept of social collectivity, I am everywhere at pains to point out the fluidity of that collectivity, its boundaries shifting over time and place. By virtue of their gender, ethnicity, class, and the historical relations in which these were embedded, each of these writers was constituted not by any single identity but by "a web of overlapping [and diverging, sometimes conflicting] identities and group affiliations" (Escoffier 64). This project, then, even while it seems to be authorized by ethnic pluralism (what is now called identity politics) presents a *critique* of a politics based on any *single* dimension such as gender, ethnicity, or class.

What follows is, finally, intended as a contribution to a canon that will appropriately reflect and complement what William Dean Howells called our "decentralized literature" (1899). (Qtd. in Chametzky.) It was during his tenure as the unofficial critic laureate of the nation and official editor-in-chief of the *Atlantic Monthly* that the modern ethnic literary tradition took shape. It has taken the academic literary establishment another one hundred years to come to terms with that reality in a way that will nurture all of its writers and readers.

You really had brought some traces of Judaism with you from the ghetto-like village community. It was not much and it dwindled a little more in the city . . . , but still, the impressions and memories of your youth did just about suffice for some sort of Jewish life. . . . Even in this there was still Judaism enough, but it was too little to be handed on to the child; it all dribbled away while you were passing it on.
--Franz Kafka, Letter to His Father, bilingual edition

Can it be that any *man* has skill to fabricate *himself*?
Saint Augustine, *Confessions* I.6 (my italics)

Part I

Gendering Paradigms: "Old World"/"New World" Versions

Kafka's pessimism yields a mythology of declension. His lament does not, however, provoke a nostalgic desire for the re-creation of the past. But it also does not see the possibilities that exist either for the past to exert its control in ways that he cannot begin to imagine, or for shaping the present in its stead. In that sense, Augustine's wonder and awe is a herald of the future, in much the same way that he regarded the religion, under which he had been reborn, to be the new dispensation.

Both authors invoke and generalize, or universalize, their own experiences. Quite unself-consciously, they either assume its relevance to all women, or do not consider its relevance to women, women not being understood as part of the universal category. In the United States and elsewhere, women were essential in

constituting modernity, fabricating new lives and new texts, themselves expressions of agency. The autobiographical genre became the quintessential discourse for indicating the reciprocal relationship between the life and the text.

Given his critical stance, it is somewhat ironic that Kafka has, in the work of some post-structural critics, become the symbol of the immigrant or other, his work the text case for a minor literature (Deleuze and Guattari).¹ Such a critical discourse confounds the meaning of minor, rendering it meaningless as a critical category. Yet the discourse is helpful for pointing to the ways in which the ideological relations that privilege the terms of ethnicity and nationalism is implicated in the writing of modernity. That is, these concepts are the structural and *co-existing* bases of modern culture and inevitably form not only divergent hegemonic and minority discourses, as one journal's special issue would have it, but varying macaronic texts (JanMohamed, Lloyd "Minority Discourse" 5-18). All texts, that is, are dialogic, informed always by both principles. Nationalism inevitably creates ethnicity; ethnicity provokes nationalism.

¹ For another critique of the argument made by the French critics, see Louis A. Renza's *"A White Heron" and the Question of Minor Literature* (1984).

Discursive practices must then work to insure that these categories are not presented in reified terms, by insisting on a "plurality of meanings" through a series of multiple readings (Belsey 55).

What follows then are meant to be illustrations of literary practices that historicize and territorialize those texts through a process of thick description and rhetorical analysis. On one hand I want to retain ideology as a tool for literary criticism; on the other, I want to redefine what others have seen as the major ideological premises shaping their discourse. Partly this occurs by re-assessing these texts as gendered expressions of life-writing.

This first section, in contrast to Part 2, focuses, in most cases, on those texts that have usually been equated with a specifically "Jewish" contribution to American literary history. In fact, they contribute a particular, Eastern European or Russian Jewish, strain to the canon, the historical terms of which need to be specified. I have chosen to begin with Bella Chagall, a writer who is not usually named in the histories.

When I was first beginning work on this project, I considered comparing texts written in English with those written in Yiddish. (The reasons for the choice of this alternative language will become clear in the course of the first chapter.) I believed that the

choice of language would in turn shape and determine all other choices of structure, organization, tropes and metaphors to express different life choices and, perhaps more importantly, meanings assigned to those life choices by the writer. I abandoned work on those other texts--and only later discovered Chagall's work, *Burning Lights* (1946) translated from the Yiddish. In worrying the linguistic boundaries of canonicity (Must the text be written in the language of the country? Are translations acceptable in developing a canon? Do they become so after a certain period of time? Or do we simply create another canonical category which permits people to have access to the particular texts? What do such canonical revisions imply for re-visioning American literature as a comparative discipline?), Chagall's work added a certain critical fillip. But its major contribution was a virtually perfect test case of my own hypothesis of at least one version of an "old world" paradigm of Jewish autobiography (immigrant or ethnic)--and the difference a woman writing that paradigmatic text makes.

Chagall also provides the occasion for introducing readers to some of the historical and theological dimensions of Jewish religious observance in Eastern Europe as ground both to her text as well as of the other chapters in this part. Within this context, I show that Chagall re-defines "traditional" observance,

appropriating the religious calendar, and making women the real timekeepers of Jewish culture. The "old world" is rendered "new," which is to say that my intention is to confound these categories that are, like ethnicity and gender, reifications that in the former case, enshrine ideological suppositions of priority and progress. Finally, in the process of testing the limits of the canon, I appropriate Chagall's text into the canon. For the chapter, like all the others, is (inevitably) engaged in the practice of canon formation.

Chapter 2 focuses on Antin's text as the "New World" paradigm. My method here is intended, on one hand, to provide the thick description that is needed for literary critics to understand fully the historical richness of the text, and in particular, by privileging Antin's dominant female genealogy of education, to serve also as a prelude to a fuller exploration of her feminine poetics. This section then not only prefaces but is even part of the paradoxical aim of critical redress. To accomplish this aim, I scrutinize both earlier and more recent evaluations of her work, *The Promised Land* (1912). These evaluations are examples of critical strategies that have traditionally relegated "ethnic literature" to the dustbin of American literary history. They are constituted by the ironic "overvaluation" of Antin's work as an ethnic,

historical text and its simultaneous devaluation as a "literary" one. Furthermore, these critical acts of literary burial are accomplished as much by her textual defenders as they are by those indifferent to her fate, perhaps even more so. Consequently, the discussion points to the need for a different set of discursive strategies for enlivening the text, making it live for the canon. Far more complex than the reductive and reductionist readings of it, Antin's text embodies the way in which using gender as a category of critical analysis can illuminate the poetics of autobiographical representation, that is, the ways in which the female projects her subjective experience/mind through tropes, themes, and structure.

Elizabeth Gertrude Stern's two autobiographies--*My Mother and I* (1917) and *I Am A Woman--and A Jew* (1926)--sets in relief the fictive nature of autobiographical narrative--a nature that is still further underscored by the initial critical reception to her works, which worried the boundaries of fiction and history. The analysis here is intended to highlight the fictive elements of the text, while showing the variety of ideological purposes such a text serves for the culture in creating such a subject and for the subject it creates. The chapter reflects on the autobiography's role in establishing the agency of the writer, the woman as artist and autonomous being.

I might also add a warning with regard to the chapter: apart from the introduction, it is structured in the order of what my research revealed to me; the final revelations occurred after I had completed most of the work on and thought for this chapter. The issues they raised are complicated, some of them not easily dealt with or dealt with in only limited ways within the constraints of a formal project such as this. Yet they too speak, in a different way, to the anxieties of genre. Rather than autobiography, however, the genre in question is criticism.

Chapter 1

Bella Chagall: "Old-World" Autobiography and the Gendering of Memory

Among the most compelling passages in *Burning Lights* are those that Bella Chagall devotes to the theme of literacy, especially the "re-writings" she offers of the scriptural texts of Exodus and the Book of Esther in the form of "readings" of the Passover Haggadah (lit. "telling"; "narrative") and the Purim Megillah (lit. (a rolled) "scroll," in this case, narrating an event), respectively. Reciting the Haggadah, she loses her way among the "little mounds of letters and lines." Then, when, during the seder dinner, crumbs of matzoh have fallen into the cracks of the book, she imagines that "the sand[s] of the land of Egypt were grating under my feet" and "the crowded pages begin to choke me. In my ears the wind of the desert blows"; she grows heavy with the soreness of trudging through the desert and her mouth is parched. The words "feel like lumps of clay" that "paste my lips shut" (231-234). The purpose of the Haggadah is to re-experience the Exodus--personally. Here the story is (re)told in this embodied form, as it is experienced by the female subject.

Like the re-presentation of the Haggadah, the reading of the Book of Esther is similarly dramatized

in quite startling fashion, rendering words and letters as objects and the oral delivery as if it had substance, or heft. As the child-narrator listens to Rabbi Leib:

I imagine that the entire array of lines has begun to move and that they are whirling as on wheels.

Here is King Ahasuerus coming down from his castle. A whole host of soldiers is thronging after him; they ride over the lines, trample upon the letters--the words might be little pebbles under the horses' feet.

The reader hurries, recites at a fast pace. In one breath he takes a whole heap of the letters into his mouth. Ahasuerus and his soldiers are pursuing him; each word is a step he gains on them.

Later, in response to the coming of Esther:

He softens his voice, adorns the chant as though with delicate flowers, and bows, bows, as if he were trying to stroke Esther's robe.

. . .
And under the reader's chant Esther walks down the stairs of the spaced lines. Her long train glistens, spreads over the empty place on which there is not a single letter but only white ribbons of light, as though white candles had been lit on the scroll in honor of the holiday. . . (175-184).

Literacy is a common trope in ethnic and women's writing, allegorizing the writer's authority and right to control the meaning of her own life (Smith, *Afro-American Narrative* 4; see also Evans 306-317); its permutations will be noted throughout as they appear in various texts. Here I note two aspects of this particular example. One is the manner in which Chagall uses

it to fuse the oral and the written and thus plays one tradition off the other, suggesting the potential for one to serve as a critique of the other (Smith 6). The second is that the trope is used in such a manner as to spatialize the text, to establish an almost anthropomorphic visualization of reality, materializing the spiritual and the abstract. Many readers recalling the paintings of Chagall's husband Marc, whose line drawings illustrate the text, may see in the painter's work a visual counterpart. It is one of the techniques, I argue, for re-presenting the female subject, embodying her history, and also gendering collective memory.

In this context, it is also noteworthy that the appropriated texts commemorate historical, and therefore secular events; they are traditionally read/celebrated in the home and not at *shul* (place of study/prayer) and are therefore part of the domestic ritual. They are portions of the Hebrew liturgy most easily annexed to women's domain.

Moreover, the passages illuminate or otherwise imply three major textual strategies that Chagall used and that Elizabeth Ordóñez has argued are common elements in texts by ethnic women. In these passages, Chagall displays "the power to displace 'the central patriarchal text'" that is, the Bible (27).) The sec-

ond strategy Ordóñez defines is "the writing and rewriting of a heretofore buried or subversively oral matrilineal tradition" (19). The last involves their deployment in the autobiographical text, and the consequent disruption of the genre, a rejection of "gender limitations" (23). Chagall's work would seem to meet all the criteria of Ordóñez's typology for American women writers.

However, *Burning Lights* (1946) was written in Yiddish (as *Brenedike Licht*) and published only posthumously in English. The text was the work of a woman who, born in 1895, had spent her childhood and adolescence in Vitebsk (part of Poland, subsequently, Byelorussia), her young adulthood in Moscow, and her adulthood in Paris, arriving there in the early 1920s, when she was twenty-eight, before coming to the United States shortly before her death in 1944 at the age of forty-nine. Chagall produced the Yiddish manuscript as a consequence of her renewed contact with Yiddish culture in Palestine in 1931 and Vilna in 1935.¹ Written

¹ The history of the textual production of Bella Chagall's manuscript is as complicated as its reproduction. The text never seems to have been published in the original Yiddish, but published directly in English as noted above. Subsequently *Brenedike Licht* and another autobiographical volume, "First Encounter," along with excerpts from Chagall's notebooks, were published in French under the title *Lumières allumées*. The French version of *Burning Lights* was a somewhat revised version of the original. The French texts were

elsewhere,² published posthumously, Chagall's text, by reason of its author's geographical history and because of its own status as a translation, might be said to stand at the border of the canon of American Jewish women's autobiography that it is the purpose of this project to define. Precisely because of its marginality, it proves helpful in developing that definition--and in setting forth a methodology. I therefore defer the pleasure of Chagall's text, even the invitation offered by Ordóñez to analyze its typological significance, in favor of providing a theoretical and historical ground.

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, the cultural historian and philosopher, has argued that Jewish history is born in

then translated into English and published under the title *First Encounter* in 1983. I quote from the earlier version of the first autobiography, because I think its English is more reflective of the Yiddish than the one translated from the French into the English. One final remark about the publication in English: the manuscript is published by Schocken, a mainstream publisher who has specialized in aspects of Jewish culture.

² There are deficient but conflicting accounts of where elsewhere was: Marc Chagall's editorial additions suggest the manuscript was written in France, while the entry on Marc Chagall in *Encyclopedia Judaica* implies that it was the product of Bella's brief sojourn in the United States.

the wake of the Spanish Expulsion. Within a one-hundred year period following that event, Jewish scholars produced ten major historical narratives. The novelty of these texts resides in three different elements: First, they are unusual in their chronological and geographical scope; second, they assign great prominence to the post-Biblical period; and third, they display a renewed interest in the history of nations, that is, in the interrelation of the Jewish communities and the countries in which they reside. Thus, Yerushalmi concludes, the critical shift in narrative discourse bears witness to the momentously distinctive event, the historical rupture that is the movement of the Jews out of Western Europe. Though it was to take another hundred years before a Jew produced a coherent historical narrative specifically about the Jews, the historical genre was born, as he tells us,

out of that assimilation from without and collapse from within which characterized the sudden emergence of Jews out of the ghetto. It originated, not as scholarly curiosity, but as ideology, one of a gamut of responses to the crisis of Jewish emancipation and the struggle to attain it (85).

Noteworthy, too, is that these historical narratives were written neither in Hebrew nor in Yiddish, but in the languages of the countries in which Jews found themselves. In other words, ethnicity and nationalism

are simultaneously *written into* the definition of modernity.

British historian Benedict Anderson, in discussing nationalism and modernity, has argued that secular print-languages became the basis for national consciousness and both created and implied new social organizations in three distinct ways. Print created a unified field of language, pulling together a variety of dialectal vernaculars. It also "gave a new fixity to language." And finally, it created a hierarchy of status in relation to assimilation to the print language (48-49). That is, prestige was awarded to those who were able to master the complexities of its production.

While Yerushalmi focuses on modern historical narrative, Anderson privileges the novel and the newspaper as constitutive genres of modernity and nation-states.³ One might also look to the significance of autobiography in constituting national identity, and the coin-

³ Although I am ahead of myself here, one might note John Higham's discussion of the immigrant's pioneering role in the production of mass culture; he points to the fact that [o]f the four outstanding editors at the turn of the century who expanded the magazine audience . . . , two were foreign-born--S.S. McClure and Edward Bok." And he concludes: "Americans became a nation of newspaper readers because what they shared was not a common past but rather the immediate events of the present: the 'news'" (26).

cidence of its intensification with the emergence and stabilization of capitalism. Like Yerushalmi in regard to historiography, theorists of autobiography have noted that social rupture and its related paradigm shift lie at the root of the autobiographical genre. One of the earliest modern literary critics of the genre, for example, has suggested that the genesis of autobiography lies in the collision and synthesis of two cultures: in St. Augustine's *Confessions*, we have, as it were, the triumph of the new world over the old, the pagan world and its classical traditions subsumed within the Christian ethic (Gusdorf 29).

If secular print languages organized new nationalist communities and thus linked textuality and territory, they did so in contrast, as Anderson tells us, to a sacred language that had once connected its users to a "superterrestrial order of power." In this context, the theological commentary on Genesis is not a flaw in Augustine's historical narrative, but rather symbolizes the origins both of the self and of the genre within a world revealed by the text of Scriptural truth (Gunn 126-27; see also Spengemann 9). Significantly, the saint's autobiography was written in Latin, that is, the language that was the quintessential expression of the divine: In the medieval/Christian/religious world view, "language is not seen as

arbitrary but as an emanation of reality" (Anderson 21). Put another way, "a particular script-language offered privileged access to ontological truth, precisely because it was an inseparable part of the truth" (Anderson 40). The sacred language was a manifestation of the religious community and its absolute world view. Precisely because language and reality were unitary, the text and the religious world view which it represented were the basis for the integration of self and society. For the individual, this meant that s/he was always at home, whether with the family or in the larger world (Berger 64). Both immanent and transcendent, the sacred text was deterritorialized yet paradoxically offered a refuge, providing a sense of safety, security, and permanence similar to what we think home provides.

Within the religious community constituted by the sacred text, worship is the means of assent and continuity. On the political level, such worship is the means whereby the members of the community reaffirm their loyalty--through "the plebiscite of every feast-day," as Ernest Gellner, the British sociologist and historian, wittily puts it (*Culture, Identity, and Politics* 10). On the cultural level, the tradition of worship establishes "the primacy of liturgy and ritual over historical narrative" as the source of collective

memory (Yerushalmi 51). Even if these festivals and fasts allude to unique and irreversible events of the biblical period, their celebration represents a merging "of verticality and circularity"; that is, they "are *experienced* cyclically, repetitively, and to that extent at least, atemporally" (42). They embody a conception of reality in which cosmology or providence and history are fused, the "Messianic time," in which past and future co-exist in an "instantaneous present," as Walter Benjamin called it (Anderson 30).

Within these contrasting perspectives of sacred language and secular-print language, of history and ritual, and between medieval and modern world views, that I have been constructing, I locate the autobiographical text of Bella Chagall. Briefly, Chagall recounts her participation in the traditional religious rituals of her Hasidic childhood. After establishing the context of belief and of the neighborhood in which she lived, the book devotes a chapter or a series of chapters to particular holy days and celebrations that marked the year as much as the seasons to which they were frequently linked. Descriptions of food, the weather, and anecdotes revealing the foibles of her various characters are fused into an ambient whole. The story is told with simplicity, charm, and candor, in keeping with a child's innocence

and wonder; the tone also harmonizes with the mystical spirituality of her religious belief. Thus the text seems to summon up a shtetl-like world made buoyant by the ecstatic vision known as Hasidism.

And indeed the English reception of the text--as minimal as it was--was marked by the tendency to read the autobiography as the product of a naif--and then to judge that either harshly or well.⁴ The *New York Times* critic apparently found it insufferable and barely saw the text for the accompanying illustrations by Marc, which seemed to him to express emotion and conviction, while the writing, "slow-moving" though "rather playful," lacked "persuasiveness and vigor" (22 December 1946). In contrast, the critic in the *Weekly Book Review*, referring to the author by her Yiddish name Bashke (almost the equivalent of using a diminutive, or pet name, in English) argued that:

The most delightful thing about all of these memories . . . is the absence of retroactive arrangement. They seem a matter almost of total recall, as if the mystical intensity of the Hasidic rites had precipitated them into permanent, unspoiled form (15 December 1946).

⁴ In addition to those cited, see also the following: *San Francisco Chronicle* (3 November 1946); *Kirkus Reviews* 51 (15 September 1983); *Library Journal* 108 (1 October 1983); *Publishers' Weekly* 224 (30 September 1983); *Wall Street Journal* 202 (30 November 1983). The book(s) were not reviewed by the English Jewish press. They have been shamefully ignored by literary critics.

In my conclusion to the chapter I will return to this critical stance if not to explain, then perhaps to take fuller notice of, the phenomenon and its more recent variants.

If Chagall's text is a re-creation *in toto* of this traditional world, then a brief identification of the revolutionary, messianic religious revival known as Hasidism is certainly in order. Originating in southern Poland, this mystically oriented renaissance found its spiritual leader in the Baal Shem-Tov, "The Master of the Good Name" (d. 1760), who practiced asceticism and faith-healing and, along with his followers, created the characteristic simple folktales and homilies that stressed worshipping God through prayer rather than study. Hasidic belief also emphasized the importance of the direct apprehension and celebration of God. By 1815, this pietistic movement had triumphed in the "majority of Jewish communities of Eastern Europe" (Sachar 76-77). And, as others besides Chagall have attested, Hasidism survived in small towns and villages, even among certain families living in major cities, up until World War II.⁵ Its survival,

⁵ See, for example, Isaac Bashevis Singer, *In My Father's Court* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1979) and his brother I.J. Singer's *Of A World That Is No More*. The former, by the way, argues that his text differs from any of his other writings in telling "the story of a family and of a rabbinical court that were so close

literally in the world, and figuratively in the text, critics suggest, is accomplished only by its being sealed off from worldly elements and, in literature, through the hermeticism guaranteed by the genre of the pastoral idyll.

But Chagall's text is *not* a mere creation of an idealized, and ultimately marginalized world-view. The text only apparently authorizes tradition and sanctions a timeless Edenic landscape. Indeed, it qualifies that point of view in a significant number of ways. First, Chagall seeks to fuse in her life-writing the sacred and the secular; on the social level, she depicts hasidic belief and activity within a bourgeois society. In other words, she shows a successful middle-class family engaged in Hasidic practices and responsive to its spritual claims; this depiction is, at the same time, reflective of Hasidism's dynamic relationship to social currents of the period. Through this synthesis, then, Chagall explodes mythic notions of shtetl life.

Second, Chagall's appropriation of the Hasidic world through the narrative is itself a product of a

together it was hard to tell where one ended and the other began" (7). Also written in Yiddish, I would argue that *In My Father's Court* is the male counterpart to Chagall's text.

highly mediated literary process: her text may be read not only in light of mystical invocations but under the aegis of Proustian evocations of memory--part of the particularly modern effort to recapture history for subjective experience. Third, by her particular narrative method, Chagall genders (collective) memory, writing against the grain of a patriarchal narrative through which the community had traditionally been preserved. Moreover, Chagall further extends her gender critique: The gender distinctions the text makes are inevitably implicated in the project of modernity; they constitute markers of the culture's failures and successes in accommodation. These, in brief, constitute the qualifying elements of Bella Chagall's text that I will be exploring in the following sections. Altogether, they undermine reductive and ahistorical readings of Chagall's story and preclude reification of that ethnicity which is embodied in equating the text with a simple mystical Hasidism.

From the narrative, we learn directly and indirectly that Chagall grows up in a well-to-do middle-class family, her parents the owners of a thriving and obviously elegant business selling fine and antique clocks, music boxes, and jewelry. The children, including the girl who is the narrator, are provided with a secular education (one of her brothers is

abroad studying medicine) along with a religious one and have some acquaintance with both the local gentile community and the larger gentile world in which they live. (Chagall graduated from the Vitebsk Gymnasium for Girls, became a student in the Faculty of Letters at the University of Moscow, and subsequently worked in the theater in Vitebsk and Moscow.) The family regularly summers in Marienbad, often making sidetrips to Vienna and Berlin. This last fact also permits us to infer that, among the possible options for fusing various cultures or abandoning one or several in favor of others, this Russian Jewish family looked to western Europe as a source of enlightenment without forswearing the religious orthodoxy that shapes Chagall's narrative.

Chagall's biography reflects, in the concrete and the particular, the impact of religious and cultural movements on Eastern European Jewry. More abstractly, three major strands affecting Jewish life in Chagall's time might be identified: traditional Orthodox Jewry; *haskalah*; political activity. Each of these ultimately influenced or was influenced by the other. *Haskalah*, or the Eastern European version of the Enlightenment, originally formed a strange alliance with Hasidism in its assault on rabbinical Jewry, but this was short-lived. And Hasidism and traditional orthodoxy

ultimately combined to reinvigorate religious belief. In a variety of ways under a variety of socio-economic conditions, they revitalized the rabbinical study of Judaism and even raised such study to a new eminence within Hasidism, endowed the spiritual leader of the community with a new authority (though derived from the *rebbe's* status as a *zaddick*, or saint and mystic rather than from the rabbi's prestige as a scholar and talmudist), or in conditions of economic and social advantage, won for congregants greater autonomy in defining religious belief. Under more urbanized conditions, within the context of socialist activity and nationalist trends the pursuit of western secular sources that had originally motivated *haskalah* gave way to an interest in Yiddish culture.⁶ The abstract humanism that is characteristic of renaissance movements in the West perhaps united with Hasidism's faith in the common people to yield a new respect for the vernacular. Intellectuals (so-called *maskilim* or enlighteners) spurred an investigation of popular and folk culture, and in the process, writers and artists like I.L. Peretz (1852-1915) and M.K. Berdichevski

⁶ For a recent comprehensive work in English on this movement, see Emanuel S. Goldsmith, *Modern Yiddish Culture: The Story of the Yiddish Language Movement* (New York: Shapolsky Publishers, 1987).

(1865-1921) made a cult of Hasidism. The new exaltation of Jewish identity led them to draw on the oral Hasidic tradition. With its wonder tales and allegories, parables and myths, the tradition offered a wealth of poetic imagery, an intense lyricism, and an animating symbolism that was incorporated into modern Yiddish literature (Dawidowicz 67-68, 294-95; see also Howe 7-20).

Thus the world depicted in Chagall's text is not merely a synchronic image of Hasidic life; nor, emphatically, is it an idealized, and therefore nostalgic, re-creation of a timeless world.⁷ It is a text inspired by, that is, taking its breath and life from, mystical Hasidic belief, but the "Hasidic world" the text invokes is a particular one existing at the beginning of the twentieth century, in which accommodations *had already been made* between tradition and modernity. Moreover, this mediated world was textualized by the appropriation of a self-conscious literary revival that is by definition modern (because self-conscious), if not modernist. That is, Chagall writes not only as a Hasid; she also writes as though she were

⁷ This statement and what follows might also be said, with appropriate revision, of Marc Chagall's work, and in response to the aesthetic critical stances often taken with regard to his oeuvre.

Hasidic. She does not only re-create the Hasidic world; she creates it. Hasidism is a fact of her life, but it is also a textual, which is to say, a deterritorialized world. And in still another revisionary turn, the narrative is written while the author herself was living under the conditions of Revolutionary displacement and (double?) exile (from Russia; perhaps also from France)--and I return in my last chapter to meditate on and define the nature of this exilic narrative.

If the collision of cultures enables a perspective that can envision the traditional community, it likewise clarifies the old world as a patriarchal one. That is to say, by the same means that Chagall incarnates the Old World, she defines the autobiographical genre as female. This represents the third qualification of any reductive reading of the traditional community that Chagall narrates. To help the reader understand how Chagall genders the text requires specifying, first, the patriarchal narrative "chain of tradition," as it is called within Judaism, and second, the roles and responsibilities this so-called Oral Law assigns to women. This will help to define the female narrative tradition that Chagall originates and to

identify the specifically female tradition of worship she textualizes.

To specify the original narrative that bestows the time-honored epithet upon the Jews as a people of the Book, one must point to the Torah, from the Hebrew meaning "guide" or "teach," encompassing the Mosaic books--Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. From the point of view of content and genre, the Torah includes history, doctrine, ethics, rituals, holy days, and forms of worship, as well as a legal code and religious domestic, social, philanthropic, and political ordinations (Steinberg 33). In the broader sense, the Torah includes all subsequent scripture as well as classical Talmudic literature and later rabbinical writings, such as the *Shulhan Arukh*; the latter constitute the codification of Jewish Law under the highly cohesive and creative Rabbinic leadership which flourished within the Babylonian and Palestinian communities and their subsequent continuation and consolidation up to the sixteenth century (De Lange 27-30; Dawidowicz 8-9). This Oral Law (*shalshelet ha-qabbalah*), as it is called, is the genre concerned with "the transmission of rabbinic law and doctrine." As Yerushalmi defines it, it is comprised of works that chronologically survey and record "the sequence of luminaries who were the bearers of tradi-

tion through the ages." The purpose of the Oral Law is "to establish and demonstrate an *unbroken* succession of teaching and authority from the Bible, through the Talmud, and often up to the time of the author himself" (my italics 31). It is, by definition, patriarchal.⁸

Within this patriarchal oral tradition various rights and restrictions of women were defined in accord

⁸ In the senses that it is written by men to preserve their authority, sanctions a metaphysics of presence, and privileges the spoken voice (in the form of the "oral law"), and while seeking to exhaust all possible meaning, also hopes to cover over or suppress issues of textual ambiguity and conflict, as through the apparent seamlessness of author-ity. As a metaphysical system, it also insists on a dualist world-view, which generates a series of binary oppositions, initiated by the opposition of speech and writing and followed by male and female, in which one of the terms is elevated over the other. For a fuller statement of the argument, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

One might also compare Mary Antin's definition of the chain of tradition:

My memory does not go back to a time when I was too young to know that God had made the world, and had appointed teachers to tell the people how to live in it. First came Moses, and after him the great rabbis, and finally the Rav of Polotzk [her hometown], who read all day in the sacred books, so that he could tell me and my parents and my friends what to do whenever we were in doubt. . . . And the rav knew about everything: about going on a journey, about business, about marrying, about purifying vessels for Passover (30-31).

Since Elizabeth Gertrude Stern's *My Mother and I* also contains a version of this, we may infer that this is a trope of the "new-world" autobiography (85).

with the sex-linked or gender-based commandments of Scripture. In the halakhic or interpretive sources, commandments are classified as active vs. passive and positive vs. negative. Likewise, commandments are categorized according to their time requirements. Everyone must obey all negative commandments, i.e., not to kill, not to commit adultery, or not to eat on the Day of Atonement. However, women are obligated to observe only those positive commandments that are not time-bound. On one hand, for example, she must return lost items to their rightful owners (because this is a positive commandment not restricted by time), and, on the other hand, she is not required to pray three times daily (because that positive commandment is conducted at particular times of the day) (Hauptman 190-193). These ideas, first given systematic formulation in the commentary Kiddushin 33b-34a, do not flow from systematic legislative thinking but are rather intended to perpetuate or insure rigid boundaries between male and female roles within the social order. In fact, Rabbi Yohanan in the Gemara comments on the disparity between the general principle of sex-based prohibitions and actual obligations and exemptions governing behavior; in effect his statement contributes to undermining the idea of an absolute principle sustaining the custom of gender division and reinforcing traditional roles

(Biale, *Women and Jewish Law*, 10-11;16-17).⁹

⁹ The implication, in other words, is that if the rulings are in fact inconsistent and based on custom rather than specific religious principle, they can be undone, and/or made to accord with more modern and enlightened views. Most feminist or liberal scholars reviewing Jewish views regarding women, male-female relations, etc., stress these aspects. Another example of this relevant to subsequent chapters is the Reform Jewish statement provided by Rabbi Solomon Zucrow. In his *Women, Slaves and the Ignorant in Rabbinic Literature* (Boston: The Stratford Company, 1932) he asserts: "in general, the Bible considered the domestic and social relationship of the sexes outside the domain of religion, belonging rather to that class of rules and regulations which, deriving their sanction from man-made laws, are subject to changes and alterations in accordance with the changed conceptions and circumstances of the time" (14). On the other hand, in discussing matrimonial regulations, he notes: "Whether or not one considers this arrangement of the relation between husband and wife [requiring women's accession to male desire and so on] ideal or just, it must be agreed that, if adhered to by both parties, it made for a happy and peaceful matrimonial life" indeed! Saul Berman's more recent text, designed to respond to the latest feminist rebellion is characterized by similar ambivalence.

The standard works on the topic of women in Judaism include Louis M. Epstein's *The Jewish Marriage Contract: A Study on the Status of the Woman in Jewish Law* (New York: Arno Press, 1973), originally published 1927 under the auspices of the Conservative Jewish institution of learning, the Jewish Theological Seminary, along with his companion volumes *Marriage Laws in the Bible and the Talmud* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1968), originally published 1942, and *Sex Laws and Customs in Judaism* (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1948.) As I have suggested above, the renewal of the feminist movement also stimulated a variety of responses. The classic of the Apologist school is considered Moshe Meiselman's *Jewish Woman in Jewish Law* (New York: Ktav/Yeshiva University Press, 1978). In addition to the works cited in the body of the chapter, the most recent scholarly feminist reappraisal is Judith Romney, *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

Gender is then the basis for segregated religious locations. In discussing the specific nature of traditional Jewish worship, De Lange distinguishes between the temple with its "sacrificial worship administered by hereditary priests" and the synagogue, originally a place of study and teaching, which consciously avoided "too overt allusions to the temple."¹⁰ Parallel to the synagogue is the home, which exists alongside it as an important place of worship, particularly centered on the table, and as a location for marriage, birth and circumcision, and mourning, and sabbath celebration and holy day festivities (37-38).¹¹ If one site is the place of the oral tradition and its liturgy, the other is the female locus of ritual.

¹⁰ That is to say, De Lange is distinguishing between an earlier worship associated with the temple and city of Jerusalem, whose final destruction in 130 A.D. is associated with the establishment of rabbinic Judaism.

¹¹ For a contrasting, and rather less hospitable position, see Sklare, who contends that in orthodoxy, women have no role in the performance of religious duties. Their "formal obligations" he argues "are only three in number: following the female ritual purification, lighting the Sabbath candles, and *hallah* [the portion of the Sabbath bread dedicated to the Lord]. By default however, she is the primary person seeing to it that the Talmudic laws of *kashruth* [the dietary laws] are maintained" (29). As will become clear, Chagall's text makes all these--only three in number--pre-eminent. From a rather different perspective, the feminist historian Paula Hyman also notes that only three *mitzvot*, or (religious) good deeds and obligations are assigned to women (106-107).

Bella Chagall's decision to write her narrative in *Yiddish* is therefore of the utmost significance, shaping and implying a host of still other narrative choices. The decision to write in Yiddish is, first of all, a refusal of the (S)cript(ure) language of which Anderson speaks, the Hebrew of the Torah, or the Torah-tradition with its "chain of transmission going back to [the revelation at] Sinai" (De Lange 26). Nonetheless, as the language of the "ghetto" and therefore the language of religiously defined community, the use of Yiddish does not preclude the expression of a spiritual tradition. It is the language of the common people, which Hasidism had infused with a new warmth and passion, and to which vernacular the Haskalah and its subsequent permutation in yiddishism had given a new dignity and sanction. It is also the *mama-loshen*, the mother tongue--the original language, the language learned from one's mother. To choose such a language is to situate oneself within the communal tradition as *that is "inherited" through the female*.

Broadly speaking, one might interpret Chagall's Yiddish in one of two ways in relation to the tradition

of worship. Her text may be seen as narrativizing the polarities of synagogue and home and thus of incarnating the dual worlds of liturgy and ritual; or one may see Chagall inscribing a specifically female narrative, one which sanctifies the world through female ritual. Through her use of Yiddish, Chagall invents a new liturgy, which rewrites the patriarchal tradition even as it incorporates the ritual worship of the lunar calendar.

Both the language and the gesture [of liturgy, of ritual] are geared to spur, not so much a leap of memory as a fusion of past and present. Memory here is no longer recollection, which still preserves a sense of distance, but reactualization. [It is not] a matter of intellection, but of evocation and identification. . . . [W]hat was suddenly drawn up from the past was not a series of facts to be contemplated at a distance, but a series of situations into which one could somehow be drawn (Yerushalmi 44).¹²

These situations represent the reinscription of the sacred in the mundane, and conversely the infusion of the subject, in particular the female subject, into the sacred through the project of the autobiographical narrative.

The gendering of memory thus animates the text; its poetics is dictated by the reinscription of

¹² Yerushalmi is here describing the sacred language of Hebrew--and yet such a description, with qualification, might be used to define the Yiddish text inscribed by Chagall.

providence in history, but one in which the female is inserted and re-shapes the patriarchal narrative of the Torah-tradition, "my portion of the legacy" (Chagall 4). Through this allusion, Chagall refers to the "portion" of the Torah that the boy in traditional Judaism is called upon to read at the *bima*, as a sign and ritual that he is ready to undertake the adult responsibilities of his faith in the rite of passage known as the *bar mitzvah*.¹³ By doing so, she also suggests that her text is itself a ritual expression that defines, and therefore, re-defines the Jewish heritage. Thus the gendering of memory is both individual and collective; it is used to signify both the female subjective experience and the feminine tradition in preserving community.

The reinscription of providence into history: the center of Chagall's text inscribes the lunar calendar, which was 12-13 months with a "leap" month. Within Jewish tradition, the year has two focal points, one in the autumn and the other in spring. The former is setting and time for a month of penitential prayers known

¹³ Chagall is not the only writer who makes this connection. The title of Rebekah Kohut's pioneering autobiographical text also alludes to and invokes this reference. See chapter 4.

as the Days of Awe, initiated by Rosh Hashonah (the New Year) and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), and ending in a three-week festive period marked by Sukkot (The Feast of Tabernacles associated with the harvest and thanksgiving) and Simhat Torah (the celebration of the giving of the commandments to Moses). Spring is framed by Pesach (Passover, the historical commemoration of the Jews exodus out of Egypt, their salvation marked by the Angel of Death "passing over" the houses of the Jewish families) and Shavuot (the feast of Pentecost or Weeks), with seven weeks intervening between them (De Lange 40-52).

To each of these holy days, Chagall accords a chapter or series of chapters, dramatizing her own and the family's preparation for and participation in them. By utilizing the calendar structure, and restoring the female subject to the center of it, Chagall subverts the time-based prohibitions on female's role in Judaism. She shows that there is, and that she lives in Jewish "women's time." This time spatialized through calendrical ritual dominates the autobiography.

Chagall's text evokes and reactualizes the rituals associated with these holidays, re-creates the world vitalized by those rituals. Characteristically, the ritual is defined by synesthetic imagery and personification; nature itself is animated by the divine

presence.¹⁴ Here is Chagall's depiction of Rosh

Hashonah:

The New Year must be already arrived. . . The shofar must be sounding there; even now it echoes in my ears. I fancy that the sky itself has come down lower and hurries to shul [synagogue] together with me. . . .

* * * *

. . . The shofar blares out. . . . The sound is chopped off, as though the horn were out of breath. . . . And then . . . there comes a pure, long sound. Like a summons it runs through the whole shul, sounding into every corner. The congregation is relieved. . . . The walls are touched by it. . . . It throbs up to the ceiling, pushes the thick air, fills every empty space. It booms in my ears, my mouth, I even feel an ache in my stomach. When will the shofar finish trumpeting? What does the New Year want of us?

I recall all my sins. . . . I am eager to go with mother to the rite of tashlich, to shake off all my sins, cast them into our big river. Other women and men are on their way. . . . All of them are dressed in black, they might be going, God forbid, to a funeral. The air is sharp. From the high river bank, from the big city park, a wind is blowing; leaves are falling, yellow, red-yellow. . . . they whirl in the air, turn over, scatter on the ground. Do our sins fly in the same way?

* * * *

. . . Mother tells me the ritual words that I have to say, and the prayers together with the sins fall from my mouth straight into the water. I fancy that the river is swollen with all our sins, and rolls along with its waters suddenly turned black (75-78).

¹⁴ That is, critics of medieval literature and religious poetry and historians of mysticism comment on these elements as typical of this kind of writing. For example see, Rosamond Tuve's *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* and Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism*. I want to intervene later to suggest a more complicated explanation for Chagall's text.

What does Chagall accomplish in her narration of the ritual? Simply put, the narrative gives a temporal and material dimension to that ritual; it imbues ritual with the weight and substance of history. Chagall captures the autumnal day, and the wind which seems to be set in turmoil by the shofar's blaring and in turn sets the river roiling--the storminess of the weather matching the tempestuousness of the congregation's movement as well as its feeling. In endowing ritual with historical substance, the narrative also restores the historical, that is to say, the female subject. She, too, experiences a fusion of physical and mental states--the ache in her stomach, the boom in her ears coinciding with her desire to call up all her sins, which she lets fall from her mouth (out of her stomach?). She seems to see the waters turn black with her sins, a projection of her own guilt upon the landscape. Significantly, the words, the prayers that she must say for absolution are taught to her by her mother; Chagall foregrounds the female as speaking subject, as the voice of authority. This desire to invoke the mother's language, more generally, to ground the text in a female tradition becomes particularly clear through the structure of Chagall's narrative.

At the *symbolic* center of the autobiography is the sanctification of the Sabbath, with its related imagery of light. What the holy days represent with regard to the yearly calendar, the Sabbath provides with regard to the week: The Sabbath organizes diurnal existence. Put another way, the Sabbath exists both to indicate an alternative to a mundane existence (the day different from all others) and to infuse mundane existence with the divine reality (Howe 8). Thus organizationally, after the prefatory chapters that briefly sketch the idea of heritage and the physical environment of the courtyard in which the world she will create existed, Chagall immediately proceeds to invoke the Sabbath, "framing" the yearly calendar with the daily one.

The signal importance of the Sabbath also resides in its role in gendering collective memory.¹⁵ As it is depicted/created by Chagall, the holiness and divine immanence that is invoked by the Sabbath is created and called into being in and through the female presence and activity. The text thus embodies female ritual.¹⁶

¹⁵ Or rather its signal importance for a feminine *poetics*. However, one ought not to ignore the Sabbath's importance in providing a respite for all the women from the drudgery of menial household labor.

¹⁶ Delores DeLouise has in fact argued that the prayer for illuminating the candles is itself a female celebration of the creation, conveying its cyclic, fluxional nature, and thus "restores or recognizes the feminine in creation which was obliterated in Genesis"

Traditionally, theological and historical texts note that the Sabbath is initiated at sundown with the lighting of the candles, *die brenedike licht* of Chagall's title: This is in fact the mother's task.

She quickly washes her face and hands, and puts on a clean lace collar . . . and approaches the candlesticks like a quite new mother. With a match in her hand she lights one candle after another. All the seven candles begin to quiver. The flames blaze into mother's face. As though an enchantment were falling upon her, she lowers her eyes. Slowly, three times in succession, she encircles the candles with both her arms; she seems to be taking them into her heart. . . . Mother's hands over the candles shine like the tablets of the decalogue over the holy ark.

* * * *

"Good Shabbes!" mother calls out loudly. Her face, all opened, looks purified, I think that it has absorbed the illumination of the Sabbath candles (48-49).

While Chagall, by her use of the title, *Brenedike Licht*, certainly means to call attention to this female ritual as the source of Yiddish spirituality, it is notable that this ritual does *not* initiate the Sabbath in the text. Instead, Chagall focuses first on the female purification ceremony of the *mikvah*, or the ritual bath, and then on the ceremonial food preparation (personal communication).

tion. The former, occurring every Thursday,¹⁷ signals the true beginning of the Sabbath, when her mother, always rushed and slightly harried, is pulled away from the family shop by her daughter and somewhat embarrassedly carries the necessary linens wrapped in yellow paper to the waiting horse and wagon to be driven to the bathhouse. There mother and daughter join with other women in the neighborhood and listen as the others unburden themselves, and are themselves disburdened of toil and weariness. By this means they wash away all that clogs and obscures the expression of the spirit. It is this self-purification that sanctifies all the other actions that they take, that makes the Sabbath sacramental. The text is the context for the body.

Like the mikvah, food has divine purpose and is infused with spiritual significance. In turn, it signals the presence of the divine, highlighting the paradox that that which is used to nurture and sustain the body is itself a manifestation of the spirit. So, Chagall writes:

¹⁷ The ceremony is commanded only under three circumstances: prior to marriage; after childbearing; and after each menstrual cycle. In voluntarily taking on this weekly ritual, Chagall's mother asserts a specifically female religious tradition. As Ellen Doherty points out, on the social level, the enactment of the ritual also represents a renewal of or rededication to a community of women (personal communication).

From the very morning, Friday begins differently from any other day with the special breakfast treat [in addition to the flat cakes, rolls, and biscuits]--a pile of tsybulnikes. . . . Big, thickly filled with fried onions, just as an oven is filled with red coals . . . washed down with a glass of cold milk (40).

More important, food is invariably associated with the female and her traditional role either as the head of the household engaged in supervising the preparation of or as the domestic servant in preparing the food. For example, she describes the care with which the women servants prepare the special bread associated with the Sabbath proper:

On the board, which is sprinkled with flour, are two or three plaited, glazed Sabbath loaves, sitting there like empresses. Smaller challahs are arrayed around them. All their heads are decked with thin, twisted braids. At the very edge of the board there is just room for a tiny challah that the cook has plaited for me from a leftover bit of dough. Just out of the oven, all the challahs glisten with bronzed cheeks that might almost have got their tan from the sun (44).

Similarly, she notes the special preparations required for the making of matzoh, the unleavened bread associated with Passover, marking the haste with which the Jews fled Egypt. It begins with the hunt for the chometz, the crumbs remaining from leavened bread, symbolizing more generally any food or items that have not

been ritually prescribed for Passover (203-04). It is followed by the painters who come to scrape, stripping the old paper, and to coat a special room with lime to be used exclusively in the preparation of passover matzoh into meal and flour, leaving it "as though decorated to welcome a bridal couple. But for Havah [the cook] it is still not kosher enough."

She covers the walls with white sheets, as if she were hanging talisim on them. Even on the floor she spreads a sheet. Now, it seems to me, one could bring the holy ark in there.

The equation between home and synagogue as sanctified places of ritual could not be more clearly or plainly put, reinforced as it is by Chagall's references to the prayer shawls traditionally worn by observant males and the repository for the holy scrolls found only in the shul.

Food marks still other holy days. At Simchat Torah, food and drink are also part of the joyous celebration:

Decked out as for a wedding, the table almost bends under the waiting feast. There are slices of cake, tarts, sponge cake with honey, platters of pickled herring, chopped liver, eggs in goose fat, calf's foot jelly, fried udders. And bottles of wine and spirits stand on parade like solders (108).

Eating, the diners make much of the feast, and "Mother's face shines with pleasure" signifying her role in its preparation, her significance in nurturing

as well as providing nourishment. On an earlier occasion, Chagall's mother nurtures her with food, as Chagall "feeds" us with this description:¹⁸

"Here is more tsimes. . . ."
 Red, flaming little carrots smile at me from my plate.
 "And who wants a wing?"
 The two wings stretch out from mother's hands--a bird ready to fly away. . . (58-59).

Indeed, the mother's nurture is implicitly equated with the bounty of the earth itself, as in this animating description of the first fruits of the harvest:

As in a great garden, thick green melons roll on the table. Beside them lie clusters of grapes, white and red. Big juicy pears have turned over on their little heads. There are sweet yellow apples that have a golden gleam--they look as if they have been dipped in honey. Plums, dark red, scatter over the table.

[Seemingly out of nowhere comes] new unfamiliar fruit: With its scaly skin it looks like a strange fish. But its tail stands up at the top like an opened fan. I touch its stuffed belly, and it trembles from top to bottom . . . it behaves somewhat like an emperor. . . .

Sasha [a servant] slices it pitiously [sic]. The pineapple groans under her sharp knife like a live fish. Its juice, like white blood, trickles onto my fingers. I lick them. It is a tart-sweet taste.

Is this the taste of the New Year? (80)

¹⁸ Chagall illuminates the significance of food in the symbolic economy of redemption, when, ravished, she returns from shul ready to break the fast and end the mourning of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement; she concludes: "We have saved ourselves. We are no longer hungry" (95). One might argue that Chagall's text is an inscription writ large of this syntactic unit.

Food has many meanings then. It is here used to suggest that the world is equal to one's desire. This is so because desire and world are both animated by a divine presence. And because divinity is immanent within food, food incarnates the sacramentality of the world. Certainly food is also the ritual means for communication and exchange within the family and thus reveals its central importance to Yiddish culture. At the same time, it reinforces the importance of women in that culture as the source of nourishment and nurture, as the ones responsible for maintaining the dietary laws. The last points to the most important aspect within this text: the centrality of food genders the *religious economy*.¹⁹

If women create the sabbath and holiday rituals, men nonetheless have privileged access to the divine word found in the shul. Chagall touches on this, depicting the segregation of men and women in the place of prayer and study--this despite the fact that the

¹⁹ This relationship, between food and the female, may perhaps be understood anthropologically at a still deeper level. It has been suggested that the dietary laws of Kashrut distinguishing between and segregating meat and milk are also mapped on the female body. The woman does not practice sexual relations during periods of menstruation. (I cannot locate the source of this discussion.)

shul itself is not considered sacrosanct or sacred territory. She extends her gender critique without marring the celebratory tone of the autobiography.

She begins the section under consideration talking about the difficulty of fasting on the holiest and saddest day of the year, Yom Kippur; she is perhaps expressing anxious concern over her inability to keep this commandment, for she has also expressed her aspiration to be as holy as her father. She goes on:

I can hardly keep myself behind the handrail of the women's section. I should like so much to jump down, to fall straight into the embrace of the Holy Torahs, or at least move closer to them, to their quivering light, at least touch them, kiss their bright glory. . . . I am attracted by the men's section, its clamorous air, filled with white talesim, like upraised wings surging through the shul, covering every dark spot (92).

Without animus, Chagall makes us feel how the control of public space establishes social hierarchies that then predicate spiritual hierarchies; she can never be as holy as her father, she implies, because she can never gain access to the holy ark, more specifically to the texts within, given the barriers and obstacles constructed by traditional Jewry.

This sense, that women's lot is the more difficult and more oppressive, is perhaps traced in Chagall's observation, recording the event of Yom Kippur: While the "men's section is half empty, the women's section

is full of stifled weeping. In every corner a women sighs and laments" (90). And, on the occasion of Sukkot, Chagall bemoans women's treatment:

Neither mother nor I nor the cook goes there [into the sukkah, or hut, usually set up in the courtyard to commemorate the Israelites dwelling in the desert] . . . 'Mother, why have we been left here with the servants, as though we too were servants? What kind of holiday is that, mother?'" (103)

Later, she is glad that the rainstorm disturbs the men's meal, as if nature commiserates with the women and enacts their secret desire for justice, if not revenge: "For mother and me the holiday is so sad!" (104) Conversely, Chagall takes note of the time once a year that "the children are allowed freely to make merry in the shul." In the hakkafof, when the Torah is carried out of the shul in a procession, is the only time when "even little girls come to the men's section" (106).

While Yerushalmi or Anderson have argued that the sacred text-language divorces itself from the body and from nature, women theorists such as Cixous and Irigaray have argued for a language--and text--that would *embody* female desire.²⁰ Using Derridean and

²⁰ Foundational texts include "Is There Such A Thing as Women's Writing?" by Xavière Gauthier, Chantal Chawaf's "Linguistic Flesh," and Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa," all in *New French Feminisms*. For

Lacanian theories of *différance*, they have proposed an *écriture féminine* characterized by multiplicity, rupture, and silence, one that would call into question the patricarchal system and the text that renders it a seamless reality.

Chagall, by writing in a language that was "between" Hebrew and Russian, "between" Hebrew and French, even "between" Hebrew and English, also rejects the easy dichotomies posited by Western/patriarchal categories of thought--between the sacred and the secular, spirit and nature, mind (text) and body, between the subject and object of worship. Food, nature, and the female body are all animated by divinity in that language. In and through the *mama-loshen*, whose very sign in Yiddish is meant to convey the physicality/ orality of language, Chagall confounds the traditional dualisms.

At the same time, she suggests that it is only through the female perspective that such a confounding is possible. Just as spirit is rendered palpable, likewise ritual is temporalized, given substance

Irigaray, see her *The Sex Which Is Not One*. Recent American theoretical formulations are to be found in *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation* and *Engendering the Word: Feminist Essays in Psychosexual Poetics*.

through the historical narrative of women and children creating, and participating in, each holiday of the year and of the week. While I have emphasized the ritual procession embodied in the calendar, the calendrical structure is a spatialization of *process* that implies the necessity of timeliness and insists on women's role in *preparing for* festivals and festivities. The "instaneous present" that the female writer creates is in fact "ahead of time," just as the realization of the Sabbath, for example, is only made possible by women's advance work begun on Thursday evening. Chagall's narrative thus writes over the oral law that displaced the female subject as a source of spirituality by freeing her from time-bound commandments; instead it inscribes the female as the real timekeeper of Jewish culture.

To conclude then: Chagall's autobiography detailing a young girl's encounter with Hasidic tradition can only be written through an already existing secularization, an already prevailing economic and social status that transcends the ghetto and its general impoverishment in the last quarter of the nineteenth and first quarter of the twentieth centuries. The forces of modernity are themselves traced through the social reality that textures the narrative. It is the perspective of

modernity that permits the re-creation of the traditional community of values, in which Chagall engages. In fact, for the *shtetl*, or village, ideal to serve as inspiration for literature, it must already be superseded. But this is so not only by virtue of its representation.

From another point of view, modernistic forces are also embodied in the use of the secular text to reanimate belief, of which Proust is the prime example. If Chagall's text invokes Hasidic belief, it does so by appropriating imagery and forms that had already been mediated by sophisticated textual sources. Indeed, Chagall can be said to participate in the Yiddishist revival, which, in one of its aspects self-consciously explored Hasidic tradition and its metaphors. If the artist yearns to sustain an idyll in literature that can no longer exist in reality--if it ever did, s/he is often in league with the critic. This conspiracy of nostalgia needs to be exposed for its dualistic tendency to characterize old-world or third-world literatures vis-à-vis new world literatures by assigning to the latter an urban and historical content while making the former the repository of the pastoral ideal. It is entirely analogous to the easy equation made even by politically progressive critics between the female

body and the poetic/literary text and both with the irrational.²¹

Reading Chagall's text, which rewrites the patriarchal narrative from the female point of view and inscribes the female within that perspective, thus allows us to see the gendered boundaries that were created by women's passage to the New World and their entry into modernity, in the American (con)text, via the autobiography. But reading her autobiography against the texts of "American" women's autobiographies also permits me to emphasize the degree to which the genre/gender/Jew is to be seen always as pluralized, territorialized, historicized.

²¹ For examples of both essentializing "heresies," see Jean Franco, "Beyond Ethnocentrism: Gender, Power, and the Third-World Intelligentsia," 503-518, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 271-316, both in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. and introd. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana/Chicago: U of Illinois Pr, 1988). Elsewhere, Spivak herself criticizes precisely this in Kristeva's *About Chinese Women*; it would therefore seem to be the typifying "blindness" identified by de Man that characterizes the post-modern/ post-colonial/ feminist critic.

Chapter 2

Mary Antin and the "New-World" Autobiography: Power, Gender, and Knowledge

By chance, Mary Antin was born in a shtetl not far from Vitbesk, where Bella Chagall was to grow up a little more than a decade later. Indeed, Vitbesk was the first urban center which Antin had visited as a youngster, and that visit to relatives constituted her first encounter with the larger world which, in turn, prepared her to take advantage of her subsequent experience in America. This coincidental and happy contrast in geography, generation, and class linking Chagall and Antin deepens the comparison between their two works, while enabling me to emphasize the minimally significant differences in demography and language that issued in "old-" and "new-world" autobiographies. I begin with Antin's origins. It was in Polotzk, Russia, within the Pale of Settlement¹ in 1881 that Mashke Antin, the second of six children was born to Israel

¹ First established by a ukase of 1794, The Pale was a Russian territory corresponding to the "boundaries of the former Polish kingdom," stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, to which Jews were restricted. By 1855, the territory consisted of Lithuania, Little Russia, New Russia, and certain cities of the Ukraine, and was a contracted portion of the original kingdom of Poland. In 1897, this territory measured approximately 386,000 square miles and was home to fewer than five million Jews, about 94 percent of the Jewish population of Russia (Sachar 82, 88; see also Howe 5).

and Esther née Hannah Weltman. In that same year Alexander I was assassinated.

The consequences of the Tsar's assassination for Jews were catastrophic, although part of a larger pattern of repression contributing to the decline of Eastern European Jewish community beginning in the sixteenth century (Sachar 33-35; Dawidowicz 9-13). In the next two years, anti-semitic pogroms struck over 200 communities and ushered in three decades of anti-Jewish harrassment and violence. Although Antin "never was in an actual pogrom, . . . there were times when it threatened" her village (8); more significantly, she grew up haunted by the fear of its occurrence, and aware of the hierarchy of power in which the Jews were subordinate and subject to the whims of Gentiles.

My grandmother told me about it, when she put me to bed at night. My parents told me about it, when they gave me presents on holidays. My playmates told me, when they drew me back into a corner of the gateway, to let a policeman pass. Vanka [a local Gentile bully], the little white-haired boy, told me all about it, when he ran out of his mother's laundry on purpose to throw mud after me when I happened to pass. I heard about it during prayers, and when women quarrelled in the marketplace; and sometimes, waking in the night, I heard my parents whisper it in the dark. There was no time in my life when I did not hear and see and feel the truth--the reason why Polotzk was cut off from the rest of Russia (4).

In addition, legislation increasingly restricted the Jews to The Pale, and, for a people who had used

their itinerent and non-landowning status to establish themselves as merchants, commercial traders, tavern-keepers, and skilled artisans, these restrictions shut them out of the economic outlets, bringing tremendous pressure to bear with regard to their economic survival. The 1882 May Laws initiated this economic policy of pauperization, including the expulsion of the Jews from villages and rural centers, and imposed severe restrictions on trade in the cities; by 1888, a Russian commission reported, 90% of the Jewish population was proletarianized, transformed into a labor pool for Russia's industrialization (Baum, Hyman, Michel 76). In 1891 20,000 Jews were banished from Moscow, and similar statutes dictated the return of Jews in St. Petersburg and Kharkov to their ghettoized community (Goren 8-9, 39-42). In a way that manages to combine thoroughness and wit, Antin describes the unequal burden placed upon the Jews:

It was bewildering to hear how many kinds of duties and taxes we owed the Czar. We paid taxes on our houses, and taxes on the rents from the houses, taxes on our business, taxes on our profits. I am not sure whether there were taxes on our losses. The town collected taxes, and the county, and the central government; and the chief of police we had always with us. . . . Cigarettes were taxed at every step of their process. The tobacco was taxed separately, and the paper, and the mouthpiece, and on the finished product an additional tax was put. There was no tax on

the smoke. The Czar must have overlooked it (20-21).²

Economic discrimination and dislocation, which led to an increasing supply and fewer and fewer sources of demand, coupled with an elaborate, inefficient, and arbitrary governmental machinery paved the way for persistent corruption. "There he [the Tsar] had us cooped up, thousands of us where only hundreds could live, and every means of living taxed to the utmost. When there are too many wolves in the prairie, they begin to prey upon each other" (24). Antin departs radically from historical sources in depicting not only the pernicious forces of church and state but in describing the negative impact the economic situation had on the social fabric, in the breakdown of the Jewish community itself. Matter-of-factly noting that "[t]he cheapest way to live in Polotzk was to pay as you went along" (17), she highlights the toadying of the Jews to various officials, the pervasive cheating, bribery, and double-dealing. Here is one version:

² Tobacco production, along with flour milling, leather, and grain and timber trades, were concentrated in Jewish hands. For a detailed picture of the economic condition of Russian Jews, two articles are considered standard: Israel Rubinow, "The Economic Condition of Jews in Russia," *Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor*, no. 72 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office) 487-583 and I.M. Dijur, "Jews in the Russian Economy," *Russian Jewry, 1860-1917*, eds. Jacob Frumkin, Gregor Aronson, and Alexis Goldenweiser (New York: Ghomas Yoseloff, 1966) 120-43.

Between the Czar whom you had never seen, and the policeman whom you knew too well, you pictured to yourself a long row of officials of all sorts, all with their palms stretched out to receive your father's money. You knew your father hated them all, but you saw him smile and bend as he filled those greedy palms. You did the same in your petty way, when you saw Vanka coming toward you on a lonely street, and you held out to him the core of the apple you had been chewing, and forced your unwilling lips into a smile (18).

She notes the groveling that accompanies such transactions and the consequent internalized conflict and self-hatred: "It hurt, that false smile; it made you feel black inside." In a subsequent passage, she recalls her anger and distress at her father for his failure of heroism, a common enough response on the part of children who must have experienced deep pain when they recognized their parents were unable to protect them. Elsewhere, however, using an economic calculus, Antin seeks to justify and rationalize the moral and psychic cost:

If a Jew and a Gentile kept store side by side, the Gentile could content himself with smaller profits. He did not have to buy permission to travel in the interests of his business. He did not have to pay three hundred rubles fine if his son evaded military service. He was saved the expense of hushing inciters of pogroms. Police favor was retailed at a lower price to him than to the Jew. His nature did not compel him to support schools and charities. It cost nothing to be a Christian; on the contrary, it brought rewards and immunities. To be a Jew was a costly luxury, the price of which was either money or blood (25).

One other arena of conflict and oppression might be noted of particular and immense importance to a bright girl-child--the area of education. Under the rule of Alexander II, at the time when Antin's mother was growing up, public schooling had been made available to the Jews with the intention of gaining their "peaceable conversion," as Antin puts it; run by Christians and regulated by practices that were in frequent conflict with religious ritual, "the schools appeared as a trap door to the abyss of apostasy" (28) and they were indeed either avoided or used as a conduit out of the ghetto. When Antin herself was growing up the only opportunity for girls to become literate was a private tutor, ill-afforded by most, and as I will later show, requiring a particular disposition to assume the additional cost. And as for the higher public education available to boys and girls, the discrimination was oppressive and humiliating:

At the high school, which was under government control, Jewish children were admitted in limited numbers,--only ten to every hundred,--and even if you were among the lucky ones you had your troubles. The tutor who prepared you talked all the time about the examinations you would have to pass, till you were scared. You heard on all sides that the brightest Jewish children were turned down if the examining officers did not like the turn of their noses. . . . There was a special examination for the Jewish candidates, of course; a nine-year-old Jewish child had to answer questions that a thirteen-year-old Gentile was hardly expected to understand. . . . You had been prepared

for the thirteen-year-old test; you found the questions quite easy. You wrote your answers triumphantly--and you received a low rating, and there was no appeal.

* * * *

[For those who did gain entrance:] Their school life was one struggle against injustice from instructors, spiteful treatment from fellow students, and insults from everybody. Those who, by heroic efforts and transcendent good luck, successfully finished the course, found themselves against a new wall, if they wished to go on. They were turned down at the universities which admitted them in the ratio of three Jews to a hundred Gentiles, under the same debarring entrance conditions as at the high school,--especially rigorous examinations, dishonest marking, or arbitrary rulings without disguise (26-27).

These series of events and practices led the East European immigrant scholar Tcherikower, one of the earliest historians of modern Jewry, to conclude that the immigration of the nineties was not the consequence of the pogroms "but of a systematic program of anti-Jewish restrictions"--the result of what came to be known as "the cold pogrom" (188). By and large the popular press in the United States identified Jews as the victims of the oppression that Antin described, making these immigrants more than others, the object of great sympathy (Tcherikower 197; Glanz 3-4).³

³ At the same time, the Jews along with other immigrants from non-Western Europe became the butt of the nation's anxious response to the disorganization of life created by the transformation of the United States into an industrialized economy and a mass culture. As early as 1889, expressions of concern with regard to the so-called immigrant hordes led to the enactment of the first anti-immigration law; in contrast to the previous decade, when a resolution condemning Russian

It is as part of this wave and as a consequence of the cold pogrom that Antin's family migrated to the United States: The father arrived first, and then sent for the remaining family members, including his daughter Mashke, thus indicating the intention to settle permanently. This enacted a pattern that typified Jewish migration of this period and distinguished it from those of other migrations (Howe 57; Goren 41; Glanz 2).⁴ Between 1881 and 1911, almost one and one-half million Jews landed in New York; by 1924, when restrictive quotas went into effect, there were 4.2 million Jews in America. About 60% of them, it is estimated, settled in the northeast corridor of the United States from Boston to Baltimore (Goren 8-9, 41-43).⁵

pogroms was passed by both houses of Congress without debate, a resolution expressing sympathy for the Jews in July 1892 met with some resistance.

⁴ Glanz, in particular, notes the distinctive element not only of family migration, but of the large number of young children, almost 25 percent of the total, which, as he notes, had an enormous impact on women, both as the mothers of these youth and as the members of that generational cohort.

⁵ This was of course part of a much larger pattern: As the sociologist Stephen Steinberg tells us, between 1820 and 1930 31 million immigrants came to this country, the largest population movement in recorded history, itself the result of the largest and most concentrated industrial change in recorded history (33).

Despite their pauperization, however, the Jewish population was distinctive in a number of ways: their pariah status made any question of return a moot one--there was no home to return to. Yet they did not need to expend their energy in acclimating themselves to minority status per se (Howe 71). Their adjustment to the new home was thereby facilitated. *The desirability of such an adjustment thereby created a receptivity to the ideological uses of literature within the Jewish community itself.* Knowing that they are staying, the Jews themselves are committed to creating a literature that will ensure that they are at home here.

Moreover, their middleman minority status had endowed them with assets that were readily liquidated and skills that were portable. They were thus mobile and easily able to relocate; and they proved to be "pioneers," fill[ing] the status gap," responding to economic opportunities and new occupational roles, and creating or catering to the newly defined needs of an expanding culture (Zenner 127). While Zenner brilliantly describes the theoretical character of the group, Steinberg provides supporting empirical data. He indicates that no other immigrant group of the period arrived with the array of industrial skills of the Jews who, according to the Immigration Commission of 1911, ranked 26 of the 47 tabulated by the agency,

which "corresponded with remarkable precision to needs in the American economy."⁶ Like other immigrants before and since, those with relatively greater skills and literacy, as well as experience with comparable urban and semiurban environments, were better prepared for and enabled to adjust to urban life in this country. Even the nativist Dillingham Commission of 1910 conceded that "the economic expansion of the previous two decades would not have been possible without the 'immigrant hordes'" (as quoted in Steinberg 36; see also 41). In the long run, these circumstances assured their "success," resulting in relatively easy assimilation and upward mobility in the economic structure they themselves had fashioned. This is not to ignore the dislocation, sense of uprootedness, and confrontation with a crass, materialistic culture (Howe 57-63, 77) that also imbued this immigrant group with a

⁶ Steinberg goes on to discuss the dominant trade for 60 percent of all Russian Jews in industry (Goren 47): "Precisely at the time when Jewish immigrants were arriving en masse, the garment industry was growing at a rate two or three times as great as the average for all industries [and] [d]espite the notoriety of the sweatshop, wages in the clothing industry compared favorably with other industries," so that Jewish immigrants earned more than other immigrants. "Furthermore, the structure of the clothing industry was conducive to individual enterprise," especially during the earlier period of their entry into this industry, when "trade unions were nonexistent or weak." Little capital and risk were required to establish one's own business (98-99, 100).

sense of alienation and split identity.⁷

Still another notable factor characterizing the immigrant Jewish population was the significant role of women in the immigration and subsequent social and economic life of the Jews in America. As I suggested earlier, Glanz (who was an early proponent of the revisionist feminist history)⁸ considered it extremely noteworthy that children constituted a significant proportion of the immigration; inevitably women as wives and as daughters dominated a family-centered and family-defined pattern of settlement. It was also true that these women, unlike their American counterparts were, even in their traditional roles, used to working, that is to say, used to playing a determinative eco-

⁷ Steinberg is also interested in demythicizing even the economic aspects of this "success story." He notes the following factors mitigating the Jews' fulfillment of the terms of the American Dream: (1) the large number of Jews living in poverty--15 percent in New York City in 1973; (1) large numbers remaining in working-class and low-paying white-collar occupations--25 percent of white Jewish males in the mid-1970s; and (1) the lack of Jews in the economic elite constituted by the capitalist and managerial classes of the automobile, transportation, insurance, utilities, and finance industries (89-91).

⁸ It is perhaps equally important to note that the publication of his work was subsidized by the National Council of Jewish Women. I will be discussing the organization and its founders in Part II.

conomic role in the household economy.⁹ This arises from economic necessity also from the injunction for the male to engage in the study of the Talmud, especially if he was gifted as a scholar, which then made the responsibility for the family's economic survival and prosperity the woman's (67).¹⁰

In truth, as Baum, Michel, and Hyman acknowledge, the "'new Jewish woman,' [as much as the new Jewish man], originated in Eastern Europe, not America" (89) in the sense that Jewish women in Russia were, as I have suggested in the previous chapter, already in

⁹ This "truism" about eastern European Jewish families to be found in most of the histories, feminist and otherwise, is somewhat lessened in its impact, if we consider that the comparison is being made between two divergent groups. Most working-class women in America worked; virtually all black women in America worked. (See economic-historians Degler; Smuts; and Matthei.) It is also true that in pre-capitalist or semi-capitalist cultures, where even paid work was less likely to be separated from the household, women commonly shared in productive labor. (See Barrett's Marxist-Feminist critique.) I point this out because of the persistent tendency (until recently?) to occlude working-class women and all black women from generalizations about "women."

¹⁰ In defining the immigrant woman, Baum, Michel, and Hyman also argue that the Russian Jewish woman's experience in the barren economy of The Pale encouraged outspoken and aggressive traits which would have been considered unfeminine by Western standards (69).

I am of two minds with regard to this curious statement: to accept the validity of these traits as the social concomitants of a certain economic organization or to point to its apparent effort to negotiate the stereotype of "the pushy Jew" and its gendered version in "the [strident] Jewish mother."

rebellion against the roles to which they had previously been assigned. While the *Haskalah* movement that influenced both Chagall's family and the Weltman family (the family of Mary Antin's mother) did not particularly emphasize the liberation of women, its call for the reconstruction of Jewish life could be seized as an opportunity to improve women's status by insisting on the importance of a secular education (Baum, Michel, Hyman 72).

The shift to America had various consequences for women. Male scholars and commentators emphasize its positive effects, but without being entirely aware of the implications of their statement. Thus Philip Slater notes that women as well as men who were not scholars "would have least to lose in terms of status, who would be best adapted to transact the difficulties of the journey, and who would find themselves most at home in the new environment" (as quoted in Baum 89); Irving Howe, too, in talking about the Jewish woman, insists that "[n]ever having regarded herself as part of a spiritual elite, she did not suffer so wrenching a drop in status and self-regard as her husband" (173). Slater wants us to be aware of women's historical experience in coping with secular matters; Howe's motive is less clear. Yet both offer us the image of the woman as *beryah*, the stalwart woman; it is another

stereotype that has little to do with the *multiple* realities of women's lives either in Russia or America. In Antin's work, we have a number of images of women and girl-children, re-presentations of life both in Russia and in the United States that convey a far more complex picture than that suggested by either Slater or Howe, and perhaps more consistent with the statements I have drawn from Baum, Michel, and Hyman. In noting her emphasis on women and girls and their lives as distinguished from those of men and boys, I also want to suggest that Antin's text is a significant feminist document, providing important historical substantiation for various aspects of women's lives.

Overall, *The Promised Land* affirms the "old world" as the domain of a patriarchal culture, one in which women were consigned to a drudgeline existence of servitude. So, describing seeing a horse on a treadmill, she suddenly expostulates: "As empty and endless and dull as the life of almost any woman in Polotzk, had I had eyes to see the likeness" (96). This analogy between women's lot and that of beasts of burden is one that Antin persistently invokes.¹¹ However, she

¹¹ This is also an ironic and presumably unself-conscious but meaningful parody of the treatment of women in the traditional literature; the tractates dealing with the role of women are the same as those concerned with chattel in the classic oral tradition. (See Biale.)

focuses her critique around the problematic of education and learning, which she defines as critical in gendering male and female roles. This gendering is rooted in the traditional and orthodox learning of the Jewish community, and so it is with *religious* education that Antin begins her descriptive analysis.

The same incident that inscribes the importance of learning to a culture for whom literacy and education were linked to the perpetuation of faith and orthodoxy simultaneously offers a record of the gender boundaries established by that knowledge or education. It also initiates Antin's use of the burden as a narrative motif. Antin records that her father was borne on his mother's back to the shul when he first entered upon Talmudic study, *as was traditional* (46). This powerful figure iconizes/allegorizes the burden women bore in sacrificing their lives and bodies as the price for loving and nurturing the men in their lives. Earlier, Antin had described the figurative pedestal on which the male child was placed, in contrast; that is, the male need not bear his own weight (captured in the English idiom of pulling one's own weight).

After a boy entered heder, he was the hero of the family. . . . If the family were very poor, all the girls must go barefoot, but the heder boy must have shoes; he must have a plate of hot soup, though the others ate dry bread. . . . No wonder he said, in his morning prayer, 'I thank Thee, Lord, for not having created me a female.' It was not much

to be a girl, you see. Girls could not be scholars and rabbonim (32-33).

Antin here perhaps initiates what becomes a well-worn feminist tradition of referring to the male's daily prayer as the chief sign of the sexist nature of the Jewish religion. She goes on to describe the traditional role assigned to women, utilizing education itself as an ironic metaphor to underline its limits:

For a girl it was enough if she could read her prayers in Hebrew, and follow the meaning by the Yiddish translation at the bottom of the page. It did not take long to learn this much,--a couple of terms with a rebbetzin (female teacher),--and after that she was done with books.

A girl's real schoolroom was her mother's kitchen. There she learned to bake and cook and manage, to knit, sew, and embroider. . . . And while her hands were busy, her mother instructed her in the laws regulating a pious Jewish household and in the conduct proper for a Jewish wife. . . . A girl was born for no other purpose.

How soon it came, the pious burden of wifehood! (my italics 34)¹²

¹² See also the subsequent statement in which Antin again characterizes the lack of what we would today call gender parity. She also invokes the metaphor of education in the passage as follows:

[E]ven these limited stores of learning were not equally divided between men and women. In the mediaeval position of women of Polotzk education really had no place. . . . If she could sign her name in Russian, do a little figuring, and write a letter in Yiddish to the parents of her betrothed she was called *whohl gelehrent*--well educated (111).

Yet again she links education, faith, and the subordination of women to men in marriage.

Antin here uses "burden" as a trope to specify the traditional role of women, repeating at the rhetorical level the figure used on the narrative level, and anticipating its recurrence later in the text. As in the figural allegory of the son on the mother's back, the syntactic unit ("the pious burden of wifehood") also links the concept of burden with piety and signals the triangular fusion of education, orthodoxy, and patriarchy. Finally, the trope suggests the ways in which the Law of the Father within the divine realm and the law of the father within the household economy reinforced each other.

Antin sees this triangulation embodied/enacted in the relations between her parents and their differential relationship to religion, education, and authority in the United States. While it is clear that her father both abandons his faith and pursues secular knowledge, her father's emancipation does not extend to either her mother or to his own view of women:

He was astonished to learn that women had written books--had used their minds, their imaginations, unaided. He still rated the mental capacity of the average woman as only a little above that of the cattle she tended. He held it to be a wife's duty to follow her husband in all things (246).

Moreover, while the male rejects authority, with the authority he derives from its affirmation of male supe-

riority, the woman, conversely, imbibes not only the articles of faith but the principle of submission itself. Thus Antin notes that her mother's obedience and argues that:

My mother, like the majority of women in the Pale, had all her life taken her religion on authority. . . . [Notwithstanding] the Jewish faith in her was deeply rooted, . . . [b]red to submission, submit she must; and when she perceived a conflict of authorities, she prepared to accept the new order of things . . . (246).

Thus the divine Law of the Father gives way, but only to be more fully compliant with the secular/social law of the father.¹³ The social law deems many of "the outward symbols" of Hannah's faith that are for her "inseparable from the spirit" (245) to be obstacles that "interfere with the American progress of the family"; so they must be abandoned (248).

It is not surprising that Antin, despite her own apparently very different experience, should come to a conclusion about the Jewish immigrant *women's* experience that differs rather markedly from that drawn by male historians and sociologists. Yet again using the figures of burden and weight almost as an Homeric tag assigned to women, Antin pronounces that

¹³ This trajectory within the book inscribes a particular individual and socio-historical instance of the general pattern in which the patriarchal culture is replaced by or reconstituted in the form of a phallocentric system coordinate with the capitalist system.

. . . [M]y mother's pack was the heaviest to lift. . . . To the housewife, want is an insidious myriapod creature that crawls in the dark, mates with its own offspring, breeds all the year round, persists like leprosy. The woman has an endless, inglorious struggle with the pest; her triumphs are too petty for applause, her failures too mean for notice (311).

This statement almost directly contradicts those of Slater and Howe, which contended that women had the least difficulty in adjusting to their settlement in the United States.

As I have suggested, Antin's portrait of women in a patriarchal/phallogentric culture is complex, and Antin is not content to draw a mere caricature. We might begin the project of tracing this picture anew by noting the way in which Antin scrupulously inscribes the vagaries of the *secular* education of the women in her own family, beginning in the old country: "Among the interesting things belonging to my [maternal] grandmother, besides her dowry" was her education. A tutor was hired to instruct her and her sisters "in the rudiments of three or four languages and the elements of arithmetic" (50). In the next generation, Antin's own grandfather proved less receptive to education in general than her great grandfather (or her grandfather's father-in-law) had been. Therefore:

If reading and writing were enough for the sons, even less would suffice the daughter. A female teacher was engaged for my mother, at three kopecks a week, to teach her the

Hebrew prayers; and my grandmother, herself a better scholar than the teacher, taught her writing in addition. My mother was quick to learn, and expressed an ambition to study Russian. She teased and coaxed, and her mother pleaded for her, till my grandfather was persuaded to send her to a tutor.

The potential for intrapsychic conflict is evident, as is the familial triangle engaged by this struggle; likewise the Oedipal symbolism, which blinds Hannah Hayye to the knowledge she seeks:

On the first day at school, a sudden inflammation of the eyes blinded my mother temporarily, and although the distemper vanished as suddenly as it had appeared, it was taken as an omen, and my mother was not allowed to return to her lessons (51).

Yet Hannah was not so easily put by. In effect, she went underground with her desire, and saving her groshen, she bribed her brother to act as her tutor, until she was at last able to "read and write Russian, and translate a simple passage of Hebrew" (52). Having served her father well in the family business, she is finally, at the age of fifteen able to persuade him yet again to permit her to continue her education with Madame Katrina Petrovna "teaching Russian, German, crocheting, and singing, . . . all for a fee of seventy-five kopecks a week"--until, that is, Hannah's father decides that it is time for her to become a bride, and her arranged marriage ("no matter what she thought of the hossen" [or bridegroom] 57) puts an end

to her career. Yet again the law of the father erects the phallic obstacle to learning/knowledge.

Mary Antin's own experience in Russia repeats, with variations, the experience of mother and grandmother before her, in inscribing the link between knowledge and the father. It is her father's attitude with regard to learning (for himself) that proves critical to his daughter's learning. In his own travels for work, he has learned of people who:

[i]nstead of bribing government officials to relax the law of compulsory education for boys, . . . pushed in numbers at every open door of culture and enlightenment. Even the girls were given books in Odessa and Kherson, as the rock to build their lives on, and not as an ornament for idleness.

Exposed to secular knowledge acquired as a result of his trade, her father returns home and

resolved to live, as far as the conditions of existence in Polotzk permitted, the life of a modern man. . . . And he saw no better place to begin than with the education of the children (76).

In Eastern Europe, this education might and did provide the basis for female leadership and revolutionary activism that was then to be extended among the earliest worker's movements in the United States (Baum, Michel, Hyman 72, 75). Moreover, *if* the family could, in America, develop *sufficient* financial or other resources, it *might* permit its *youngest* female children to avail themselves of similar educational

opportunities (similar, that is, to those their older sisters or mothers had had access to in Russia) that were potentially transformative. I emphasize these various contingencies for a number of reasons. It is important to stress that the generational and demographic opportunities available are neither consistently transportable nor inheritable. It is also important to emphasize that the social obstacles and economic exigencies of Russian-Jewish life continued to frustrate women's desires and that the disruption and trauma of migration and the economic uncertainties of settlement also created similar discontinuities and aborted processes of growth and development that told themselves in the narrative histories of women's lives in this country.

It is precisely this painful truth that Antin herself articulates in the narrative(s) that distinguishes hers from her elder sister's. She and her younger sister are taken to school by their father, in an action that signals a reversal of the trope of the "old world" whereby the mother escorted the male child to study the Talmud:

This foreigner, who brought his children to school as if it were an act of consecration, who regarded the teacher of the primer class with reverence, who spoke of visions, like a man inspired, in a common schoolroom. . . . I think Miss Nixon [the teacher] guessed what my father's best English could not convey. I think she divined that by the simple act of

delivering our school certificates to her he took possession of America (205).

"Our going to school was the fulfilment of my father's best promises to us, " notes Antin; she goes on to record the antithetical fate of her elder sister:

Frieda's share in it was to fashion and fit the calico frocks in which the baby sister and I made our first appearance in a public schoolroom. . . . In every straight, smooth seam, perhaps, she tucked away some lingering impulse of childhood; but she matched the scrolls and flowers with the utmost care. If a sudden shock of rebellion made her straighten up for an instant, the next instant she was bending to adjust a ruffle to the best advantage (199).

In a strange but evocative fusion of Old and New Testament fables and motives, Antin seems simultaneously to allude to the parable of the child brought before the sage of Solomon by the two women claiming to be its mother, and the New Testament notion that one shall render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto the Lord that which belongs to the Lord, when she concludes that my father "divided the world between his children in accordance with the laws of the country and the compulsion of his circumstances" making his daughter Mary a hostage to fortune, while consigning his daughter Frieda to the traditional fate of a woman: work and marriage as the alternative to the brutality of the capitalist marketplace.

Indeed, Baum, Michel, and Hyman assert that the real contribution of women to the immigrant community

lay in the women's role in assuming the economic burden for survival rather than as mythicized "bearers and conservors of culture" (120). Such a statement is fundamentally misguided, setting two significant aspects of social life at odds with one another. By confusing issues of economic production that are ultimately linked to biological survival with issues of social *reproduction*, which are related to cultural survival and the transformation of social identity, Baum et al. ignore the radical shift in the context of the reproduction of culture that is the result of the relationship between the changing roles of Jewish women and the opportunities available to Jewish women in the United States and thus the radical shift in the person/gender responsible for cultural reproduction, from the "old" world to the "new." In the traditional Russian-Jewish culture, males bore the exclusive responsibility for passing on the culture; in America, women became responsible for transmitting new cultural values to both male and female children. In other words, the statement cancels out a fundamentally new role that American-Jewish women played in *creating* culture, which is represented in and through Mary Antin's writing. She defined the terms of her ethnic identity and the shape of her female experience--in itself a radical project. Moreover, she defined the collective

ethnicity of the Jew in modern American life, equally with if not more so than male writers, establishing one of its major ideological and political perspectives.

Not surprisingly, she did so in English, for it was almost as if English alone could encompass the experience now newly available to her, and would in turn define a new set of variables and constraints shaping her life and those around her. Antin puts it this way:

Getting a language in this way, word by word has a charm that may be set against the disadvantages. . . . Particular words remain associated with important occasions in the learner's mind. I could thus write a history of my English vocabulary that should be at the same time an account of my comings and goings, my mistakes and my triumphs, during the years of my initiation (210).

Nor can one ignore the political *necessity* of expressing this in English and thereby showing one's extraordinary mastery of the language and authenticating one's nationalist commitments--the ideological underpinnings I earlier referred to.

It is these various and related problematics concerning nation, ethnicity, and gender for which the genre of autobiography became a kind of crossroads. Because the Jews constituted such a significant segment of the vast migration and therefore constituted both the sign of national upheaval and the potential source of its resolution, their life-writings might be

emblematic of a new multi-cultural paradigm; they were thus extensively featured in the commodification process of textual reproduction. Because of their family-oriented pattern of settlement, they promised to be a permanent part of the national constituency. But the presence of women also signalled a new role for women, and women defined these new roles that existed for themselves and within their Jewish and American cultures, in and through the writing of autobiography.

Autobiography itself was a preferred form because its narrative paradigm suited it to the transformation and rebirth stories told by its writers at the same time that autobiography was perceived as a characteristic nationalist genre and thus was a means of (re)locating the ethnic in America. Much critical discussion has begun to focus on the immigrant and ethnic autobiography. Boelhower has called immigrant autobiography an important variant of the American autobiographical "macrotext" ("Brave New World" 18; see also *Immigrant Autobiography* 25-52). Clearly the immigrant character resonates with the original tradition but also takes on a peculiar burden--for the creation of the self is defined not merely in public or private terms but in relation to social and cultural categories that derive from a larger ideal/ideology, a

myth regarding an American ethos.¹⁴ Holte hears the relationship between autobiography and ethnic experience in the "representative voice" (25-6), while Boelhower argues for a "composite self" that is responsible for the "demythification" of the worlds inhabited and realized by the narrator of the "microtext" (16, 18, 20).¹⁵

While both critics offer considerable insight into the genre, neither considers how the female experience complicates or modifies his hypothesis. These and other critics invoke Mary Antin's The Promised Land (1912) as a foundational immigrant ethnic text, but they rarely do more than *note* that the autobiography is by an immigrant *woman*. That is, its immigrant status almost always overrides its female identification in the criticism, and the latter has little bearing on the

¹⁴ See Albert E. Stone for one recent effort to define these issues. The sections most relevant to this chapter are pp. 1-27, 190-230. John Higham's introduction to his history of immigrant life is particularly compelling: "Conceived as the quintessential act of mobility, or as the starting point of the great American success story, immigration exemplifies conditions general to the whole society. Since the common experience of all Americans is the memory of displacement from somewhere else, migration may be seen as the key to the American character. . . . Insofar as we conceive it as a kind of rite of passage to an American identity, it eludes us as a historical variable" (4-5).

¹⁵ Holte is not limiting himself to immigrant works.

interpretive argument. Yet, as I have already argued, the autobiography was a form that women in particular seized because it afforded the possibility of restoring the female subject to history, indeed of providing the female subject *with* a history, and ultimately, guaranteeing the female subject as a central trope of modernity.

Let me begin this section with an annotated summary of *The Promised Land*. Although the text shows evidence of its serial publication and the resulting necessity to repeat some information, it is nonetheless cohesive, held together by a chronological narrative and an apparent dyptych-like complementary or parallel structure. That is, the text is divided roughly into two, the earlier section recounting life in The Pale and the slightly longer second half devoted to life in the United States, taking us up through Antin's high school years; the sections are bridged by the central episode that Antin terms the "Exodus," treating the journey from Russia to the United States.

The first section is evenly divided in its focus on communal life, her family geneology and her parents' upbringing, and the momentous experiences of Antin's own childhood. The text suggests that the immediate motive for the family's decision to emigrate is the sudden downturn in their own personal fortunes and the

father's apparent inability to recoup certain losses, but it is also careful to depict the long-term economic and social pressures affecting the entire community that contribute to the family's decision. These include not only those I have described in the initial, socio-historical section of this chapter, but Antin's father's deracinated status in a provincial village. A *yeshiva bokher* who attains his majority only to lose his faith, Israel Antin has no secular culture to which he can attach his intellectual ambitions and habits.

The second section traces the family's establishment in their newly adopted country. Mary's happiness and success in the country is matched by the depression and increasing failure of the family to sustain itself (one might couple foreground and background or ascent and descent as the rhetorical pairs that define the narrative structure of this section). For the child and subsequent youth, there is the sense of breaking loose and of the environment nurturing both body and mind (she is most eloquent in describing her experience playing outdoors and finding recreation at the shore as well as her intellectual prowess at school). Much of *her* story is filled with the details of her educational successes and her relationship to a variety of mentors. Moreover, her initiation into American history at an impressionable time in her life

combines with these experiences to inspire her with a patriotic adoration of America that some have perceived as having the zeal of a civic religion.

Nonetheless, the promised land seems to fall short in sustaining her family. Using the rhetorical figures of *circumlocutio* and *occupatio*, Antin conveys a gradually accumulating sense of crisis, though its precise nature remains unclear. There is an economic dimension, certainly, since she describes in comical terms her own misguided efforts to earn money for the family, though the family's desperate straits, never totally suppressed, are the motive for her saleswork. There is also a mental dimension: Antin seems to have experienced some sort of breakdown. Psychologically, one might define it in terms of an adolescent crisis of identity. Or perhaps one might say that Antin experienced a perceptual crisis that resulted when her own experience differed so greatly from that of her family. Insofar as one sees the autobiography as a conversion narrative, one might also define the breakdown as a crisis of faith--an interpretation I am inclined to support, given certain fissures in the text. The crisis is ultimately resolved when Antin becomes involved in the Everett Nathan Hale Settlement House, specifically joining a group engaged in the study of natural history.

The resolution is stated in rhetorical terms that mimic those Antin used with regard to her laying claim to America: Using the religious imagery of the Old Testament, Antin entitles the episode "The Burning Bush," referring to the revelation given to Moses at Sinai. She regards natural history as impelling "the second transformation of my life, as truly as coming to America was the first great transformation" (321).

Here is the description of its impact:

[A]ll creation was remodelled on a grander scale . . . ; and my problems, though they deepened with the expansion of all namable phenomena, were carried up to the heights of the impersonal, and ceased to torment me. . . . Thinking in aeons and in races, instead of in years and individuals, somehow lightened the burden of intelligence, and filled me anew with a sense of youth and well-being, that I had almost lost in the pit of my narrow personal doubts . . . [T]he high peaks of the *promised land* of evolution did flash on my vision, . . . and with these to guide me I rebuilt the world, and found it much nobler than before, and took great comfort in it (my *italics* 335).

I quote this passage because it provides a highly occluded critique of American life: while it roots the conflict in personal doubts, it also makes clear that these personal doubts result from an encounter with a reality that proved incommensurate with the promise of the ideal. Thus I conclude this somewhat contentious summary simply by saying that having discovered a rather different promised land than one was originally embarked on a rather different reading of the text than

we have inherited from literary history seems called for.

As I have said, Mary Antin's work is often invoked by literary critics. Partly, this occurs because hers was the first immigrant work to appear; it thus carries with it the importance of historical priority. In fact, its historical importance was recognized at the time of its publication, and--unlike a number of the texts that I am considering that were hardly or not at all reviewed--, Antin's was widely discussed.¹⁶ Her text thus attained a circulation unusual even in our own day. As Oscar Handlin tells us, by the time that Antin died in 1949, there were 85,000 copies in print (*Notable American Women*).

¹⁶ Antin was also known to an earlier generation, having previously published *From Plotzk to Boston* in 1899. This text detailing the journey from her native land to the port of entry was a translation from the Yiddish of letters written to her uncle in Vitebsk. Parts of it were incorporated into the text of *The Promised Land*. The reviews of both her works were highly favorable. In addition to those that I will discuss, they include those published in *The New York Times* (27 May 1899: 342; 14 April 1912: 228; 30 June 1912: 392); *A.L.A. Booklist* 8 (June 1912): 387; *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 43 (September 1912): 327; *Catholic World* 95 (July 1912): 547; *American Review of Reviews* 45 (June 1912): 768; *The Independent* 72 (22 August 1912): 445; *Yale Review* (October 1912); *Survey* 28 (11 May 1912): 277; *The Nation* 94 (1912): 517; *The American Hebrew* (19 June 1912): 358-359; Percy F. Bicknell, "How One Immigrant Girl Discovered America," *The Dial* 52 (1 May 1912): 348-350; George Middleton, "Mary Antin's 'The Promised Land'," *Bookman* 35 (1912): 419-421.

However, the literary recognition that has come with notice of the text and its author has been far from positive; it is in fact characterized by a curious ambivalence. The text is invoked because it supposedly renders the archetypal transformation of the immigrant from ethnic to American. Characteristically, the critic stresses the significance of the text in mediating between two cultures. At the same time, the text is frequently criticized because it renders the transformation apparently too completely, or rather renders a too complete transformation; Antin is taken to task because, as Mary Dearborn puts it, she writes from "the perspective of the dominant culture" which "prescribes modes of narration, stances toward authority, and plots and morals for their stories" [i.e., those of Antin, Stern, and Yezierska]. To Antin, Dearborn does not even grant something of an oppositional stance that she awards the other Jewish-American women writers of the period (41,43). Blacher Cohen, writing one of the earliest modern reconsiderations of Antin, notices that Antin's Russian childhood was in many ways a negative one, and its negativity was in large part rooted in the devaluation of females of that traditional Jewish culture (29); despite this (mildly) feminist critique, Blacher Cohen cannot forego blaming Antin for her so-called failure to produce a text that lays claim to a

Jewish identity. Indeed there is an almost personal sense of betrayal conveyed by the title of Blacher Cohen's work, which itself puns on the title of Antin's book: "Mary Antin's *The Promised Land: A Breach of Promise*" (35).¹⁷ Proefriedt wonders how much of Antin's point of view is "self-deception, how much deception of an audience" (91); yet he and another of Antin's more recent critics, Steven Rubin, also assert that there is a more complex and contradictory tone in the autobiography than Antin is usually credited with, and that in addition to the "rhetoric of unity and reconciliation" that she practices, there is also a reality that is at odds with it, of which "she was very

¹⁷ In the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, a rather bleak and brief entry is Antin's comeuppance for her apostasy; I quote in full the major portion of the text. "Her best selling autobiography *The Promised Land* (1912) expounded the assimilationist 'melting pot' theory of Americanization. For Mary Antin integration meant shedding all Jewish traits, customs, and beliefs that came from a pre-American past. Her book *They Who Knock at Our Gates* (1914) [Antin's gospel advocating open immigration] was less successful, and the experience of her later years belied her earlier optimism. In 1920 the husband whom she had idealized left her to settle in China. Mary Antin's popularity as a writer and lecturer waned. Her brief period of fame was followed by years of hardship, when she supported herself by doing social work." So much for Cinderella and the American myth of success! It is perhaps even more poignant in light of Antin's own childish fantasizing "that after my death my name would surely be printed in the encyclopedia. It was such a prodigious thing to expect that I kept the idea a secret even from myself, just letting it lie where it sprouted, in an unexplored corner of my brain" (258).

much aware" (Proefriedt 95).

The meanings attributed to Antin's text (not to speak of her life) derive less from assumptions about literary value and more from questions of "political correctness." Whether we think of Antin's text in Yerushalmi's terms as participating in an ideological narrative or in Thomas Ferrarro's terms as rooted in what he calls the genre of ethnic realism, the implication is that its *literary* value lies in part in its value as *social critique*. Yet I believe its political implications might themselves be better understood if the text were honored with a closer examination of its rhetoric and a better understanding of its tropes and narrative structure. Given that I am concerned with its rhetoric, I do not want my reading to be understood as neutralizing the politics of its discourse; rather I would hope to engage in what Annette Kolodny has called "revisionary rereading" so as to insure a revised understanding of the political and social critique of the text ("A Map for Rereading" 59-60).

Moreover, I think a deconstructionist reading is called for, one which will insist less on the unity of Antin's rhetoric than it does on the fact that her text, as Antin herself tells us, is itself an experiment in remembrance, and more shaped by her sense that she is constituted not only by the "doubling process"

of the immigrant self, as Boelhower defines it, but by multiple processes shaping a constantly evolving self or re-presenting selves in flux. This is the way Antin herself describes the process:

We are not born all at once, but by bits. The body first, and the spirit later; and the birth and growth of the spirit, in those who are attentive to their own inner life, are slow and exceedingly painful. . . . Our souls are scarred with the struggles of successive births, and the process is recorded also by the wrinkles in our brains, by the lines in our faces. . . . (87).

Far from aspiring to re-present the unity of the American self, the text inscribes Antin's constitution of the self as subject, with its palimpsest-like transformations. Such an enlarged reading, then, will help us see the text's literary value and contribute to revising the text's status as an "historic event," under which terms it has continued to be judged (Kolodny, "The Integrity of Memory" 104)

Many early reviewers noted the central importance both of mentors to Antin's life and of education as the source of her acclimitization to America: education is the means whereby she lays claim to America as much as it claims possession of her. One journal considered it appropos to choose the one-time Superintendent of Schools in Greater New York to review her work when it first appeared. He was the first to sound the theme

that it was "the educative process in the public schools and in the public library . . . [which] triumph over the obstacles of heredity and the circumstances of environment" (1261); it is "an autobiography of surpassing interest" but also "a treatise on sociology, of which education is the dominant feature" (1262). More recently, a scholar in the field of education, William Proefriedt, in a fine reading of the text, has also focused on education as the central trope and dominant theme.

Werner Sollors and Mary Dearborn have also insisted on the centrality of education to the project of Americanization. The latter has argued that by adopting the messianic symbolism inherent in the civic religion she learned as national history in the schools, Antin was able to cast off her patriarchal past while inserting her self into the ahistorical rhetoric of the founding fathers (72). But, as Sollors stresses, the Americanization rhetoric can also "serve to define a new ethnic peoplehood in contradistinction to a general American identity. . . , to forge divergent and dissenting groupings" (*Beyond Ethnicity* 49). Similarly, Boelhower contends that the rhetoric of unity is a method for legitimizing a new diversity, a strategy for revising the inventory of types in American autobiography (50). To accomplish this, "the

immigrant protagonist re-enact[s] . . . the Pilgrim experience" in which the Promised Land of Jerusalem is replaced by "a glorious entry into the heavenly city" of New York, or Boston (*Immigrant Autobiography* 28-29, 33). And Tuerk, in a reading intended to recall us to Antin's *other* audience, also notes that the invocation of the Exodus and related biblical imagery as a structuring motif also makes the text resonate with profoundly Jewish themes (33)--and thus points to still another perspective from which "ethnicity" was appropriated into the nationalist discourse.

If the perspectives of ethnicity and nationalism have been the critical lens through which critics have been able to define the central importance of education to the text, then gender can serve as still another critical perspective for expanding the framework for understanding the text's commentary on education. Viewing education through the perspective of gender suddenly exposes the narrowness of the social category and institution as the exclusive mode of inquiry. For Antin, gender, like religious/ethnic origin, was the means or basis for questioning how we learn what we learn, and what exactly constitutes knowledge; it also served as the impetus for *re-defining* the epistemological basis of the self. All these elements are in turn linked to questions of power. In tracing these themes,

I also hope to enlarge our understanding of the concept of gender as well.

Earlier, I transcribed extensive quotations from Antin's text in an effort to capture her own emphasis on what might be called a female genealogy of education; I argued that Antin was concerned to reveal the extent to which education as a social category was defined by gender and the knowledge provided by that education as gendered knowledge. I would here like to extend the inquiry further to define what constituted the knowledge of/ the knowledge belonging to the F/father. This knowledge falls into two major categories: (1) the knowledge about the place of Jews in the world; and (2) matters of faith, or religious orthodoxy. In scrutinizing these major categories of knowledge, we discover that Antin characteristically defines them, not in terms of their illumination or the insight they offer, but in terms of the "boundaries," "barriers," and "obstacles" which they create. In virtually the first pages of her text, she records "the first lesson a little girl in Polotzk had to learn":

The boundary between Polotzk and the rest of the world was not, as I had supposed, a physical barrier, like the fence which divided our garden from the street. . . .

* * * * *

So there was a fence around Polotzk after all. The world was divided into Jews and Gentiles.

Indeed the imagery of walls, fences, and limits is intensified by her sense of entrapment, which then becomes the basis for a related set of metaphors: "By the time I fully understood that I was a prisoner, the shackles had grown familiar to my flesh" (5).¹⁸ Antin perceived the threat of oppression to be as great from within as from without; she believed that, as we saw earlier, it might be worse to internalize one's own impotence than to suffer violence at the hands of one's oppressor. To her this knowledge, rather than offering liberation, freedom, openings, and revelations, was a *subjugated knowledge*, a way of keeping people--Jews, women--in their place. And the metaphors are a method of rendering the spatial coordinates of such restriction. They constitute a part of what I call her poetics of geography.

Antin's inscription of the religious faith she learned is described in similar terms. In an interest-

¹⁸ Later metaphor and metonym are conflated when Antin refers to Jewish soldiers who'd completed their service in the army; she notes that they were "sent back to the Pale, like escaped prisoners . . . If within a limited time they were found outside the Pale, they would be seized and sent home in chains" (13).

Not surprisingly, Antin also applies the metaphor of the prison to her experience of the "new-world" version of the ghetto or The Pale: "The well-versed metropolitan knows the slums as a sort of house of detention for poor aliens, where they live on probation till they can show a certificate of good citizenship" (183).

ing conflation, Antin suggests the contiguity between the two categories of knowledge:

. . . within the wall raised around my birthplace by the vigilance of the police, another wall, higher, thicker, more impenetrable . . . This wall within the wall is the religious integrity of the Jews, a fortress erected by the prisoners of the Pale, in defiance of their jailers . . . (29).

While Antin does not dispute the authenticity of belief, she here tacitly defines Jewish orthodoxy as a reactionary response to as well as a refuge against oppression; while she recognizes its value in preserving the group in the maintenance of its collective identity, she nonetheless suggests that such salvation might cramp the freedom of the redeemed. A fortress will insulate those inside it from danger, but its "impenetrable" walls will also isolate them from potentially nurturing contacts with those beyond its encircling barriers.

Orthodoxy, like the knowledge of the Jews' place in the world, ultimately limits and confines those on whom it is imposed. In a rather engaging vignette, Antin describes her effort to "stretch the boundaries" of her world through the lesson she has with her tutor regarding Genesis. As the classic text on origins, it is also a fitting narrative for exploring the epistemological issues inscribed in this autobiography; it is somehow appropriate that Antin formulates the

issue in comic terms--as if to deflate or reverse
patriarchal arrogance:¹⁹

It was inevitable, as we came to Genesis, that I should ask questions. . . . [and she shifts into the third person and structures the exchange as a dialogue to heighten its dramatic, comic effect]

Pupil repeating: "In the beginning--Rebbe, when was the beginning?"

Rebbe, losing his place in amazement: "*'S gehert a kasse?* (Ever hear such a question?) The beginning was--the beginning--the beginning was in the beginning, of course! *Nu! nu! Go on.*"

Pupil resuming: "In the beginning God made the earth.--Rebbe, what did He make it out of?"

Rebbe, dropping his pointer in astonishment: "What did--? what sort of girl is this, that asks questions? . . ."

Pupil, timidly, but determinedly, detaining him: "Reb' Lebe, *who made God?*"

The rebbe regards the pupil in amazement mixed with anxiety. His emotion is beyond speech. He turns and leaves the room. In his perturbation he even forgets to kiss the *mezuzah* on the doorpost. Who *did* make God? But if the rebbe will not tell--will not tell? Or, perhaps, he does not know? The rebbe--? (114-115).

Both categories of what I have called subjugated knowledge derive from the hegemony of a collective identity in formulating epistemological definitions of the self. From the point of the individual, such knowledge is received knowledge; it asks to be treated

¹⁹ Its presence in the autobiographical text is sanctioned by Augustine's narrative; his use gives it an archetypal authority. Is it too much to imagine that the student at Girls' Latin High School might be gently satirizing this great text of one of the true Christian F/fathers?

as a given. Early in the text, when reflecting on the split between the Jewish and Orthodox Russian communities, Antin concludes that "they ought not to have told me. . . (8). Such a statement from a child who is otherwise characterized by her avid desire for knowledge is curious. It suggests that knowledge acquired from others, by the nature, or rather by the *fact*, of its *transmission*, cannot be accepted as truth; knowledge that has already been arrived at is by definition not true.

Against the orthodoxy of received knowledge, of knowledge as a given, Antin proposed another ideal that is at the heart of her vision. Her rejection of what one might also call *situated* knowledge in favor of the knowledge constituted through the self is indicated in her discussion of remembrance, as she recalls the garden adjoining their home:

where deep-red dahlias grew. . . . I have been told that they were not dahlias at all, but poppies. . . . Indeed, I must insist on my dahlias, if I am to preserve the garden at all. . . .[I]f I try to see *poppies* in those red masses over the wall, the whole garden crumbles away, and leaves me a gray blank" (81).

The curious ambiguity of the last sentence is telling: one may read the gray blank as referring to the recollection itself, along with its image in the memory or its representation in the text. Or one may read it as referring to Antin herself who is thereby

rendered as a blankness, if she is deprived of this touchstone of her subjectivity. Essentially Antin argues that the self can only constitute itself through experience. In addition, experience itself is the only valid test of knowledge and truth: Thus she says that at an early age, she challenged accepted conventions, "content with *finding out for myself*" (82). Received knowledge, knowledge reified, is traded in for the criterion of pragmatism, for the experiential ideal.

It is an ideal characterized above all by its direct and unmediated experience of the world. Here is one of its most compelling inscriptions in Antin's text, a record of one of the many country idylls of her childhood in Russia:

It was early spring, and the sky and the earth were two warm palms in which all live things nestled. Little green leaves trembled on the trees, and the green, green grass sparkled. We sat down to rest a little above the bridge; and life flowed in and out of us fully, freely, as the river [Dvina] flowed and parted about the bridge piles.

A market garden lay on the opposite slope, yellow-green with first growth. In the long black furrows yet unsown a peasant pushed his plow. I watched him go up and down, leaving a new black line on the bank for every turn. Suddenly he began to sing, a rude plowman's song. Only the melody reached me, but the meaning sprang up in my heart to fit it--a song of the earth and the hopes of the earth. I sat a long time listening, looking, tense with attention. I felt myself discovering things. Something in me gasped for life, and lay still. I was but a little body, and Life Universal had burst upon me. For a moment I had my little hand on the Great Pulse, but my fingers slipped, empty.

For the space of a wild heartbeat I *knew*, and then I was again a simple child looking to my earthly senses for life.

Echoing Romantic and Transcendalist experiences in nature (Wordsworth, Emerson, Whitman come to mind as textual parallels), Antin concludes, in the imagery that we recognize is the very antithesis of that which she has used to define knowledge that sets limits and bounds: "But the sky had stretched for me, the earth had expanded; a greater life had dawned on me" (86-87).

This imagery, expressing the overcoming of the narrowness of provincial life, is a definitive aspect of what I have called Antin's poetics of geography. It is to be found in her earliest awareness of life beyond The Pale. "The world went like this now: "Polotzk--more Polotzk--more Polotzk--Vitebsk!" (3). As a somewhat older child, Antin returns home again after another visit to ponder the change in herself and the resulting transformation of the place in which she finds herself:

My books, my walks, my visits, as teacher to many homes, had been so many doors opening on a wider world; so many horizons, one beyond the other. The boundaries of life had stretched, and I had filled my lungs with the thrilling air of a great Beyond. Child though I was, Polotzk, when I came back, was too small for me (162).

It is no wonder that, with the knowledge that she will be going to America, "[t]he boundaries burst. The arch of heaven soared" (162). One final trans-

formation might be noted in Antin's trajectory of ever-enlarging spatial configurations. That occurs when she encounters the subject of natural history and becomes an apparent convert to evolution:

Vastly as my mind had stretched to embrace the idea of a great country, when I exchanged Polotzk for America, it was no such enlargement as I now experienced, when in place of the measurable earth, with its paltry tale of historic centuries, I was given the illimitable universe to contemplate, with the numberless aeons of infinite time (330).

Thus Antin takes us to the verge of outer space from the smallest and tightest geographical boundary that she knows, utilizing a geographical poetics that structures the autobiography by an ever-widening series of circles as she eliminates boundary after boundary in her effort to deepen the experience of her self. It is this concentric structure that is the scaffold of the autobiography, far more significant than the journey of immigration that critics have insisted is *the* structuring motif of the autobiography. Before completing the discussion of what I have been calling Antin's poetics of geography, and placing the journey to America within its context, however, it will be helpful to explore the underlying philosophy of pragmatism and its method, for both these aspects in significant ways shaped the tropes Antin used in conveying their meaning.

It is the empirical and pragmatic standard that inspires her challenge of orthodoxy. Or, put another

way, the challenge to orthodoxy proves to be the basis for developing what one might call her empirical "method." Here is Antin's analysis of her expostulation with her teacher regarding Genesis. She perceives the teacher, in fact, as unable to answer her questions, and hiding behind his authority and social convention to disguise his ignorance or inability. Accepting this as the expression of an individual, and "undeterred by the fate of Eve," she pursues her inquiry with others, only to discover "two facts:"

first, that she knew as much as any of those who undertook to instruct her; second that her oracles sometimes gave false answers. . . . Magnanimous creature, she kept their falsehood a secret, and ceased to probe their shallow depths."

Instead she determines that "What you would know, find out for yourself: this became our student's motto; and she passed from the question to the experiment" (123). Her "experiments" consists in testing human knowledge until she determines "to put God himself to the proof" by secretly carrying a handkerchief, which according to Jewish law symbolized labor, and thus was strictly forbidden on the sabbath:

Nothing happened! Where was the wrath of God? *Where was God?* . . . God had not punished her, but nothing was proved by His indifference. Either the act was no sin, and her preceptors were all deceivers; or it was indeed a sin in the eyes of God, but He refrained from stern justice for high reasons of His own. It was not a searching experiment she had made. She was bitterly dis-

appointed, and perhaps that was meant as her punishment: God refused to give her a reply (125).

This represents the limits of empiricism; yet it proved sufficient for Antin to abandon orthodoxy. Ultimately, she is not merely "content to *find out* things" without communicating her discoveries to others (132); she is determined to forget "the conventional meanings of things, in some search for a meaning of my own" (80).

To return now to Antin's poetics. In valorizing this radical empiricism, Antin develops two very distinct webs of imagery and symbolic structures. In contrast to the imagery and symbolic structures of boundaries, obstacles, and barriers that characterize situated or subjugated knowledge, Antin uses two other rhetorical modes: the knowledge of the body and the knowledge derived from travel and journeys. The body as a source of knowledge represents a secularized and eroticized version of subjective experience previously suggested in Chagall's text. Antin is quite explicit in the primacy of sensuous experience as the source of her philosophy/spiritual knowledge:

I seem to learn nothing except by the prick of life on my own skin. . . . I imbibe wisdom through every pore of my body. There are times, indeed, when the doctor in his study is less intelligible to me than a cricket far off in the field. The earth was my mother, the earth is my teacher. I am a dutiful pupil: I listen ever with my ear close to her lips. It seems to me I do not know a single thing that I did not learn, more or

less directly, through the corporal senses. As long as I have my body, I need not despair of salvation (136).

This knowledge of the body is linked to Antin's use of food as image, symbol, and metaphor. Thus food feeds her memory, evoking time and place; recalling a cake baked by her mother in childhood, she says that it tasted of

the flavor of daisies and clover picked on the vale; the sweetness of Dvina water; the richness of newly turned earth which I moulded with bare feet and hands; the ripeness of red cherries bought by the dipperful in the marketplace; the fragrance of all my childhood's summers (91).

Subsequently a Proustian-like experience of "the flavor of ripe strawberries on my tongue" summons up her childhood and all that she has become. She meditates:

This experience gives me a great respect for my bread and meat. I want to taste of as many viands as possible; for when I sit down to a dish of porridge I am certain of rising again a better animal, and I may rise a wiser man. I want to eat and drink and be instructed. Some day I expect to extract from my pudding the flavor of manna which I ate in the desert, and then I shall write you a contemporaneous commentary of the Exodus. Nor do I despair of remembering yet, over a dish of corn, the time when I fed on worms; and then I may be able to recall how it felt to be made at last into a man. Give me to eat and drink, for I crave wisdom (93).

Invoking her favorite metaphor, Antin argues that food is knowledge. (Dearborn comments that ethnic writers frequently expressed their desire for learning

in terms of hunger 80). When she reverses the equation, she says that instruction came "at such a rate that I could not digest it all the time" (339-340). There is also the irony in this passage of her projecting "a contemporaneous commentary of the Exodus" which most critics are agreed she wrote in the very text in which this metonymic aspiration is embedded. She also seems here to raise experience to the level of metaphysics, and derives a spiritual parallel from Darwinian notions of evolution perhaps captured in the catch phrase of ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny. Philosophically speaking, in other words, ontology recapitulates phenomenology. Contemplation of sensuous experience leads to knowledge of true order of things.

Perhaps the most startling and brilliant use of food symbolism and its relation to the knowledge of the body is captured in the following incident. Invited to dinner by her former elementary school teacher and mentor, Miss Dillingham, she is passed a platter at the table that she assumes contains ham:

--forbidden food; and I, the liberal, the free was afraid to touch it! . . . I was furious with myself for my weakness. I to be afraid of a pink piece of pig's flesh, who had defied at least two religions in defense of free thought

Alas! I learned that to eat in defense of principle was not so easy as to talk. I ate, but only a newly abnegated Jew can understand with what squirming, what protesting of the inner man, what exquisite abhorrence of myself. That Spartan boy who

allowed the stolen fox hidden in his bosom to consume his vitals rather than be detected in theft, showed no such miracle of self-control as did I sitting there at my friend's tea table, eating unjewish meat (250).

Here the body challenges unbelief, gauging Antin's intellectual rejection of orthodoxy by her paradoxical ability to stomach it.

The rhetoric of movement is the second mode of Antin's poetics of liberatory knowledge; just as boundaries and barriers (and burdens) were spatial metaphors for marking the double marginalizations of ethnicity (and gender), so the symbolic and metaphoric aspects of travel represent Antin's countermovement, an extension of the body in space to establish new de-centered/eccentric sources of authority, as it were. All critics have remarked on the centrality of the journey as sign and symbol of the narrative of "conversion" experience that Antin relates, yet most critics have been so immobilized by the immigrant's narrative, that they have failed to notice that the journey to America is part of a larger interpretative pattern.

Travel is, for Antin, a method of inquiry: empirical, an extension of the self in space, it is also the means of learning the terrain or landscape. By implication, it is an expression of mastery and conquest, the means whereby the self asserts its dominion over the territory. It is not surprising that

virtually every episode of Antin's life features a discussion of movement and travel that is defined in terms of its mind-expanding properties, as I have noted above. If the journey to America is central to the climax of the autobiography, it is foreshadowed and followed by a series of trips, which themselves indicate the mind taking possession of the world it surveys. In the context of the discussion on the metaphors of expanding horizons vs. boundaries/limits, I have already cited the various trips the Russian-Jewish child Mashke makes to Vitebsk: there are also the enlightening sojourns made both by her uncle and her father; her father's journey in his search to develop work, after he himself abandons his career as a Jewish scholar, is particularly critical precisely because it gives him access to a "world of ideas" previously closed to him. That "world" in turn is what brings him home with the determination "to live . . . the life of a modern man" and to educate his children (75-76). And here is Antin appropriating the imagery of travel in anticipation of her actual journey:

And all my delight and pride and interest were steeped in a super-feeling, the sense that it was I, Mashke, *I myself*, that was moving and acting in the midst of unusual events. Now that I was sure of America, I was in no hurry to depart, and not impatient to arrive. I was willing to linger over every detail of our progress, and so cherish the flavor of the adventure" (167).

The appropriation of the imagery of travel clarifies Antin's view of travel as both an act of agency and a symbol of agency.

Life in America is itself inscribed by a variety of journeys. Here too Antin is eager to display her mastery through representations of anecdotes that take her from place to place, neighborhood to neighborhood; she proudly delights us with her adventures in negotiating the streets of Boston as she searches out a newspaper that will publish her poetry; later she hazards calls to a variety of firms in her somewhat misguided efforts to earn money for the family by selling subscriptions to a journal. Not only does she thereby provide us with one of the earliest descriptions of urban life at the turn of the century; she also marks her own urbanity in navigating them. There are also the journeys to library and schools, her access to these signs of her intellectual dominion. All of these constitute a kind of secular pilgrim's progress, or gendered picaresque.

There is finally the associated metaphor--however hackneyed--that she uses for the autobiographical project itself and the successive acts of remembrance that it narrates:

I propose to be my own pilot across the seas of memory; and if I lose myself in the mists of uncertainty, or run aground on the reefs

of speculation, I still hope to make port at last. . . (78).

Interestingly this assertion presumably occurs at the juncture in Antin's life story where Antin acquires the language in which she can frame her own experience; it is coincident with a knowledge that comes from within herself and is not derived from the secondary sources of family communication, orthodox pronouncements, or the conventions of the community. (It precedes and parallels the related acquisition of English and its integral relation to her experience in this country that I have previously noted.) Her metaphoric seizing of the helm is then, in the poetics of geography, to be understood as "the speech of the self" (Karamcheti).

One final element in this poetics is to be noted. Antin consistently rates her American education excellent. While lucid and witty in her criticisms of her Jewish teachers, and exemplary in the clarity with which she exposes the corruption of the public school and university system in Russia, Antin abdicates any such responsibility vis-à-vis the American school system. She suppresses any knowledge of rote teaching and other inadequate methodologies, outmoded or out-dated curricula, and ignorant, callous, and prejudiced--even indifferent--teachers and administrators she must have encountered. Yet Antin does single

out *one* element for criticism. That is the study of geography.

A little instruction in the elements of chartography--a little practice in the use of the compass and the spirit level, a topographical map of the town common, an excursion with a road map--would have given me a fat round earth in place of my paper ghost; would have illuminated the one dark alley in my school life (221; see also 162).

This is the stuff of progressive education. And unquestionably, Antin's empirical ideal is writ small here. Yet for someone so intensely aware of the boundaries of the world, one so learned in the borders required to be crossed in the journeys from north to south and east to west Antin's professed lack of geographical knowledge seems odd. For someone so intent on lauding her education, such a profession seems even odder. I would argue that this opaque symbol has a number of significances, all of which darken and complicate the text.

Antin's book is first and foremost a book about literacy and writing, literary ambition and authorship (see also Dearborn 33); Antin documents her earliest efforts at reading and writing both in Yiddish and English, recounts her publications in English, and holds up the language itself to our admiration (See, for example 146, 178, 208, 210, 213-214, 258). In an era in which the efforts to impose literacy restrictions on immigration were gradually intensifying,

Antin's text is intended as proof that education, as the reviewer Maxwell put it, could overcome (the limitations of) the immigrant's environment. Writing itself becomes Antin's means of mastering America--of reterritorializing the Jew who was nowhere else at home: the poetics of geography was the means of relocating the Jew in America, which is to say of installing the Jew as a now made-over "ethnic," soon to be named the hyphenated American.²⁰ In the gendering of the autobiography, it also signalled--*inscribed*--the cultural power and knowledge that now lay with the Jewish-American woman. The map, however, remained beyond her. As sign of the territory itself, and

²⁰ Under the poetics of geography, one might also pair the images of Antin roaming at will with images of being at home as the twin sources of pleasure; these might be included in a discussion to enlarge the poetics that I have been defining to encompass the Diaspora, or *galut*, as it is called in Yiddish. However, I have deferred an examination of this motif until the chapter on Leader. Yet I want briefly to note this motif in relation to Antin's text. Antin insists--sometimes stridently so--that she is at home in America (see, for example, 225, 228, 341); she persistently congratulates her adopted country for the mobility/freedom/knowledge it has granted her (222, 364). Yet the inscription of exile as the erratic and mobile twin of the stasis of the Pale is a subtext that suggests still another disruption of the genre and fissuring in the apparently seamless unity of its rhetoric (40-41, 227, 346, 358). One might argue that Antin's transcendent move involves the reinscription of the Diaspora in the Darwinian terms available to her at the beginning of the century; in other words, she reappropriates the Diaspora to encounter and cancel the American dilemma she confronts.

indirectly, the wealth of its economy, the country was not hers to possess.

Antin's forthright critique of geographical education covers over an anguish that is dispersed in the text in a number of ways, most specifically in tracing the downward trajectory of her family's sojourn in America. If Antin tracks her own upward mobility both in her expanding travels and in her successful writing projects, she just as certainly traces her father's gradual descent into increasing hopelessness and helplessness; the family is shown barely able to survive.²¹ From the income-producing food stand at Revere Beach to the minimally adequate grocery in Chelsea to the losing grocery in the slums of Boston's South End to her brother's newspaper route and her sister's millinery wages that finally serve as the sole support of a still-growing family, Antin is witness to the family's downward slide. She records the "disorganization of our home life" (271). Ultimately, however, Antin's knowledge does not lead to a more thoroughgoing analysis, much less to an indictment, of the inequities of the system into which the immigrants had been enrolled and of which they bore the greatest burden.

²¹ Howe points to the theme of the dispossession and shame of immigrant fathers as a staple of fiction written both in English and Yiddish (173).

Throughout this segment of the text, Antin alludes to suffering and revelations that she is not free to divulge. They are perhaps the consequence of the yawning gap between the wealth she discovers around her that seems unavailable to her own family and others in the slums, so like *The Pale* now in its oppressive circumstances, and the conflicts this gap raised in her. These revelations might expose her anguish at the disparity between her family's plight rooted in the slums and herself as she journeys to Girls' Latin High School, where she is now a student, and which will, gratefully, take her, for the last time, beyond the bounds of that world, but which also snobbishly ignores her and imagines the world from which she comes, if they consider it at all, pitilessly. So painful is this gap and irresolvable the conflict and incalculable the exchange between gain and loss that mobility/travel itself comes under the sign of flight, and Antin seeks only escape:

Then it was I took to running away from home.
 . . . If I lost my way, so much the better; I
 never wanted to see Dover Street again (297-
 298).

But if literacy was her refuge, the map was more than the representation of that which remained off-limits--land, or the wealth which it represented. It becomes finally the symbol in the text of what the text refuses to narrate: it represents the limits of what

Antin is willing to say. In denying the implications of her own critique, Antin's text divorces knowledge from power, even the rhetorical power it might have in exposing the truth and moving people to act on it. While critics have recently conceded that Antin herself acknowledges lacks or deficits, no critic has been willing to acknowledge the sacrifice she made of her self.

Nancy Cott in *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* argues that women organized themselves by gender and developed a feminist political program which asked that women be treated not as women, that is, not as members of a socially reified and subordinated category, but as individuals; caught on the horns of that dilemma, feminism as a coherent political movement and social organization dissolved more or less with the winning of the vote that ostensibly was the key to individual rights (20; 271-273).

Similarly, historians and critics of ethnicity and ethnic relations have offered "a critique of pure pluralism." (The phrase is from the article by that title by Sollors.) Examining its historical antecedents in the writings of Horace Kallen and others who were its original proponents, they have argued that pluralism was contaminated by the same biologist think-

ing that racist anti-immigrationist thinkers were guilty of; Gleason notes that Kallen did not consistently distinguish between the cultural bases and other elements of identity (43-45). The latter thus differed little from his primary opponent, the University of Wisconsin sociologist Edward A. Ross, whose scathing indictment of foreign groups he sought to rebut. John Higham, in his history of immigrants, argues that in its exclusion of Blacks, "the pluralist thesis was," from the outset "encapsulated in white [European] ethnocentrism." He concludes that on the one hand the theory refused to consider that maintaining cultural differences "might flow from or reinforce social inequalities" and that on the other it served those who were already largely assimilated, and for whom permanent minority status might be politically advantageous (210, 213).

The Promised Land is a document that is suspended between the polarities that I have been trying to define here, just as its author found herself caught between perceiving herself both as a representative of her sex and of her Jewish group as the means of self-preservation and as an individual--genderless and without ethnicity--as the alternate means of self-realization. In effect Antin was forced to argue that although her trajectory was itself "representative,"

it could only be achieved through her individual efforts--both as a consequence of the American rhetoric she adopted and the pragmatic philosophy she developed for herself. I do not believe that Antin either wished to or could deny either her female or her Jewish identity; she was too much the historian and sociologist for that. Her autobiography is constituted to show precisely how gendered and ethnic forces shaped her. In doing so, she also constituted both gender and ethnicity on what she considered a modern basis as ideological/political categories. With regard to her Jewish immigrant past, with regard to women's rights she became a proponent of progressive and humane social policies; yet in her autobiography she could only offer a limited critique, which at the same time ironically limits the text's value as a personal statement in validating her experiential ideal. However, in engaging precisely those tensions that I have discussed here, Antin writes a more complex autobiography than the history of literary criticism has been willing to witness.

Chapter 3

Elizabeth Gertrude Stern and the Anxieties of Genre

In the same year that *My Mother and I* was published, those in favor of restriction had succeeded in passing an immigration law which for the first time imposed a literacy requirement on all adults desiring entry into this country. The 1917 law was successful in cutting in half the new immigration "without seriously interfering with the older immigration from the [wealthier,] more literate areas of Europe" (Higham 38, 52) such as England, France, and the Scandinavian countries.¹ From this perspective, Stern's text offers itself as proof of literacy, as a sign of its Americanness, as it were. Even more, foreworded by Theodore Roosevelt, it represents itself as an embodiment of, and the model for, successful Americanization. Given its publication at the time of World War I, the xenophobic nationalism of the text is a reflection of the period.

¹ The law contained two other key provisions that bespoke both the intense racist climate and the new political reaction that followed upon the declaration of World War I. One provision mapped an "'Asiatic barred zone'" that excluded all Asiatic peoples except Chinese and Japanese emigrants; the other excluded all members of revolutionary organizations and directed the deportation of any aliens preaching revolution (Higham 52). It was as a result of this law that the immigrant Emma Goldman was taken prisoner in the notorious raids conducted by United States Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer and ultimately returned to Russia.

Nine years later, Elizabeth Gertrude Stern published a second work, *I Am A Woman--and A Jew* (1926). If the second book is an extension of or supplement to the first book, updating the life of its protagonist to include not only her upbringing and coming to maturity and leaving home but also focusing on her life as wife, mother, and professional worker, it may also be seen as a denial (in the sense of "undoing") of the original text. What the earlier work neutralized or repudiated--feminism, Judaism, artistic authority, identity--the later work problematizes or affirms.

The mere fact of the latter text rewriting the former reverberates with a certain anxiety; the fantasy that emboldens the autobiographical genre is the opportunity for revising one's life, affording the illusion of doing the life over again, this time getting it right, or better, or at any rate, different. Put another way, the autobiography is a vehicle of agency--an expression of the female subject's ability to actualize herself in the world. To write the autobiography twice, however, and in particular as Stern does it, so that the two seem to cancel each other out or exist in a negative relation to one

another, infects the genre with the anxiety of that compulsion. In the creation of a variety of subject-positions, in fact, the author suggests the limits not merely of female agency but of the genre's ability to authorize itself. The activity confirms from still another point of view the recent metacritical theorizing of critics that define the status of autobiographical narrator and the various "selves" of the general autobiographical project.

At the level of social or cultural critique, however, it is neither difficult to justify the double autobiography, nor to understand the misgivings or apprehensions that may thereby be attached to the genre. For the genre is in this manner seeking to narrate and contain the anxieties or stresses of the culture. Stern, instrumentalizing her own life, was responding to the pressures of post-war American society. The first text "used" the life to redefine gender and ethnic identity, asserting an identity that was acceptable to and premised on the equation of the dominant white Anglo-Saxon Protestant ethic and a middle-class culture in formation with Americanism. The second text dealt with the psychological and social "fall-out" resulting from the deculturation and assimilation that earlier texts (including Stern's own) had preached. It also expressed the fears and tensions

raised within women, men, and the social institutions in response to new ideals for sexual relations as well as gender definitions and roles that had been premised in the first text. Not surprisingly Stern's works inevitably reverberates with those anxieties. I begin this chapter with a meditation, as a way of enunciating the problematics of the texts, on the critical reception that greeted both works; this meditation also tactically notes points of comparison with Mary Antin's *ur-text*.

At least two reviewers discussing Stern's first published work noted its resemblance to Mary Antin's *Promised Land*: "Like Mary Antin's 'Promised Land,'" wrote the critic for *The Nation*, *My Mother and I* "is a young woman's account of her emergence from the ghetto into genuine American society by way of the public schools, the college, and the university" (224). Rosalind Schwab writing in the *Menorah Journal* went so far as to assert that "Excepting that it deals only with America, its story is practically the same" (304). And it might be said that Stern simply relocates the crowded and unsanitary and unhealthful conditions and narrowmindedness and intolerance of Antin's Pale to the ghetto of an unnamed midwestern city ("a sort of little Russia," as *The New York Times* reviewer put it, "a place which, though geographically within the borders

of the United States, is in every other respect thousands of miles away" 255) and then proceeds to trace the means by which it gradually loosens its hold on her and she leaves it behind.

Yet the assertions of these three reviewers strike me as wrong, misguided if not inaccurate. Stern's story, although it involves attending high school and institutions of higher learning, is not pre-eminently about the role of formal education in her assimilation/acculturation. And it is of enormous importance that three-quarters of Antin's book is focused on her and her family's life past life in Plotzk, while Stern's evocations of the "old world" are nominal and have no direct bearing on her life; she herself tells us that she was carried here at some two years of age. Further, Antin's descriptions of life in the various impoverished and slum sections of Boston have a greater social density than do Stern's depiction of the ghetto in which she lived; Stern's community is rendered only thinly and largely in psycho-symbolic terms.

Both Stern and her critics, though by different methods, effectively erase the immigrant community from the American landscape and thus elide the social issues implied by the text, generally indicating a more conservative political context for the publication of this work. (How Stern accomplishes her aim will be the sub-

ject of extended discussion.) The critics' recollection of Antin's work, if that is what it is, are interesting indicators of the paradigmatic ideal that cultural memory seeks to establish for the immigrant autobiographical genre. This may also be at the root of the apparent desire to fit Stern's text into a tradition and to insist on a non-existent uniformity between the two works.

Unlike Antin, who addresses the hegemonic culture directly, Stern is more circuitous in her appeal. In fact, Stern speaks *in propria persona* as a settlement worker to the immigrant or ethnic resident, whose appeal for guidance has caused her to take up the pen, and, more importantly, re-awaken the pain that had been muted when she had let "the door close. . . upon the past" (14). This is used to justify the text's self-conscious inscription as a model of "Americanization"--a self-consciousness that is reinforced by the foreword. The particular model of Americanization that it recommends to its reader is not the patriotic ideal, which the comparison to Antin and its publication at the height of wartime might lead us to expect. The nature of this model and its relationship to the implied readership of first-generation Jews and other "ethnics" is worthy of inquiry.

Still another way in which Stern's text differs from Antin's is signified by the title: unlike Antin who gives her mother only a shadowy presence (if anyone beyond Antin herself holds pride of place, it is the deracinated--and increasingly tawdry--figure of her father), Stern endows her mother and her relationship with her with a sense of reality and symbolic significance. Reviewers were quick to note that "the remarkable charm of the book lies in the daughter's faithful picture of the mother" (*Bookman* 649); and in the portrait of the mother-daughter relationship--"at once an idyl and a tragedy" (*New York Times* 258), Stern incarnated the cost of Americanization. Despite the apparent particularity of this relation, several reviewers argued in effect that this constituted the text's wider appeal. That is to say, while the *Promised Land* wrote the success story of the immigrant, *My Mother and I* writes the more universal tale of generational conflict (Schwab, 304). The *Times* reviewer put it this way:

The gulf which separates the two generations is a thing as pathetic as it is commonplace. And doubly pathetic in an instance like the one recorded in this new and very interesting book, where every circumstance of environment and of education helps to make the gulf deeper and more difficult to bridge (255).

Similarly, Dearborn writing today isolates this generational theme as a major trope in American literature

generally, and in ethnic writing in particular; writers "as diverse as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Gertrude Stein," she states:

have found in the idea of generational conflict a rhetoric of American identity so compelling that the notion of children struggling against their parents as a way of describing American life has attained the status of an ideological force. It is not surprising that what has often been thought of as a subheading of American identity--ethnic identity--should partake of this rhetoric as thoroughly as it does, to the extent that in the rhetoric of ethnic identity one can locate a compressed and intensified version of a larger American rhetoric of generational conflict (73).

That it is both compressed and intensified in the ethnic literature is a consequence I would argue of the historical and social considerations that rendered the immigrant/ethnic person the quintessential capitalist player. That is, the generational conflict translates into the domestic and psychological arenas the consequences of an industrial and increasingly technological society, in which the older generation cannot pass on to its children the skills and expertise it requires to survive; the literary text renders the cultural reflection of the economic structure.

What divided critics was the ultimate status of the relationship between mother and daughter and its implications. Did this book bind up the wounds or merely expose them? Were we to see in the text's con-

clusion a warning or an inevitability; was it inescapable or avoidable? something to avert or for which to aim? One merely considered that the text calculated what "Americanization . . . means in pain and separation" (*Bookman* 649); another critic thought s/he discerned a "predominance of pride over tears" in the complete break with the ghetto (*Independent* 351); while another reader was sure that the text provided the useful service of opening "some blind young eyes to the true worth and value of their parents" (*Survey* 48). One can only mark in these readings the ambiguity not only of the text to which they respond but the ambivalence of the culture itself with regard to these values.

The critical focus on "the cultural work," (as Jane Tompkins calls it) of these texts brings us to one final aspect of the reception of this work and of the second autobiographical work that Stern wrote and published in 1926--*I Am A Woman and A Jew*. Of the latter work, several critics remarked on its representative nature: So the anonymous reviewer for *The American Hebrew* noted that "she has told the story of the spiritual and social struggles not only of herself but of one hundred thousand Jewish women in America, in greater or lesser degree" (841), while the *Boston Transcript* reviewer believed she had "virtually written

a composite autobiography of the Jew in America" (4). Various critics noted the psychological acumen of the portrayal of women and of the portrayal of Gentile and Jew (*Literary Review* 8; *New York Times Book Review* 12). Unlike its predecessor, its intense feminism and its re-assertion of Jewish identity, along with its critique of anti-semitism, also made the text the focus of some acrimony and debate; it also met with sharper aesthetic criticism than had her earlier work (*Saturday Review of Literature* 447-448; *Herald Tribune* 17; see also Freehof).

Most important and puzzling, however, were the comments about the veracity of both the earlier and the later texts. (On both occasions, the response differs radically from that given Antin's work.) In various ways, the reviewers questioned the authenticity of the work, specifically by speculating on whether the texts were fiction or autobiography. The major examples to consider: Though Roosevelt's foreword would seem to warrant its factuality, *My Mother and I* was reviewed in the *Times* under the fiction column. Nonetheless the reviewer there remarked:

The protagonist's progress along this path of Americanization is told vividly and with so great an effect of reality that one is often impelled to wonder whether this is not, in essentials at least, a genuine autobiography rather than a work of fiction (255).

If the reviewer's affirmative valuation of the work impels him to desire that the text be true, the *Nation* reviewer's negative view of the work causes him to question its veracity in rather more subtle terms. Somewhat exaggerating the terms of Stern's ascendancy, the reviewer comments acerbically:

[I]t does not much illuminate the processes by which a girl of such origins becomes the social companion of the Daughters of the American Revolution and descendants of the Mayflower pilgrims. Such things are achievable; but their achievement is not quite the easy matter of course that they are here made to appear. . . . In an affair of this sort details become of the first consequence. . . . what part was played by private benefactors, scholarships, prizes, hard work in odd hours?--what part was due to talent and personal charm?--how does one get a 'pull' with Mr. Roosevelt?

In other words, the anxieties about genre are placed in the service of a political critique of class. Elsewhere, the anxieties are subsumed under what one might call ethnic critique.

Under the rubric of ethnicity, Schwab notes of *My Mother and I*:

The story is told as autobiography, and the careful omission of place or personal names would indicate that it is a real one. If it is fictitious, it is certainly conceived by a most vivid and realistic imagination (304-305).

One element that seems to motor Schwab's desire to have the text be fiction is a yearning for a resolution different from the ones she thinks she finds in the text.

She believes that the text indicates the protagonist's marriage to a non-Jew and a complete break between mother and daughter (and the consequent inability of the grandmother to form a relationship with her grandchild). Thus the reviewer wonders aloud: "I am curious to know if 'E.G. Stern' is completing a real autobiography or if she is thus rounding out her story with a reasoned conclusion." Schwab wants to believe that in real life, Stern's husband is a Jew and thus represents a kind of talisman guarding her against complete apostasy and that the grandmother transcends the unease of her initial encounter with her grandchild and gets to experience *nachas*, or the pleasure and pride that one should properly derive from the immediate members of one's family and their accomplishments (305). (In fact the text nowhere indicates that the husband is non-Jewish; the suggestion rather, in the detail that he cannot speak his mother-in-law's tongue, is rather that he is a highly assimilated Jew.) I finish my examination of Schwab's review by noting that Schwab has placed Stern's name in quotation marks, as if by placing Stern's identity in jeopardy, she will undo the implications of the text's factuality, negate, as it were, the presence of such realities in American culture.

The response to *I Am A Woman--and A Jew* was, if anything, more polarized. Perhaps responding to the use of a pseudonymous author and its contentious subject matter, the critics felt it important to determine or align themselves with regard to the text's "accuracy." The *New York Times Book Review* was paradoxically somewhat mealy-mouthed with regard to the issue.

The most outstanding feature of this book is its utter frankness. If it is what it purports to be, the actual experiences of a real woman, it has interest and value far beyond its portrayal of one woman's contacts with life and the world (12).

The critic of *The American Hebrew* was more definitive:

The story is told by a master hand, written only as an autobiography can be written by one who desires to hide nothing but to tell the truth (856).

However, Ruth Sapin, writing for *The Menorah Journal*, felt hoodwinked:

Reviewed widely as authentic autobiography, preached about from synagogue pulpits and made the subject of "study" in certain clubs of Jewish ladies, *I Am A Woman--And A Jew* nevertheless belongs to a disingenuous literary genre. It is fiction written under a pseudonym and masquerading as fact.

Sapin even goes so far as to accuse the author of doing this as a publicity ploy: "The book inevitably received an attention as a Jewish woman's autobiography that it would have missed as the novel of a comparatively unknown author" (331). Yet despite her

insistence, the reviewer is then at some pains to point out a variety of elements that "are doubtless authentic"-- "the pictures of the author's inhibited youth . . . , the years in social work--" and she concludes that the text does present "a vivid personal account of a modern woman's life" (331) thus seeming to deny what she has previously asserted.

This attention to the veracity of the autobiography, and the moral criterion attaching to its truthfulness, I would argue is ideological in nature. That is, the rhetoric disguises a deep-seated cultural anxiety with regard to the status of the Jew or ethnic Other and of the New Woman in American life. In doing the cultural work of her society, Stern offered a pattern of assimilation for millions of immigrants; Stern also was doing cultural work in her desire to deal with new definitions and roles of gender. Yet in seeking to express and contain the anxieties raised by these issues, she found herself the scapegoat. If her text could be proved to be untrue, then the culture could, by analogy, pretend that these problems did not exist. The irony of this will become apparent in the conclusion of my chapter.

In her survey of female autobiographies, Mason has suggested that female self-definition typically takes

shape in relation to others (207-35).² That is, the female autobiography is not so much a record of the conflicting elements within oneself, as it is the embodiment of daily reality and the human relationships by which the self is defined. Mason also notes that the "other" who serves to define the self is typically female (231), and *My Mother and I* exemplifies this principle by focusing on the pivotal female relationship between mother and daughter. The mother-daughter theme, in turn, has been identified as an important trope in women's fiction as well as autobiography (Davidson, Broner). Demetrakopolous has argued for a "matrilineal consciousness" that gives rise to a metaphysics of matrilinearism" in women's autobiography (180); this critical concept can be used to gender the immigrant autobiographical model posited by Boelhower.

A number of feminists have pointed to mothers acting as transmitters of cultural identity, particularly in ethnic women's poetry and fiction and female autobiographers. Maglin, working primarily with texts

² Mason actually distinguishes between Augustinian and Rousseauian prototypes (210), against which she sets female autobiography; I have collapsed her male versions somewhat. What Mason identifies as a principle of female autobiographical writing has been explored in terms of female psychology as part of a specifically American feminist practice (see Gilligan 24-63).

by Blacks, Hispanics, and third-world women writers highlights the generally positive recognition of the mother's cultural role (257-67); we have seen this pattern in Chagall's writing where a matrilineal genealogy has been used as one of the literary bases for gendering the text as well. Lynn Bloom, reading more diverse texts, suggests that the acceptance or rejection of the mothers by the daughters may also condition the daughters' attitudes toward the cultures of which their mothers are a part (299-300). My sense is that the reverse is also true: the attitudes toward the cultures of which they are a part also conditions the acceptance or rejection of the mothers by the daughters. I would also like to suggest that we may read the mother-daughter relationship in the context of the family romance as the allegorical basis for the cultural narrative of immigration and assimilation or acculturation.

Let me begin by noting an important psychological strain in the mother-daughter relationship described by Stern in *My Mother and I* relevant to such a reading. It is the living-for and living-in one another that is characteristic of their relationship. Stern notes twice that her mother seemed to live vicariously through the daughter-self, and the daughter shares all her experi-

ences with her mother (35, 63, 71, 86, 94, 103).³ The mother, unable to make the transition to modern American life for herself, supports the daughter's efforts. Thus when Elizabeth is thirteen (the Jewish coming-of-age), the mother assures her daughter's piano lessons and so begins a conscious process of transforming the daughter into an American woman (75). And when the daughter wins a scholarship and takes her mother to the local college to view the graduation ceremonies, the daughter, gesturing to the students, asks "Do you want me to be like them?," she is met with a positive response. Stern concludes the episode on a valedictory note:

So in the old gallery mother declared her intention to give me to that strange new womanhood of America (116).

There is also another note struck here: this declaration resonates with the language of making sacrifices on the altar of strange gods. And it marks the

³ I have used the term "daughter-self" here, and "writer-self," later in regard to *I Am A Woman--and A Jew*, to distinguish the narrators from the author of the autobiography. Partly this responds to a number of critics who have defined a "double persona" for the autobiographical genre, distinguished from the persona in fictional narrative structures, as first discussed by Wayne Booth (see esp. 71-76 and 211-21; see also Howarth 87). Partly, these personae recognize that Stern's works were written pseudonymously, and sometimes termed fictionalized autobiography. I will return to this issue again in my conclusion.

beginning of the end of that vicarious relationship that I have been tracing. Now the rhetoric is the antithesis, noting the drawing apart (125, 134). The note will be struck again in the conclusion, when Stern will "sacrifice" her mother to the woman she has indeed become (168).⁴

Nonetheless, the mother paves the way for each step the daughter takes away from the family--first to go to high school, then to attend college, then to go on to New York and to graduate school, finally to marry. She does this, as Stern notes, by each time acting as a "buffer" between the daughter and the father (48, 75, 122). In this we may see the paradigm for the female autobiographer's life, as well as the role established for the text's cultural narrative. Just as the mother acts as a mediator between father and daughter, so the "family plot" becomes the basis for the role that the daughter and the text of her life are to play in the larger culture, mediating between the "old world" and the "new."

In *My Mother and I*, we can trace this mother-daughter relationship and its relation to the cultural

⁴ It is with remarkable little bitterness that her mother seems to give up her daughter, yet Stern strains too far when she asserts that "there is one thing we have in common, mother and I. We have this woman that I am, this woman mother has helped me to become" (168). I will discuss this further below.

matrix through a series of symbolic "rooms" with which the daughter-self and her mother are identified. From the single-room apartment that represents the classic (Jewish) immigrant family's experience of their first American home and the symbol of the family's original organic unity to the specialized house of the modern urban housewife, where we catch our last glimpse of the fugitive daughter, rooms are used to define both self and culture.⁵

In insisting on her own room, the daughter-self declares her adolescence--itself a marker of an American identity. The room is linked to an assertion of female identity and symbolizes her developing selfhood: "My room came to be different from every room in the house." But this room is also an effort to

⁵ The characteristic one-room tenement dwelling is also noted in Irving Howe (173). For Stern, the room/house motif is, in fact, much more insistent than I have indicated; relevant here is her using it to denote the family's growing prosperity: the family itself goes from the one-room kitchen apartment to floor-through flat to two-story house--the living room is made possible when the family dispossesses renters on the second floor and the family can live in all the rooms of the house they have purchased. Thus Stern's metonym is all the more stunning by way of contrast with the real rooms she occupied with her family. (They suggest that a rather different story might have been told of the family's successful negotiation of American life and its complex, multi-leveled, multi-storied response to American culture.)

(re)create the rooms the daughter-self has seen in the homes of her schoolfriends, and its function, if not its décor, reflects an identification with modern (read "American") fashion;⁶ in its characteristic relation to individualism and privacy, the "space" also defines a peculiarly American selfishness/self-consciousness:

I did not notice the change in it, as I did not perceive that I was changing My room became also . . . the symbol of the difference between me and the others in the other rooms of my parents' home (100-01).

The daughter's growing emotional distance is projected in her mother's spatial relationship to the room:

Mother would come often to look into my living room. She would buy a chair or a little rug and even finally a carpet, for its beautifying. She crocheted doilies for the table, embroidered covers for the chair backs; much of the work of her hands went into that room. But I cannot remember ever having seen mother sitting in my living room (102).

The crisis of the daughter's Americanization comes, appropriately enough, when she comes of age (according to the legal institutions of her new society--not to those of her Jewish heritage) and spends her twenty-first birthday away from home: In a syntax characteristic in its ambiguous egotism, the

⁶ I deal only briefly with this equation here. It will be the subject of expanded discussion in a subsequent section.

daughter-self acknowledges: "As if I had been suddenly wounded it came to me that in that formal marking of my attainment to womanhood mother had given neither her home, nor the help of her hands, nor her own presence. She had never seen the house where it had taken place" (133). Just as the daughter's room had been an indication of her individuation within the family, so this stay at a strange house is a prelude to her separation from it. The episode constitutes a rite of passage.

The departure of the protagonist for graduate school in opposition to her father's wishes is a form of self-exile which effectively severs all communication with her family; it also duplicates the emigrant journey her parents had taken from Russia and marks--as theirs did--her voyage-adventure into American society. Soon after, desperate for money, the daughter confronts her (temporary) insufficiency, and writes to her mother, who immediately responds with both love and financial support. Recognizing that the new environment in which she lives is as alien to her mother as the new self she is creating, the daughter accommodates herself to her mother by writing only about their common experience in the "home" of her childhood past: "I asked if the copper pot and the candle-sticks were kept polished to her liking" (152).

Marriage to an assimilated Jew after graduation once again strains the tie between mother and daughter. But when the daughter becomes mother, she seeks another rapprochement, out of a well-meaning desire to give her mother the pleasure and satisfaction of being a grandmother, a role she understands is important in the traditional culture. The mother, too, makes an effort to cross the cultural barriers that now divide them.

The mother's visit with her daughter is characteristically imaged to us in a guided tour of the "rooms," each of which has its own special use, and in which her daughter's new life has taken shape. The mother surveys one booklined room with puzzled awe and dismay: "There stood the old candle-sticks which she had known in her father's home in Poland and which had stood in her own kitchen in Soho," but instead of providing a symbol of continuity and religious tradition (the candlesticks used to light candles in the ceremony that initiates the Jewish sabbath), they--like the copper pot that had once been used to feed and nurture the family but now holds autumn leaves--have "become an emblem of the past, an ornament in my living room" (166-67). Moving to the baby's room, the mother stands at the threshold, as she had at her daughter's room, an outsider:

looking dully at the spotless baby cot, the
white wicker chairs, the little washable rugs

on the floor, the gay pictures on the white walls She was afraid to touch the crib, to soil the spotless rugs (164).

Oblivious to the insult implied by this description, the daughter-self is still more complacent even as she recognizes her mother's alienation from the grandchild "taught to pride himself on his self-sufficiency." Her mother's words are awkward with pain: "You say he speaks, daughter. I do not understand the words he means to say now. And--he will never learn--learn my language'" (164-5).

The daughter-self argues that her mother is the link to a chain "slight but never to be broken . . . that will always bind me to that which I had thought myself forever cut off" (11); the autobiography, by definition, acknowledges her immigrant roots. Yet the "daughter-as-autobiographer" is also, paradoxically, "the recreator of her maternal parent and the controlling adult in their literary relationship" (Bloom 292). From that position of dominance, the daughter insists that her mother's life "has lain always within the four dim walls of her ghetto home" (168). Within this last, reduced room to which she confines her mother, and by means of which she distances its world from her own, Stern effectively puts her mother in her "place." The image undoubtedly conveys the sense of enclosure and imprisonment which threatened to suffocate the

daughter's emerging selfhood; it also suggests the narrow tradition and rigid orthodoxy of the cultural ghetto from which she fled--a symbolic pattern already established in Antin's text.

We are not surprised in this context by the eulogistic farewell that frames and ends the book: "And they who recede into the shadow, they are old, and they do not understand America. But they have made their contribution to America--their sons and daughters" (169). Clearly, the autobiographer hears the undertones of this statement, its echoes of older, more barbaric sacrifices to civilization, though perhaps not the less-primitive-but-more-tragic consequences for civilization itself.

In developing a scheme for American autobiography, Sayre argues that the genre shows an unusual affinity for the architectural metaphor, as if in recognition of its literary purpose in the "making of America" (148-9). Likewise, the rooms in Stern's book have a long history and constitute a "potent symbolism" in the female literary tradition: from the attic in *Jane Eyre* to the basement in *The Four-Gated City*, women have persistently been "architects" of a

distinctive "female space" (Showalter 264).⁷ *My Mother and I* fuses these prototypical images by twinning the theme of female identity and selfhood with the immigrant's desire to be "at home" in the new world. In doing so, it seems to resolve the tensions between female identity and American society, even as it suggests, in a way Stern the autobiographer is not altogether conscious of, how such rooms may trap the unwary self and limit the possibilities of culture.

Sayre's thesis also points the way for locating the spatial architectonics of the text under the aegis of another rhetorical inquiry. As I indicated previously, the narrative inscribes an allegory of cultural mediation. The text narrates the Americanization that Stern wishes her ethnic audience to assimilate. Yet the annotation of patriotic nationalism that we might assume would be forthcoming is not to be found here. To better understand what she defines as "American" requires an explanation of the changed readership Stern is addressing and the transformed culture of which it formed a part.

⁷ Showalter is using it to define Virginia Woolf's work, but the concept is discussed as image and symbol and traced through a variety of female-generated texts; it constitutes a thematized version of women's literary history within her text.

Beginning in 1881, the East European Jew and other immigrants had constituted the majority and dominant force defining ethnicity; by the second decade of the twentieth century, however, a native-born population began to dominate the community. Successive legal restrictions on immigration further diminished the proportion of the foreign born until 1925 when they constituted half the number of what might be termed ethnic communities (Duker 216-217). While mass immigration in its first phase was tied to an urban environment and proletarianization, ethnic settlement in its second phase was tied to a shift in the occupational structure and place of residence: Jews began to do white collar work and to gain entry into the professions (219); they also moved from urban to increasingly suburbanized environments.

In these regards the Jews were not different from the rest of America. The rapid expansion of people into clerical, professional, and sales work in the progressive era may be gauged by the decline of agricultural work from 35 percent in 1900 to 20 percent in 1930 and the decrease of manual work from 95 percent to 65 percent in the same period. Essentially these figures represent a newly emergent class--the middle

class. They also represent a newly emergent culture--one shaping and shaped by the mass media and the commodification of human activity accomplished in the move from industrial to technological capitalism.⁸ The culture of consumption, as it has come to be called in sociological and historical literature beginning with Veblen who delineated its most salient features, also required new forms of representation.⁹

Christopher Wilson in *White Collar Fictions* has pointed to writers such as O. Henry, Sinclair Lewis,

⁸ Among the texts considered standard for an understanding of this culture are: Jan Cohn, *Creating America: George Horace Lorimer and the Saturday Evening Post* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989); Richard Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, eds., *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History 1880-1980* (New York: Pantheon, 1983); Daniel Horowitz, "Frugality or Comfort: Middle-Class Styles of Life in the Early Twentieth Century," *American Quarterly* 37 (1985): 239-259; Don S. Kirschner, "'Publicity Properly Applied': The Selling of Expertise in America, 1900-1929" *American Studies* 19 (1978): 65-78; Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Michael B. Miller, *The Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920*.

⁹ Some of the new literary readings on forms and characters of representation defined by the new culture include: Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing, and Zola* (New York: Methuen, 1985); June Howard, *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

Edna Ferber, and Elmer Rice whose popular portrayals cast characters as the embodiment of the norm, "an arithmetic mean of culture" (2). In fact these characters represented certain class ideals--that might or might not be subject to critique by their authors. If fiction presented one literary strategy, autobiography presented still another--one perhaps even more suitable to the task.

Changes in culture required and created changes in self. Simon Patten writing *The New Basis of Civilization* in 1909 "argued that a society moving from scarcity to abundance required a new self" (Susman 215). And as the hundreds of manuals and guides for self-improvement published between 1900 and 1920 attest, such a project--the making of a new self--was not merely desireable but do-able. And in the autobiography of the immigrant/ethnic one might find the ideal self requiring to be "made over," --as well as the pattern or model according to which one was to be made new. That is, the autobiography in its particular conjoining of the public and the private, in its allegorization of the creation of the private self as a public self, represents the genre par excellence for mapping the dominant personality of the period. As Warren Susman suggests, the bourgeois culture required

the creation of a personality oriented toward conspicuous consumption, pleasure, and self-realization.

Stern's text(s) inscribe such a personality through a narrative of *embourgeoisement*; Stern, in other words, initiates us into middle-class culture by textualizing it in the form of a narrative of Americanization. The salient features of such *embourgeoisement* are: conspicuous consumption; specialization; aesthetic and hedonistic standards of life; technical expertise; and what might be called heterosexual and peer ideals. These are intersecting and overlapping elements in *My Mother and I*, and subsequently, *I Am A Woman--and A Jew*. Drawing largely on the first text, I want here to document only briefly this assertion.¹⁰

¹⁰ The following section of my text might also be written through an analysis of the spatial metaphor that Stern had used to define the relationship between mother and daughter and which she extended into other domains. In the meeting with the Anglo-Saxon family, for example, that I discuss in the next paragraph of the text, "protected space" is a defining element. They are not only aliens, inverting the topos of the text; they represent their difference through an inverted topography--they have an entire house to themselves. The immigrant daughter and her family cannot imagine the tree-lined street and single-family residential community, of which the "WASP" family are living historical representatives and symbolic remnants (62-64).

Secondly, the trope of rooms and houses represents the culture to which the daughter seeks to gain entry. When the daughter enters college, her life becomes "centred in the college walls, as if they were a treasure house from which my riches came. . . . [O]ften and often I would come up to the grounds just

One of the significant incidents in Stern's childhood is meeting an Anglo-Saxon family (two brothers and a sister) who occupy an entire house on the street. This degree of wealth, as well as the possibilities for privacy and leisure in which to develop the self, represent themselves to the narrator in marked contrast to the crowded and unspecialized environment of her family, those of her neighbors who also create multiple-family dwellings of what were once one-family homes, and consequently of the community as a whole. As she grows up, Stern acquires a knowledge of scientific domestic management and economics which she attempts to impose on the family; new standards of hygiene, cleanliness, sleeping arrangements, and fresh air are accepted, while experiments with culinary fare

to walk through the white rooms, to feel the physical nearness of the place" (118-119). When she and a friend, a medical student home on holiday, take imaginary flight from the ghetto, they race to the neighboring community to sneak glimpses through living-picture windows of the life lived by the middle class (127-128). What she fears most is that, upon graduation, "this wonderful world would disappear forever from me like an enchanted castle that had faded in the night" (137), and it is that fear that propels her to the drastic action of leaving her family. With this comes the recognition that "My mother country had always been--America. It was only my home that had not been American. . . . This begins a paean to the American home, in which lie "the treasures of the world" (148).

prove less successful. (Even the daughter can hardly stomach the overcooked and bland vegetables that were then lauded as a nutritional standard, although the family acquiesces to "the abolition of fried food" [77-80].)¹¹ Her later decision to enter into social work initiates her into a profession that allows her to become part of the rationalization of social service and define herself as an expert administering expertise, giving her explicit permission to impose her knowledge of scientific domestic management and home economics on others.

As the daughter is increasingly socialized outside the Jewish community, she is exposed to a new cultural vocabulary and standard of dining and recreation. On one hand, the discovery of specific activities of which she had no awareness, such as tennis and golf, with their specialized accoutrements required for creating pleasure, introduce her to commodified forms of leisure (89; see also 168). On the other hand, she is intro-

¹¹ The inscription of the culinary trope in Jewish (and other) immigrant autobiographies, as in Bella Chagall's work, as a marker of generic ethnicity should be noted. See Boelhower's splendid discussion of Jerre Mangione's Italian-American autobiography *Mount Allegro* (1943), especially his discussion of "the banquet, . . . [which] changes linear time into rite and ceremony, and individuals into a community (*Immigrant Autobiography* 185-217; 201).

duced to the concept of "living" as a separate activity, leisure itself as something to be self-consciously cultivated and incorporated into one's life as a sign of good taste, individuality, and energy, while itself making for pleasure.

An important evolution in the narrator's thinking is the re-conceptualization of human life and individual human psychology as a series of distinct developmental stages. Childhood, and its extension into adolescence (a relatively new marker of human growth strongly related to technological necessities of the economy characterized by a large measure of social dependence), and adulthood, each of which is characterized by distinctive activities and traits. Childhood, for example, is now to be understood as a period in which the child is stimulated and carefully rewarded for behavior that is characterized by a high degree of self-discipline and self-sufficiency (164); adolescence is a time to develop a sense of self without the burden of adult responsibilities. The narrator comments on several occasions on how *young* her friends are, unburdened as they seem to be by economic concerns, child-care or other domestic responsibilities, and thoughts of the future. Thus she discovers that her girlfriends

had never done anything but *play* during all the years before they came to high school. .

. Furthermore . . . [they] were not in the least embarrassed to confess that they had played until they were as old as thirteen even, and one huge freshman of fifteen still rode a sled and was not ashamed to have us know that she loved so juvenile a toy (91; see also 104; 113).

These developmental stages are then incorporated into a related set of bourgeois ideals of peer community, heterosexual romance and companionate marriage, and motherhood. The middle-class ideal of motherhood is critical, since it represents a turning point in the daughter-self's relation to the mother. At a party for a classmate, she is greeted by a "woman in *white*!"--so contrary to the dour and inelegant dress of all the mothers of her world. Furthermore:

[T]his mother sang to us. She romped through the two-steps with us, and judged the forfeits. I had always thought mothers never "enjoyed," just worked (110-111; see also 135-36).

What is also significant is that parents now cultivate sophisticated relationships with their children, treating them as proto-equals, in contrast to the hierarchal relations of parent and child found in the traditional Jewish community. This romanticization of the nuclear family, embodying an ideal of generational harmony is inscribed in a Thanksgiving idyl in which the narrator participates, going off for a holiday weekend with a friend from college. After an elegant dinner,

The father accompanied us when we took a long walk . . . Spontaneous, merry laughter rose

again and again from our lips as he told us many a joke and tale. And he enjoyed with us the stories of college fun, and listened understandingly to the serious words that the quiet afternoon brought from our hearts.

In the evening we sat in the soft light, our friend at her father's knee, her older sister by the fire, and we others about the mother (122-124).

Stern reinforces this ideal by having her text culminate in marriage and childbearing; in fact she asserts that the marriage constitutes a break as great as her mother's departure for America, the arena in which she will enact her part in the bourgeois romance of companionate marriage and incarnate the nuclear family ideal, here introduced as a foreshadowing of her own life. Notably, this trope/formula appropriates the traditional conclusion of the novel for the autobiography.

Thus Stern's narrative suggests the degree to which the American way of life became identified and synonymous with a particular class during this period. And just as the middle-class text was used to bridge the gap between the "polarized two-class descriptions of American social structure," (Wilson 3) so the immigrant autobiography rendered class and nationalism synonymous to depolarize hegemonic-minority descriptions of the social structure.

Hidden behind the American self¹ so resolutely projected in *My Mother and I* lies the narrator's identity as a woman, and as a Jew, revisioned in an autobiographical work Stern published pseudonymously some ten years later. More problematic and ambiguous than her previous work, *I Am A Woman--and A Jew* by Leah Morton is nonetheless more consistent with, and more central to, patterns that have been formulated by Boelhower for immigrant autobiography and by Jelinek and others for female autobiography.² From the point of

¹ Patricia Meyer Spacks discusses a number of eminent female autobiographers and the problems--aesthetic and psychological--posed by the authors' total identification with their causes (112-32). While Stern does not quite fall into this category, there is a parallel in her ardent desire for transformation, which allows her to submerge the personal self in a national/ethnic identity.

² Among the texts now making for a new canon of feminist criticism of autobiography are the following literary collections: Shari Benstock, ed., *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Susan Groag Bell and Marilyn Yalom, eds., *Revealing Lives: Autobiography, Biography, and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, eds., *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Domna C. Stanton, ed., *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987). See also The Personal Narratives Group, ed., *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

view of Boelhower's paradigm, the text can be inscribed within the second of his three main systems, which he posits as the "new-world ideal" vs. the "new-world reality" ("Brave New World" 15).³ It is from within this system that the central "composite self" emerges as it engages in a "doubling not an erasing process" that serves to "generate . . . antitheses" and "to unify them" (18, 19). Arguably, this contribution to an "inventory of American types" (19) is more coherent when defined by the male perspective than when developed from the female point of view. Jelinek contrasts "the unidirectionality of men's lives [which] is appropriately cast into . . . progressive narrative," betokening "a faith in the continuity of the world and their own self-images" with the "multidimensionality of women's socially conditioned roles" (17). Given this distinction, female experience is often embodied in "disconnected, fragmentary . . . [or] self-sustained units" (19). Like Mason, she argues that the female autobiography serves less to reflect public events than

³ David Fine also traces a similar pattern in works of immigrant fiction from the initial embrace of all things American to a recoil from the harsh realities of American life and from that to a reconciliation or "taking root," especially through intermarriage; he argues that the "New World Rebirth" offers an escape from medieval Jewish orthodoxy and Christian anti-Semitism" (104-113).

to record domestic detail, even when their writers have gained recognition as artists or are known for their professional achievements (8-10).

When we turn to Stern's work, we can, in fact, see Boelhower's paradigm complicated by many of the strictures developed in Jelinek: In a book that traces and retraces certain key activities, the chronological and narrative thrust is retarded, not to say undermined, by static portraits, expositional meditation, and obsessional thematic concerns. In lieu of a "composite self," we have the many selves of a woman: wife, mother, daughter; salesworker, teacher, personnel director, social worker, administrator; and also, writer. And while we have the new-world reality, it is englobed and defined by the struggle of a woman to reconcile herself with the many roles she plays in relation to her family and society. The public achievement *is* there, but consistent with the female--and immigrant--paradigm, we see the "underside" of her accomplishments.

Historically, *I Am A Woman--and A Jew* is of significant value in documenting the lives of women, especially professional women, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, offering observations of attitudes of and towards women, especially in relation to work. The period was a crucially transitional one for women. Women's movement into the paid workforce was what Wil-

liam A. Neill called "the most significant event in the modern history of women" (Degler 376).⁴ This is illustrated by Morton's own life. The protagonist is representative of the more than one million married women who were working outside the home by 1910 (410). Moreover, her work is representative in its traditional aspects and in its innovative aspects. On the one hand, Leah gives up work (sic!) when she marries and does paid and unpaid professional work at home (97, 122, 139). On the other hand, she does professional work at night, works intermittently, part time, and on a free-lance or consultative basis as a consequence of financial need or to supplement family income (100, 123, 189, 232, 258).⁵ Stern also describes her protagonist's role in the woman's club movement;⁶ Leah

⁴ The data available do not permit a single figure, but they do reveal a clear trend toward paid work outside the home. However, this should be understood as part of the larger movements involving increased industrialization, i.e., the centralization of production, and the shift from a rural to an urban demographics as I have noted in this chapter and earlier. (See also Robert W. Smuts 1-37. Originally published in 1959, the opening chapter of his classic work gives a good summary of the changing nature of women's work.)

⁵ Historians have disputed statistical and literary evidence of a decline of married women professionals working during the decade in which Stern published her book. For an excellent summary of the debate, and an argument for a sympathetic view of the married woman's dilemma, see Frank Stricker 476-498.

⁶ This movement and its importance in shaping the public roles of women will be discussed in the following chapter.

indicates that she spoke "to my amusement--but with great seriousness to be sure--about my 'work' and even about 'opportunities for married women in professions'" (101; the self-mocking tone that characterizes the statement will be discussed in another context).

The representation of modern women's work is also embodied in the individual and group portraits Morton stops to sketch throughout her narrative. The most significant of these are: the women in the department store where she finds work, whom she categorizes as "the older women who had grown up with the business" (152-8) and "the young salesgirls . . . , second-generation immigrants . . . [who] were interested in getting on--and out (166, 167, and 169-172); the portrait of the professional woman, an "expert in nursing and social service" (290-292); the portrait of the wealthy woman volunteer (308-309); and the sketch of the small-town Jewish girls (183).⁷ Stern also uses this medallion device in regard to her other--Jewish--

⁷ These are also interesting as a counterpoint to the recent work in social and women's history, particularly those focusing on working women and the commodification of leisure. See Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986) and Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

theme, as indicated by the last portrait cited.

Exemplary figures, mini-case studies, these serve structurally to affirm the many selves of womanhood just as they reflect, thematize, and spatialize the multiple lives she herself leads.

Middle-class women were indeed forging professional lives for themselves to a level (and in numbers) unprecedented. By 1910, they constituted 9.1 percent of all professional workers (Degler 414). Nonetheless, the society still demanded that a woman not be motivated by personal goals and desires. As Degler notes, the concept of a woman as truly autonomous constituted a major threat to the society of the period: the threat was nowhere more epitomized than by the married woman, since her view of herself as an independent female was directly at odds with her perceived role in the family (343, 352, 359; see also Cott 179-180). Yet this view may be qualified by other historical factors.

D'Emilio and Freedman are helpful in laying out the varying factors contributing to a break with the past. Pre-eminently they point to the development among the bourgeoisie of the new ideal of companionate marriage, previously mentioned in the discussion of *My Mother and I*. Such a marriage, defined as a voluntary bond ostensibly between two equals, was specifically understood in contrast to the arranged marriages of

traditional, orthodox, ethnic communities, in which marriage was a social contract as much as it was a contract between two consenting individuals. While also related to a new or increased valorization of heterosexuality, the marital ideal benefitted from new attitudes toward sexuality as well as a new candor about other sexualities to insure greater mutuality between the sexes. In brief, the idea of sexuality apart from procreation sanctioned sexual pleasure and, by implication, endorsed greater autonomy for women. Breaking the link between fertility and sexuality (through greater numbers of [middle-class educated] women not marrying, the practice of homosexuality, and the practice of various forms of birth control lowering the fertility rate) also "called into question the primacy of motherhood in women's lives" (D'Emilio, Freedman 203; see 172-233). This in turn sanctioned women's self-development and their professional commitment.⁸

Nonetheless, as Cott notes, "even in the 1920s and 1930s the law still treated marriage as a labor con-

⁸ The number of professional women who did not marry was far above that of the general female population: as late as 1930, 75 percent were single (Degler 412-3). In 1910, when "Leah Morton" was beginning her career, only 12 percent married; the narrator of *I Am A Woman--and A Jew* remarks that, even after World War I, "every woman I knew who had an outstanding work, a 'big job,' was an unmarried woman, or in a few instances, a widow" (204). Morton is musing in the context of a tentative offer made to her--a position that promises a salary equal to that paid to men; it is later withdrawn, because she is a married woman.

tract" and it "operated most powerfully over those women not employed outside the home" while dictating the antagonistic view towards married women in the labor market. The latter group was essentially categorized as an "'enemy of society'" (186-87, 189). It is female autonomy and the tensions it generates both between the individual and the family as well as with the larger society that Stern's autobiography seeks--not wholly successfully--to record and to resolve.

The issue of "ethnicity" posed related problems. Racist doctrine, given new sanction in eugenics theories, previously wielded against Blacks in the South and Southeast Asian immigrants on the West coast, were now applied to the "alien hordes" of the East coast. Their application was intensified by a xenophobic nationalism that followed hard on the heels of World War I, and were exacerbated by the political identification of Jews in particular with left-wing movements in the United States and the Bolshevik Revolution of their homeland. As late as 1926, the year before Stern's second text appeared, Henry Ford used his private newspaper to advertise the conspiracy theory promulgated by the known forgery of the

Protocols of the Elders of Zion; the very year that Stern's text appeared, the courts compelled Ford to apologize publicly to Jews and to condemn anti-semitism. Discrimination largely took the form of quota systems established in undergraduate colleges and medical and law schools and subsequently extended to housing through the establishment of covenants (Sachar 338-342). Howe's summary of the post-WWI situation provides the appropriate context for Stern's writing:

The structure of prejudice was confined mostly to personal and business relations; it was not a strategy for depriving Jews of their rights as citizens. The Jews were to be given opportunities, and it was to be expected that they would take advantage of them through exertions beyond those which might be forthcoming from gentiles; but the Jews were not to be cordially received into that network of clubs, universities, schools, and places of recreation in which the American elite flourished. The Jews were to be allowed, even required, to become Americans--but at arm's length (409).

Stern in her turn dealt with the paradoxes generated by the actual and apparent disparities that occurred with "Americanization." She inscribed the tensions surrounding the efforts of Jews to establish ethnic autonomy.

Finally, the problem of autonomy can be posed in still another way, in regard to the formal elements of the genre. Behind the selves within the autobiography stands the "writer-self" of the autobiography. The key to the character's identity as a woman--and as a Jew,

then, lies in the liberation of this archetypal figure; to the degree that the writer can resolve the "double jeopardy" to which she is subject (Blackburn 146-7), in this case, as a woman and as a Jew, she can succeed in that "secondary revision of her life" (Renza 282).⁹ Again, as in Stern's earlier work, her success is an ambiguous and partial one.

Viewed from the perspective of gender, *I Am A Woman--and A Jew* (re)casts the life in terms of love and work: the heart of the book lies in the conflicting claims of love and duty that arise after marriage and motherhood. A wide range of literature had begun to appear on work and marriage as a result of the demographic changes that marked the first quarter of the twentieth century. Among those economists who supported combining work and marriage were Alice Beal Parsons who published *Women's Dilemma* (1926) and Suzanne La Follette who wrote *Concerning Women* (1926). They wrote the two most sustained feminist critiques of the decade; they attacked the bourgeois presumptions that underwrote the conflicts between career and marriage

⁹ While Blackburn is using this phrase to identify an important theme, symbol, and structural element in Black women's writing, the allied concepts of race and ethnicity as well as the historical situation of the Jew during the period Stern is writing about make the analogy an apt one.

(Cott 191-192, 271). In contrast to these texts, and in support of large segments of popular opinion and more conservative economists, there also appeared what the historian Cott defines as "a subgenre of individual tales by 'ex-feminists'" which focused on "the difficulties of managing [motherhood and career] and the realities of husbands' resentment and resistance" (198-9).¹⁰ While Stern declares herself a feminist, the narrator she inscribes bears a significant resemblance to these women, and the vagaries of combining work and marriage are certainly similar to theirs.

What these texts (including Stern's) do is to question and in varying degrees subvert the presumptions on which career-marriage advocates rested their claims. They expose a lack of parity between husband and wife, critique the husband's power or the institution of marriage, deny the totality of women's control over their reproductive lives. They argue against what once were, if they are no longer, mythologies about one-income households and in general operate to

¹⁰ See "Confessions of an Ex-Feminist," *The New Republic* 46 (14 April 1926): 218-220; Diana Freeman, "The Feminist's Husband," *The New Republic* 52 (24 August 1927): 15-16; Worth Tuttle, "Autobiography of an Ex-Feminist," *Atlantic Monthly* 152 (December 1933): 641-649 and "A Feminist Marries," *Atlantic Monthly* 153 (January 1934): 73-81; R. Phillips, "The Problem of the Educated Woman," *Harper's* 154 (December 1926): 57-63; "The Harm My Education Did Me" by an Ex-Feminist, *The Outlook* 147 (30 November 1927): 396-397.

undermine the dichotomized or stratified views of women's work as a matter either of self-fulfillment or economic need, either the result of the desire to serve or the expression of female autonomy. In this context, we may turn to Stern's text, noting that *her* rhetorical situation is ultimately enriched by the metacritical concerns she voices with "being a writer."

As a mother, the writer-self shows herself simultaneously engaged by the satisfying compensations of child-rearing and rebelling against the drudgery of household cares and domestic duties, which leave her "back aching" and her mind dull (96-7, 114). When her first child is three, and the family find themselves in debt, she attempts for the first time as a married woman to get work in the social work profession for which she has been trained, only to be rebuffed with the not-so-rhetorical query from the Chairman of the Board who has reluctantly agreed to interview her: "'And let your baby be killed while you are away?'" (98). Obviously, he refuses to give her the job, though he considers an offer to allow her to teach a night class (when the baby will be sleeping) a handsome concession to her need for work. In this episode, the writer-self confronts the quintessential "new-world reality" of *married* American women--which is that they

did not work.¹¹ While the statistical odds were against her, the narrator recognizes that the official data merely serve to perpetuate certain myths:

I wanted to tell him [the Chairman of the Board] about the working mothers who went to the mills, the factories, the stores, while their babies were at home. I wanted to talk to him about the wealthy women, even on his board, who left children to servants, not only when they sought pleasure, but when they did some work (99).

Instead she remains silent and settles for the night-school job.

Later, she confronts the same prejudice when she seeks saleswork to support her family. Having proven herself a "regular," she is ultimately promoted to the newly created position of educational or personnel director within the department store; her narrative description and comment on the event are enlightening. Her superior commends her for having acted as if "you worked for a living, instead of coming to slum in the store" (161). Clearly "He thought I was doing this because I was an idle married woman who had nothing else with which to fill her time" (162).

But the myths she must overcome lie even closer to home. Teaching in night school, and later, doing

¹¹ In 1900, according to a census study, less than 4 percent of married white woman, regardless of nativity, worked outside the home"; by 1920, it was 8 percent; and as late as 1940, it was not greater than 12 percent of the total population of working women. A large majority of them were probably in the professional category (Degler 384-5).

saleswork, are justified by temporary financial need; in the latter job, the narrator admits, she has no real interest and no training (203). The conflict begins when the work becomes important to the household and meaningful for her. Thus, when her husband notices her personal checking account:

He didn't like it. He didn't like it at all. He put my small sheaf of checks down, and said, "My darling, you mustn't buy things for the house! You must use--your earnings--to make your life easier and more beautiful" (104-5).

Only if her steady work is defined as a luxury, and seen ultimately as superfluous, in other words, is it acceptable. But the threat proves too great, and it is

this little sheaf of checks he found that made him decide with quite astonishing abruptness that he must leave his present work and find another position, if need be (106).

The incident blows over, and she proceeds with her plan to open her own night school. In her struggle to "do this work [that] was living to me, that . . . made for contentment . . . [and] happiness," she even lies, hiding her second pregnancy from her husband until the last possible moment. At that point, recognizing that he will no longer have to be the one to uproot himself, he successfully plays on her love for him and on her guilt: "'Please drop the school. I--it shames me to

have you work at this time.'" Seeing him flush and the flush die "into a miserable white line near his gentle mouth" (107) every time she leaves for work, and forced, by implication, to confront the birth and care of a second child without his support, she closes the school down.

The work she does as a mother, even the work she does as a teacher and social worker, are acceptable because they fit the cultural definitions of being female. As Degler documents, the period saw these professions that Stern practiced as extensions of traditional female roles, and therefore, as acceptable outlets for female energies (321, 380).¹² Yet the same reasoning could be used to limit a woman's work when she married and had children, for the training she had received as a teacher and as a social worker could then best be applied in the scientific management of her household and the efficient nurture of her children.¹³ The greatest threat, precisely because the work defines her as a fully autonomous being, is presented by the narrator in her role as writer--and in this, Stern's

¹² Women had in fact worked rather assiduously to create this ideological sanction for their work outside the home. See chapter 6.

¹³ For a discussion of this and its increasingly straitening consequences, see Christopher Lasch 8-12.

own lack of confidence and self-esteem conspires with her husband's views.

As with other positions she assumes, the initial impetus to write is financial, although in this case that the end serves to justify the desire is evident. And just to the degree that she took her teaching and social work seriously, did they constitute a threat that could only be diffused by viewing the work as economically superfluous, so conversely, the financial significance of her new position as a journalist when her husband loses his job requires that the work itself be trivialized and cheapened. Her husband

treated my writing as if it were something rather delightful, femininely sweet, that I chose to do, and that quaintly enough, proved helpful just now in the serious things of living. 'You through with your little piece?' he would ask, waiting for me to complete my work.

Somewhat disingenuously, she adds:

I did not know why that wounded me. I thought the 'piece' little, too; I did not take this newspaper writing seriously. And yet it was writing, it earned part of our livelihood. Neither I nor he spoke [this way] of even the smallest thing he did to earn money (135-6).

But her conclusion, in pointing at the serious disparity rooted in gender power relations, tellingly argues for her self-consciousness and the affront done to her identity.

Once her husband finds work, the pattern of response is repeated, and she quits her position as a

staff writer. After a scene which clearly if somewhat embarrassingly reveals how he manipulates her sexually to smother her self-assertion,¹⁴ she defensively announces:

"I like to work. . . . I enjoy--being important," I said with a half laugh. He laughed then, relieved. He was delighted that I spoke like a child about my work (164).

Yet she knows, as we do, that her work is not so easily to be dismissed. The compelling urge to write, to be a writer is everywhere: "I wanted to write. The thought pulled at me and urged me, as it had since, as a little girl of twelve, I wrote my first novel in a yellow tablet in Yiddish, while the rest of my class sat studying geography" (75).¹⁵ In an epiphanic moment of stillness, when the domestic chores are done, and her imagination is released by the icon of her household notebook:

[I]n my tiny kitchen, I remembered something I wanted to do--wasn't it long ago? To write a book someday. I put the pencil down, but

14 ". . . 'Silly little darling,' he said lifting me up and carrying me around in his delight at his luck. . . . , 'why do you have to bother doing that?'. . . 'You'll never work again, except at things you enjoy! . . . '

'But that's what I enjoy!' I wanted to say. He didn't let me. He kissed me and kissed me until my lips clung to his, until I forgot that I wanted to write, to help . . . " (137).

15 Stern had also charmingly narrated her "work" as the community scribe, lovingly detailing the rigorous decorum that attached to the epistolary convention, in *My Mother and I* (35-42).

my thought did not go away. All through the morning it followed me, like a bright light shining. Write. Write (114-5).

Then tempted at last, she tries her hand:

How easily the words came! They poured out! I felt in the writing, as if I pushed open with magnificence, with light pouring in, a heavy door that had closed on me. Oh, if one could write! (115).

Having seized the opportunity, she discovers that she had

found something I had lost. I found I had things to write down, oh, not for one paper, but many. I had BOOKS in my mind, of experiences, feelings, and thoughts. . . . This was my language. I had found it. Now I would speak (121-2).

Writing thus constitutes the real self. Its potential for liberation is clearly symbolized in the relationship she forms with an Irish Bohemian whom she has met at a "literary tea," that is, in an environment in which she is defined exclusively as a writer. The friendship they form, then, falls outside the social network she has created with others "as the wife of my husband . . .":

This odd man would not see that I was married, a mother. He would only see that I was a woman, and one to whom he liked to speak and with whom, it appeared, he liked to be (140).

What is most significant is that he takes her writing seriously--"not as a frill on my life nor even as a great jewel that decorated its leisure." Having drawn on a set of metaphors of ornamentality which she con-

sistently uses to characterize her writing, she goes on:

He saw it as--the absolute expression of myself; as a physician's--a man physcian's--work might be the expression of his life, too; or as a missionary's work is the expression of his whole life. . . .And he would read my things carefully, almost rigidly, at attention. His judgment was always exactly right (141).¹⁶

His fascination with her work is also a fascination with her, and her efforts to integrate this man into her world, and by implication, to give the fullest expression to that identity he perceives, are thwarted. She is left to work out her creative identity alone (and to subsume her erotic identity to the marital norm).

Symbolically, the episode suggests that the effort to fashion herself as a writer is a threat to the conventional female roles she plays as mother and wife. Though the writer-self argues that she has made her writing important--and proved her bohemian friend wrong, the text tells a more mixed tale.

What it tells us is that she can write only by adopting a variety of evasive strategies that permit her to avoid confronting the meaning of her work for herself: on one hand, she can subsume her work under

¹⁶ I have reversed the order of the text in this quotation.

the guise of social services, where it serves the purposes of referential documentation (116, 120-2, 202) and is morally justified by professional ethics, or under the limited goal of supplementing the family income (78), accomplished between the interstices of her real work as a wife, and thus reduced to "a frill on my motherhood" (122, 139). On the other hand, she can submerge her identity in her husband's and consider the work to be his (122), so that when "I had lovely words about them [the books she has written], I felt I ought to shout out 'That's not me, that's my husband. He made me make it beautiful, it's he!'" (138) and "when, in one of his pamphlets, credit was given to me for work, I sent it to my college, feeling a childish sort of pleasure, I suppose. My writing had not been serious, like this. It was only books" (202). Being a writer is only to be had by a denial of the self--one which inevitably contaminates the writing itself.

Elizaeth Winston, working predominantly with British writers, argues that after 1920, though showing some uneasiness, the authors evince greater self-confidence, which permits the use of "autobiography for explicitly personal and, thus, more self-validating reasons--to express strongly held beliefs, explore and understand the self, or experiment with the conventions of the genre" (93). Yet even in the "self-affirming narratives . . . , one detects the signs of struggle,

the force spent in challenging criticism and fighting restrictions. One gets a glimpse, in other words, of the price of success for a woman writing" (95).

Elizabeth Stern's work is an American counterpart.

Both of Stern's works are formulated in gender terms: in *My Mother and I*, the immigrant experience is defined by the matrilineal link between mother and daughter; it constitutes the locus of female definition, even as it deconstructs the cultural identity of the female self. In *I Am A Woman--and A Jew*, the "new-world" reality is defined in relation to masculinist or phallogentric structures and myths. Stern's focus clarifies the more radical displacement experienced by the woman who must confront significant role differences (rooted in gender) in addition to the differing cultural norms experienced by her male counterpart. Considerations of a specifically feminine identity shape the self and the text: conflicts regarding sexual autonomy, economic equality, and finally, the tension between the woman's manifold social roles and the writing self.

The woman as writer gives expression to all these struggles as she (re)creates her own life. At the heart of many current interpretations is an emphasis on the fictive aspect of the autobiographical genre and a concomittant de-emphasis of the historical roots of autobiography in favor of the genre as a creation of

the self. Yet this view of autobiography as a "self-authoring mode" implies an autonomous self, from which women's ambiguous and ambivalent experience alienates them. By giving expression to the flawed reality, Stern helps to expose the phallocentric ideology. A feminist theory of autobiography similarly resists those assumptions as they (mis)shape the critical constructs of autobiography.

In the foregoing I have asserted the primacy of gender in the narrator's self-alienation, or alterity, but the title of the text and my own introduction to this chapter, not to speak of the dual relationship I have sought to define throughout this work, insist otherwise. How then does the text narrate the Jewish question? And how does it render that question in terms of Morton's subjective experience? I have of course boldly used this phrase "the Jewish question" for the first time, signalling immediately to the reader that Stern's text marked an insistence on rewriting the autobiography as a genre of *unassimilability*. One might say that she deconstructed the apparent absorption of the Jew into American culture. Put still another way, Stern's text allegorizes a vision of ethnicity premised in the reciprocal relations between Gentile and Jew, in which each doubles for the other and as the other. The text has a

curiously bifocal perspective as Stern narrates a variety of events and encounters, about which she hopes to preserve her belief in a cosmopolitan ideal of Americanization, but which betoken a parochial and sectarian reality--the concrete realization of Boelhower's "new-world" ideal vs. "new world" reality occurring simultaneously and immanent within the same circumstances.

On one hand, there is the prejudice that Stern meets with in the field of social work, frequently in blatant contrast with the stated ideals of the profession. She recalls fellow students in graduate school:

middle-aged women, mostly unmarried, from little towns in the East and Middle West [who took notes and] listened intently to data on racial relations, and how to "Americanize the immigrant." . . . But all the time they never moved a millimeter out of the little groove in which each had been born and in which each lived. They were men and women learning a new gospel in which all men and all creeds are united for one cause to make humankind happier and perhaps a little better; they were Baptists and Presbyterians and Catholics, each working for a Christian America (41).

And she concludes significantly: "They were as close inside their doors of dogma and sect as had been the Jewish home from which I came." She thus marks the "American" as the double or equivalent of the "ethnic" rather than her antithetic ideal. There is, moreover, the irony of finding in the profession that should be most exempt from this prejudice, an attitude which she

learns is commonplace in American life, an "education" that is concomittant with her expanding experience.

Stern also documents the anti-semitic discrimination she finds in the workplace--a discrimination equal to that which she has found as a woman. In addition to exclusions she sees in education and social work, she discovers that retail stores engage in similar practices (75, 123, 244, 338). For example, having undergone a strenuous probation on the sales floor of one department store and proven her ability to offer successful educational and social programs for the sales "girls," the chance anti-semitic statement of the owner forces her both to declare her identity and leave her position (173). Seeking work elsewhere, she discovers:

At Fields' I was excluded because I was married. At Oppenheimer's I was not wanted because I was a Jewess (195; see also 238).

But the blatant forms of discrimination in public life are matched by more subtle forms of parochialism in private life, including friends who presume that because she has married a non-Jew that she has forsworn her origin/identity as a Jew (89; 179). Or else they patronize her as a "Jewess"; in this context, she defines one of her few genuine friends in terms of the latter's ability to satirize this situation. Her friend speaks "mischievously of her sorrow at being 'nothing but a Methodist'":

"Anyhow," she sighed as if in infinite relief, "if I can't be a romantic Jewish girl, at least I can be grateful I am not a young Jewish man!" (61)

Despite these offenses, Stern continues to maintain what she calls a cosmopolitan ideal. Therefore she is interested in exposing a parallel insularity and clannishness on the part of Jews as well as Christians. For example, she describes those highly assimilated Jews in her social circle:

[M]ost of the Jewish families I knew celebrated Christmas, Easter holidays-- . . . They threw off the ceremonies of their own faith and adopted those of others. The very charming women I knew would meet . . . carefully inviting Jews only--and would relate with pride, "Why you'd hardly know my Gloria was Jewish; she's often taken for French or even Irish!" . . .

* * * * *

They carefully preserved the group unity. Their children too, would marry Jews, come to synagogue.

But their pride was that these children of theirs, brought to the Jewish Temple, held closely in the Jewish circle, were "not like Jews at all" (257).

What is notable in this excerpt are the contradictions with which these people live--a denial of their Jewish identity coupled with an equally intense isolationism. Their drive toward assimilation is linked to a countervailing drive toward ethnic assertion, representing a schizophrenic dualism.

Still another group whom the narrator meets after relocating to another city even go so far as to identify themselves as Christian Scientists. Yet they

too "only give to Jewish charities, belong to Jewish social clubs, and live in fear of anti-Semitism," reacting with great distress to the media attention given to a Jew involved in some sort of scandal (Umansky 8-9; *I Am A Woman--And A Jew* 335-336).

Stern's exploration of her Jewish identity through the character of Leah Morton shows her relationship to the community to be problematic as well. Her identification with Jewish people is stated in transhistorical terms. Thus, in speaking of her response to certain community activities during World War I, she notes:

I had cut myself from the Jewish faith. But the group--to that I belonged. . . . There was a Jewish people, *something that belonged to us, so unchanging that we could not destroy it.*

I had always been amused at the Jewish pride in their great men and women, the personal pride and justification Jews seem to feel in the achievement of Jews of the past and present. . . .

But now I felt pride because two Jewesses . . . were going abroad to serve in a war in which I did not believe. I thought, "They're the first women to go. The two first women in this city to go are Jewesses" (my italics 193).

The tendency to reify the concept of ethnic affiliation is evident in the assertion of an unchanging relationship that transcends specific historical circumstances, particular social conditions, and even, as she indicates, opposing political positions.

This tentative exploration of her relationship to the group is transformed when her father dies. His

death precipitates a personal crisis and puts her under pressure to resolve her somewhat amorphous feelings. The reasons for a renewed sense of or yearning for Jewish identity are several. Her lack of religious belief and subsequent marriage to a non-Jew were the occasions of alienation between father and daughter. Now the daughter seeks this identity because it represents a link to him:

I could not choose to divide myself from that which represented all which is left to me of my father--his people, his creed (232-233).

But his death also raises in her a desire for belief:

"I hungered for the comfort of some religion "

In the end, she concedes her confusion: "I did not know whether it was because I sought his God, or whether I was seeking him through the God in which he had faith" (234). She therefore decides:

This religion which had meant so much to him, which had expressed everything for him, became something which I felt I must seek . . . I did not mean to tell myself a lie, to practice its precepts and its faith. But I must live closer to its people (233).

Thus begins a "spiritual odyssey" that lasts for many years, in which she explores the options available to her.

Her return to an Orthodox shul to say *kaddish* (the memorial prayer for the dead traditionally said daily for a year) for her father is the first essay she makes. This world, so incompatible both with her

intellectual ideals and her bourgeois circumstances, proves too limiting. This traditional form of worship, the narrator contends:

had not my father's intellectual fire and his culture behind it. These poor people hardly understood their Hebrew prayers; the men themselves could in most cases, barely pronounce the words they shouted. This was the decay of the grandeur of my people's inheritance (235).

Then the Reform Temple, although severe in its style and lacking in warmth, holds out the promise of a "new ideal." The young rabbi of the particular temple she locates is as committed to cosmopolitanism as she is; but she sees in the senior rabbi a too expedient man meeting the social needs of his membership and prudently catering to his status-conscious congregation. When she sees how disrespectfully the younger man is treated, she bows out of the Temple (252-258). Finally, the narrator presents one man who has been inspired by the idea of a Jewish state, one for whom Zionism itself has become a religion. While he is one of a series of figures who indicate the transformative possibilities of belief, his choice is never a serious choice for one so committed to the American idea as she (248-251). She is compelled to conclude: I simply must accept the fact that I no longer belonged" (259). She throws herself into her work and into meeting the needs of her family. She reiterates the ideal of a

universal humanity in her writing and thinking about Jews.

Yet once again the screw turns. Having made application for her daughter to attend a private school for which she had provided consultative services, Leah finds her child rejected because the school's limited quota for Jews has been filled (350-353). And she suddenly sees the inevitability of her alliance with the self-same women she had previously criticized and faulted for their clannishness.

In effect, Stern argued, the Jews had no other choice but to maintain their insularity as a defensive shield against the anti-semitism that greeted them in their social and professional encounters. But unlike other social critics, she is not led to the conclusion that the Jew is made rather than born--a product of the social conditions and circumstances in which one finds oneself. Her own argument is ultimately vitiated by her insistence on affirming a conception of Judaism that is not only transhistorical but as rooted in biologism as anti-Semitic conceptions of Jews. I quote at length from Stern's final proclamation, stressing those details that reinforce this reductionism.

But now I knew that . . . what every Jew is and does, is something which must, indeed belong to his people; *that no other people living have our peculiar quality, which is not individual, but racial*, and which gives to each of us who accomplishes with genius, the ability to express through himself only

the accumulated genius of his race, so that every Jewish writer, statesman, actor, is not only himself, but the mirror of his people, the voice of his people (my italics 358).

It comes as no surprise when she invokes the metaphor that we previously discovered in Antin's text that is a sign of the polarized relationships of Gentile and Jew, and of the dualistic thinking that breeds structuralist oppositions:

[T]he Jewish nation does not need the boundaries of a land, it does not require the frontier of a physical country. Each of us carries the boundaries, the acknowledgement of its sovereignty, *in our hearts, in our blood*. The way our eyes see life, our minds thought, we discover through our Jewishness (my italics 359).

Judaism is now a quality inherent in human nature rather than a relational outgrowth embedded in particular social and economic realities. Stern here biologizes the geographic metaphor, internalizing what was previously territorial and historical. The narrator concludes:

[T]he Jew in me could, by no choice, no reasoning, elect to be anything but a Jew: *that was part of the life which poured through my veins; it had come to me in my mother's womb, before I had thought, before I had being* (my italics 359-360).

Stern has transformed the Jew into an Other--defiled and stigmatized by this ethnic difference as American culture insisted she was.

On July 9, 1990, Ellen Umansky, the historian responsible for the introduction to a new edition of *I Am A Woman--and A Jew* received a letter from Thomas Noel Stern. The son of Elizabeth Gertrude Stern, then in his late seventies, had seen the reprint of the text and was writing to indicate that Umansky was correct in assuming that the work was a novel. As their correspondence evolved, however, he began to make even more sweeping assertions. In fact, his mother "was not born in East Prussia to Sarah and Aaron Levin . . . but in 1889 in Pittsburgh, the illegitimate daughter of Christian Limburg, a German Lutheran, and Elizabeth Morgan, a Welsh Baptist." He continued: "'After shifting from home to home in early years, Mother was placed with Aaron and Sarah Leah Levin, near the Pittsburgh railway depot. She left her foster home at age seventeen to live with her mother, Elizabeth Morgan the older, near the University of Pittsburgh.'" He had further expanded on his own origins and on his mother's private life in a published essay entitled "Family Secrets" and in a privately printed book entitled *Secret Family* (3). These works contained still other revelatory details.

Despite the insistence of Stern's claim to have been "raised . . . in a loving and traditionally pious home," the reality she expressed privately was that "Aaron Levin sexually abused . . . [her] for seven

years: from the time she came to live with the Levins until she was fourteen. What ended the abuse, apparently, was her becoming pregnant and subsequently undergoing an illegal and dangerous abortion. After that, Elizabeth later told her son, she and 'Zadie [Grandpa] Levin . . . stayed away from each other'" (14).

Apparently as a desire for revenge, Elizabeth coerced her adoptive father into arranging an Orthodox Jewish wedding for her marriage to Leon Stern--also illegitimate and non-Jewish by birth, also raised by Jewish foster parents--, holding the threat of exposure of Levin's sexual violation over him if he failed or refused to do so. This Orthodox marriage ceremony is documented by a certificate still extant and a notice in the local press. This evidence provides the only verification for Thomas Stern's narrative and, therefore, from an historian's point of view, supports the only detail that prima facie contradicts the story that the Stern son tells. That is, no Orthodox rabbi would have agreed to carry out such a marriage unless he had been misled or himself hoped to keep his community free from scandal. Put another way, Umansky, despite searches in the public record and in private archives, including the collection of Leon and Elizabeth Stern's papers, has been able to find nothing that either con-

firms or denies the story that she has been told by Thomas Noel Stern.

How do we explain this bizarre twist that seems, on the face of it, to undo all my interpretive activity? What does this communication, *if it is true*, do to the larger project of establishing the truth-value of autobiographical texts or for the incorporation of these or other contradictory texts into an autobiographical canon? Perhaps the foregoing revelations support those critics (including myself) who insist on the fictive nature of the genre, although the support provided would seem to be rather more than I and these critics bargained for--confirmation with a vengeance, as it were, for their theories. (One wonders, for example, if these same critics would accede as readily to the fictive nature of canon-making?) Oddly, the information does confirm in a general way my reading of the texts as incomplete and problematic. Shuttling between avowals and disavowals of Stern's Jewishness and alternating claims of dependence and independence with regard to her (gender and sexual) autonomy, the texts proclaim their self-division and thereby their otherness. Yet these revelations, somewhat contradictorily and paradoxically, would seem to negate my hypothesis of the impossibility of autobiography as a self-authorizing mode for female identity.

In terms of *the biography*, one can certainly understand Stern's desire to claim a Jewish identity in her life and to assert her feminism simultaneously. After all, she had been born illegitimate and been given up for adoption. In the culture of the period, her origins defined her position as one of non-identity; the apparent inconsistency of her birth mother's care certainly contributed to reinforce a continuing lack of identity, and the resolve to place the child Elizabeth into adoption was probably an effort to provide her with a proper name and place in the world. With the stepfather's abuse, Elizabeth's identity had been infinitely violated. The claim to a Jewish identity was the means of covering over illegitimate origins and hiding the painful reality of her adoptive life (Umansky 3-4, 14); in a different sense, feminism taught Stern to repudiate society's negative image of her and to defend her psyche at least from patriarchal assault. The solidity of "ethnic" identity and the strength of feminist assertion necessarily intersected to qualify one another. Writing this life, moreover, provided the addition or supplement to life: the autobiographical genre in particular insists on the presence of meaning in one's life, makes one's life present to oneself. Even more to the point, perhaps, is that the texts were the only forum by which Stern could make official the identity she claimed; they

legitimated her. Yet that does not fully answer Stern's decision to assert these claims in the public form of an autobiography that rendered the subject as female and as Jew.

First I would argue that Stern sought to insert herself into this autobiographical tradition because of the psychic resonance of her personal situation with the genre's ideological role in representing the immigrant's adoption of the country and the country's acceptance of the immigrant and its role in *legitimizing* the modern Jewish woman. As I have suggested in the chapter on Antin, the autobiography is an allegorical genre: thus the social significance of the tale resonated with the issues of adoption at the personal level; the Jew's acceptance as an American provided an echo of Stern's adoptive parents acknowledging her as their daughter. That the daughter as an immigrant embraces American culture must be seen as a parallel to the daughter of the natural mother embracing her adoptive parents; both express her desire to assert her "mastery" and to control the terms of the relationship.

Second, and this speaks in particular to the first text and its particular shape, for we need to ask why Stern reproduced the particular mother-daughter relationship that she did. As I initially suggested in this chapter, the autobiography as a genre offers the ideological possibility of a unified subject and in

particular the opportunity to project a life adequate to one's desire; it affords the narrative illusion of reality. It permits the individual to construct a better life for herself than the one she had. For Stern, this was perhaps an opportunity to write the narrative of a helping mother, the good mother that she did not have to defend her against an abusive father. In her imagination, she freed the mother to aid her. In other words, she created the mother who enabled her to extricate herself from the real circumstances of her life; and if she then seems to "abandon" the mother for this kindness, it is in fact only recompense for the mother's actual behavior. Put another way, Stern created the narrative that extricated her from the reality of her life conditions.

Through the autobiographical narrative, she established a subjectivity she could live (in the process of writing), providing her with the internal agency that then allowed her to actualize herself in the world. From this point of view, the autobiographical narrative is vindicated as an act of agency, if not that of a unified subject.

Given the problematic of the unified subject, both autobiographical versions of the text also signal the ambivalence generated by the endeavors (the act of adoption, the act of writing). In the first text, Stern avows her Jewish identity in the act of renounc-

ing it; the later text inverts, reverses, or negates the trope. The narrator there variously: insists on an identity that is not apparent to others; claims the identity that certain segments of society would deprive her of; asserts her identity with pride in the face of those who would use it to humiliate her; or argues that she would not identify as a Jew if the society did not insist on her being one. From the point of view of the text as a manifestation of psychic structure, in other words, the message is always a double one. The same trajectory is discoverable for the gender thematic. Each text, within itself and in relation to the other, puts identity into question at the same time that it validates it.¹⁷

Even Stern's use of a pseudonym for the second work may be understood not merely as an effort to protect herself from critical and political controversy but as a psychic strategy that has the potential for

¹⁷ See Marsha Noel Evans, "Writing as Difference in Violette Leduc" for an inspired deconstructionist reading of the French writer's work. Leduc offers an interesting parallel to Stern. Her "wish to authorize herself by her writing entails . . . the paradoxical and painful necessity of self-repudiation" (308). Leduc, like Stern, was born out of wedlock, and Evans argues that "[I]f she can succeed in occupying the empty place of her procreator, she will simultaneously annul the anguish of her abandonment and become herself the guarantor of her own legitimacy"; Unlike Stern (and writing some thirty years after her), Leduc adopts the opposite strategy and flaunts her bastard birth--and her (homo)sexuality (309).

several meanings that reinforce the larger project. It may on one hand signal the creation of a new ethnic identity, the counterpart of the new American identity she defined in her earlier work. It may, on the other hand, represent still another form by which she denies what the writing of an autobiography signifies: it makes a lie of the text, or conversely, it continues to render her illegitimate. It thus symbolizes the conflict that Stern experienced in defining herself as a writer, which is now cast in a rather different light, subsumed by the contagion of ethnic and sexual contradiction that further infect the genre.¹⁸

An analogy may help to extend my chief hypothesis for Stern's action. At a certain juncture in the most recent wave of the women's movement, a significant minority of women activists felt the need to identify as lesbians, partly because to be a lesbian was to represent the most intensified form of the ideal of sisterhood. Moreover, feminist theorizing arose to conceptualize such a notion of lesbianism as a woman-identified culture (as distinguished from lesbianism defined exclusively as an erotic or sexual identity): Adrienne Rich's essay, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and

¹⁸ For a discussion of the implications of women writers assuming a pseudonym, see Showalter 19, 29, 57, 60, 91, 212, 302.

Lesbian Existence" is the touchstone. And it was during this same period that a novel with a gay woman as its protagonist became a best seller. Originally published by Daughters, Inc., a marginal feminist press, in 1973, *Rubyfruit Jungle* was soon purchased and distributed by Bantam; its representation of a lesbian heroine in and as mainstream fiction was an occurrence if not without precedent in American literary history, certainly unique in the period. Broadly speaking, the novel's bastard heroine might be interpreted in political terms, as a vindication of lesbian-feminism or, in metaphysical or psychological terms, as an explanation for the difficulties of establishing loving relationships. She who was the cast-off child of her parents as well as her culture might thus become the quintessential embodiment of what the culture considered to be one of the most significant issues of its time.

One might make precisely the same statement about the allegorical value of Stern's text. The Jewish question and the feminist question were the essential social concerns of the period; they were the issues that mattered most, that spoke to the culture's view of itself and expressed its aspirations and its limitations. In passing as a Jew, Stern incarnated in her autobiography precisely all those anxieties generated in the culture regarding the project in which both the Jew in American society and American society itself

were then engaged in creating themselves and each other. The autobiography thus "theorized" the fictive nature of the Jew's identity as well as the fictive nature of American identity (it did something parallel in its delineation of male-female identities); it also insisted on, in yet a different sense, the fictive (or inauthentic) nature of the relationship between the two parties.

Behold the voice of the cry of
 the daughter of my people because of them that dwell in
 a far country: Is not the Lord in Zion? is not her king
 in her? . . . For the hurt of the daughter of my people
 am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on
 me. Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician
 there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my
 people recovered?

(Jeremiah 8:19-22, King James Version)

The chain of tradition continued unbroken from Moses
 through Joshua, the Elders, the Prophets and the Men of
 the Great Synagogue. . . . On this tradition rests our
 faith, which Moses first received from God on Sinai.
 On this foundation we take our stand. He who denies
 this on principle, disclaims his connection with the
 bond of community that unites the House of Israel . . .
 [and] writes his own epitaph: "I am no Jew, no adherent
 to the faith of my fathers
 (Alexander Kohut, *The Ethics of the Fathers* 3, 6)

The best history is biography
 (Rebekah Kohut, *My Portion*, 72-73)

The characteristic of the book and . . . of the life
 which it depicts is that they are absolutely modern,
 absolutely American. The story might be that of the
 daughter and wife of clergymen of any denomination and
 of . . . New England or Southern origin. "Romantic
 Career of a Vicarious Mother in Israel," *New York Times*
Book Review April 26, 1925)

Part II

Writing in the Father's House

Rebekah Kohut and Hannah Solomon are never mentioned in literary histories of the period. Their memoirs or autobiographies are little known outside the activist Jewish women's community or to those who are not feminist historians of American Jewry (i.e., (Baum, Hyman, Michel; Sochen; Kuzmack; Elwell). Yet their writings have literary value for those critics who reject the monolithic paradigm of American literature, for the texts complicate our view of what constitutes Jewish-American identity and literature. Thus they indirectly undermine both a reductionist view of ethnicity and the "ethnic text" in general.

Kohut and Solomon were neither Russian Jews nor part of that largely proletarian worker's movement that occurred after 1890. They memorialize a history of Jewish women that precedes that migration. It is one which, in its own day, was equally momentous, for it saw the Jewish population increase from 15,000 to a quarter of a million by 1880. In general terms, the early period of settlement is distinguished from the later one by nationality and class, as well as the particular socio-historical and cultural realities from which the migrations took their impetus: These autobiographers come from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. They grow up in bourgeois (if sometimes genteely

impoverished) households shaped in varying degrees by the German Enlightenment and Romantic nationalism, as well as the political ferment created by those ideas. They come to maturity under the aegis of the first wave of the American woman's movement and the progressive movements, to both of which they are major contributors, albeit unacknowledged either by mainstream feminist or progressive historians. They were part of the first generation of volunteer activists and civic reformers who helped redefine the public sphere and their roles (as women and Jews) in it. It must be said, with regard to the latter, that their lives show a decisive commitment not only to the Jewish community or to some vague Jewish ethos, but to the Jewish religion itself. They were major Jewish leaders, though unacknowledged by mainstream/male Jewish historians.

Their autobiographies certainly document the early lives and the public roles women began to play, written to insure that their contribution was part of the public record, and of necessity until recently, as an alternative to that record. But I want to lay particular emphasis on these women's life-writings as quasi-religious or tacitly religious autobiographies.

They wrote at a time when institutional Jewish religion was undergoing great change, ultimately evolving into three broad divisions--Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Jewry. Reform Judaism, in all probability,

was the only religious arena in which women had the moral authority and theological sanction for exerting public leadership in this country. For this reason, only Reform Jewish women could have written religious autobiographies in this period. In contrast to the immigrant women rooted in Orthodox or traditional Judaism whose texts we have been examining, these women did not feel it necessary to abandon their faith to their F/fathers. Rather, they made that faith the basis for redefining their roles as women--and, in the process, redefined the faith. They perceived themselves as creating or re-defining religion. In this sense, Kohut and Solomon's work may also be seen as reasserting a tradition established by Chagall's work, which represents a related encounter between modernity and spirituality, as these are resynthesized by the female subject. That is why they represent the autobiographical counterparts of the Russian Jewish women writers who, in antithetical but related fashion, saw themselves making history when they abandoned the faith of their Fathers. Both constituted the project of modernity inscribed in the "ethnic" autobiography.

In parallel terms, the writings of Kohut and Solomon evince rather differing definitions of ethnicity and of gender as well as differing relations *between* ethnicity and gender from those we have discovered in the previous chapters. The paradigmatic

autobiography implied by their works necessarily differs from the one discerned in those of Antin and Stern.

Whether perceived as one that disavows ethnicity or one that establishes a "public" or "political" ethnicity, in the process of apparently repudiating it, the first model represented by Antin and Stern posits a definition of the ethnic as other, defined in relational terms to the dominant culture. Kohut's and Solomon's model, by contrast, restores specific religious/theological content to ethnic experience. Theirs is a religiously defined ethnicity, which also is consistent with the specific (Jewish) audience they aimed for. As the dualism posited by the ethnic/American polarity collapses or recedes as an issue in the text, the dualism posited by the male/female polarity dominates. Consequently, the following chapters focus on the gender, rather than ethnic critique, that these autobiographies inscribe.

Insofar as the ethnicity of Kohut and Solomon is substantive, rather than serving to demarcate a political group, or to establish the relation of the dominant and marginal cultures, understanding their texts requires a different set of knowledges than American critics have hitherto required for ethnic Jewish texts. They are the historical, theological, institutional (sociological), and rhetorical contexts that I have

been suggesting in this introduction and which the following chapters propose to develop in the spirit of contributing to creating a Jewish-American canon of autobiography that is itself multi-cultural.

I would hazard that these works have not warranted critical attention for two major and rather related reasons. One reason is precisely because their writings did not uphold the particular ethnic model we have been exploring in Part I. Or conversely, that the works could not be made to bear the particular interpretation required by the culture of this period. They were, from the literary/cultural point of view, illegible, or unreadable, if not illiterate. The other is, as I have suggested above, that in order to be fully legible they required a greater knowledge than is accessible to the dominant critical paradigm. Put another way, these texts could not be assimilated to the critical paradigm, and the critical paradigm failed to accommodate itself to the text. This chapter then is intended to make possible a revision of the critical paradigm.

So far in my discussion I have emphasized the similarities between Kohut and Solomon and sought to distinguish them from the Russian-Jewish autobiographers. Their biographies will serve to preface a discussion of some of the differences between them as a

way of suggesting the differences we will find in their autobiographical styles, accomplishments, and forms.

Rebekah Bettelheim Kohut (1864-1951)¹ was the daughter and wife of rabbis, the father probably quite radical, the husband conservative, but both part of a tradition that combined what was then the new scholarship with talmudic learning. The family migrated for political reasons from Hungary in 1867, and shortly after their arrival, when she was about five, Rebekah's mother died. Her father soon remarried, but her step-mother seems to have been sickly, and she is a shadowy figure in the life. Kohut spent her childhood in the post-Civil War South, but then settled with her family in San Francisco where her father worked as a doctor and served a congregation as rabbi. Kohut came of age with the first generation of New Women, for whom college and paid professional work was still unlikely; her West Coast background as well as her marginality probably spurred her to live more experimentally during that period of her life. She attended Berkeley and worked as a teacher in the then pioneering kindergarten movement. This early sense of professionalism and involvement in

¹ In addition to Kohut's own autobiographical works--*My Portion* (1925) and *More Yesterdays* (1925-49) (1950), I have relied on *Encyclopedia Judaica* 4: 775 and 10: 1150-51, *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* 6:438-39, *The New York Times*, and archival material at The Jewish Theological Seminary, New York City.

education also probably contributed to her later attendance at school (in education and social work and scientific philanthropy) as well as her interest in developing education for Jewish women.

In her early twenties, she came East to visit friends, and there met and fell in love with a man twice her age: a widower with eight children, and also a formidable scholar, religious leader, and important participant in Hungarian politics, and subsequently, a major religious leader in the United States as well. They married when she was 22, and she began a career of volunteerism--a career that was constantly to expand to meet the burgeoning needs of the cities with their increasing numbers of immigrants and corrupt and inadequate municipal administrations. Initiated on a volunteer basis, the work provided emotional solace and subsequently, financial compensation, when all the most significant people/men in her life died by the time she was thirty. Nine years after her marriage, Kohut found herself a widow with eight children to support.

From 1895 until the mid-1930s Kohut's name appeared regularly in *The New York Times*. During these forty years, it documented the following activities and positions: heading the YWHA's employment bureau from 1914 to 1917, chairing the industrial committee of the National League for Women's Service, and working for the Federal Employment Clearing House. As an employ-

ment specialist, Kohut served on a variety of city and state employment commissions and advisory boards, both during and after World War I and in the Depression years. In one case, her refusal to support the findings and recommendations of a particular commission, and her decision to issue a separate statement, created something of a furor and made the front page of *The Times*. She was also extensively involved in education, from the founding of the Kohut School for Girls in 1899, to her work with the Kohut School for Boys (founded by her stepson George), and, later as executive director of the Columbia Grammar School, all in New York City. She also worked both as a teacher and as a board member with the Educational Alliance, a settlement organization still located on the Lower East Side of New York then serving the needs of Russian-Jewish immigrants.

In addition to these civic activities, Kohut was extensively involved in international work in the Jewish community. At the turn of the century, this work concerned the white slave traffic (illicit prostitution rings), and later involved reconstruction work caused by the devastation wrought by World War I throughout Europe. In religious terms, Kohut was close to many of her father's and husband's colleagues and maintained a lifelong relationship with the conservative Jewish Theological Seminary that her husband had helped to

found; her own affiliations were with reform temples, the most notable of which was Emanu-El. Her feminist work was first engaged by the founding of the National Council of Jewish Women, and from 1897 to 1901, she was president of the New York branch. She was a leader in forging international women's alliances and in 1923 became the first president of the World Congress of Jewish Women. The people she worked with most extensively would form a virtual roster of the largely German-Jewish philanthropic and activist community: Jacob Schiff, Julia Richman, Stephen F. Wise, to name a few of the most illustrious.

Hannah Greenebaum Solomon (1858-1942)² was one of ten children born to a prosperous merchant family who, for economic reasons, had migrated from the German Palatinate. After a public school education that included two years of high school and an education in Hebrew and German in religious school, Solomon chose to continue private study of the piano. At the age of twenty-three, she was married to Henry Solomon, who shared her interests in music and the arts and seems to

² For information with regard to Solomon, I have relied on material drawn from her autobiography *Fabric of My Life* and that in *Notable American Women, 1607-1950* 3: 324-25, as well as articles in *The Reform Advocate* and *The American Hebrew*.

have been remarkably supportive of her womanist activities. After giving birth to three children and devoting herself to their early care, she became increasingly active in the organizational life of Chicago. The first Jew to be inducted into the Chicago Woman's Club, she was subsequently asked by the committee organizing the 1893 Columbian Exposition to head up the Jewish Women's Congress. She used this opportunity to create a permanent national organization of Jewish women.

Subsequent civic activity involved a devotion to women's causes, and organizing at the state, national, and international levels. With Susan B. Anthony and May Sewall, she organized the Council of Women and represented the organization at an international meeting in 1904. In the 1890s, she turned increasingly to social welfare and civic reform, to provide support for the growing number of immigrants settling in Chicago. Eventually she established the Bureau of Personal Service, designed to coordinate the various philanthropies. Like her New York counterpart, Solomon was regularly featured in the major Chicago papers from the late 1880s to World War I. Highlighted were the civic and cultural activities as well as the work she did in establishing a residential training school for girls and insuring the humane treatment of children in the welfare and court system. A complete roster of those

she worked with would list all those women who created major progressive institutions and developed the major social legislation of that period: Jane Addams, Ellen Gates Starr, Florence Kelley, and Julia Lathrop are among the most prominent. Religiously, Solomon attended the nationally renowned Bar Sinai Temple, whose rabbi Emil Hirsch was a leading member of the second generation of the Reformed rabbinate; she became the first Jewish woman to speak from its pulpit.

Kohut was a Hungarian Jew; the daughter and wife of rabbinical scholars and activists; an immigrant, with limited financial resources and the experience of being constituted as an "other" by members of the Jewish community as well as by the larger American community; experiencing the trauma of major losses both in childhood and young adulthood; the stepmother of eight children; a New Yorker for all of her adult life. Solomon was a native-born American; the daughter of a prosperous German-Jewish merchant family; highly assimilated and well-to-do; accepted by the Protestant social élite of Chicago where she lived all of her life, a part of its exclusive women's clubs and progressive clubs.³ I hypothesize that the differences in

³ For a discussion of the warm reception given to the German Jews and of the community that subsequently came to be called the "Golden Ghetto" and its relationship to the Protestant community in Chicago, see Mazur

Kohut and Solomon's work are in part the result of these factors.

The salient factors contributing to Kohut's life suggests a degree of marginality and instability that contribute to a greater lack of confidence: in a world where material wealth was the standard, greater admiration was given to the economically successful, to those who showed that they concurred with such a standard; in a society which constituted the ethnic and the immigrant as other, Kohut experienced the jeopardy of her status; financial constraints, at least for some period, made her desirous of pleasing the establishment and currying the favor of its members. Her participation in the social life of New York must have also made her aware of the conservative forces operating against innovation and flexibility, forces operating to insist on the maintenance of a social hierarchy.

Solomon, in contrast, operated out of a sense of enormous well-being and complacency that is evident throughout her work and is the result of a life apparently pervaded by singular good fortune. On one hand, she felt herself rooted in a successful minority culture; on the other she felt herself accepted, and even mentored, by the majority culture. Social life in

46-68.

a midwestern city that defined itself as new and innovative presumably was less rigid and hierarchical than elsewhere. All these contributed to endow Solomon with an assurance that made it possible for her to take risks.

Friends, colleagues, co-religionists, both these women were remarkable. Their achievement in the social arena are rather similar and parallel; their autobiographies, I argue, are rather different, bespeaking the differences that underwrite their lives. Using *My Portion* as the title of her work, Kohut alludes to the biblical portion of the reading done at the religious service by males. In writing her autobiography, she, as it were, writes herself into the patriarchal liturgy. Solomon, I believe, is more audacious in her use of the liturgical text. In *Fabric of My Life*, she claims it for her own, radically seeking to extend its possibilities, rather than to accommodate herself to it. Along with the gender critique directed toward the male Jewish community, Solomon uses her secure hold within the larger community to engage in an ethnic critique of the dominant culture as well. These concerns are the basis of the following four chapters.

Chapter 4

Rebekah Kohut: Autobiography as Icon

Rebekah Kohut begins her autobiography, *My Portion*, (1925)¹ with a tale that might be a medieval romance: the great Count Bethlen, drawn by the beauty of a poor maiden, offers her wealth and riches, if she will fulfill his desire. But she refuses, and her victorious husband is afterwards called Bethlen-Jude to memorialize his honor. This originary myth, intended to explain the source of the Bettelheim name and her family's history, functions like an icon on a knight's shield: it asks to be read, that is, to be allegorized. If we do so, we understand that Kohut presents us with an image of fidelity. But it is a fidelity not merely of wife to husband. The icon of thwarted seduction/rape is also one of aborted apostasy. And indeed Kohut concludes the geneological tale of her Bettelheim ancestry with this coda: "Several generations later, one branch of the family espoused Christianity, while

¹ I write this chapter under the rubric of what Jane Marcus has called "the resurrecting reader," a designation that she uses for the critic who retrieves life-writings of "invincible mediocrity," as Virginia Woolf called them. The role seems most apt for recovering public women who wrote types of spiritual autobiography (116-123), though the alien Christian associations embedded in the rubric are at least to be noted.

the other remained ever loyal to the ancient creed"
(5).

Several other things might be said of this icon and its accompanying commentary. One is that the female's strength consists in her self-assertion; her autonomy both precedes the action and is constituted by it. Yet her heroism is masked or subsumed by the patriarchal encoding: she spurns but he is honored. Another is that personal relations are subsumed under and encode public/social and ideological relations. Specifically, the rape as a site of phallocentrism is dispersed in favor of rape as a site of patriarchal, that is religious, order; rape is defined as a liminal act that blurs "racial"/ethnic divisions. A final point is that one is what one chooses: fidelity, faith itself, and the terms of one's commitment to the community defined by it, is a choice. Put another way, one might say that what is apparently a given is in fact a construction. As a fable for the social politics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Kohut's introduction suggests that religion and ethnicity, like gender, are to be constructed. The construction is determined by the intersection of a variety of dominant and minority discourses that *this* chapter tracks. The icon may therefore also serve as heraldic device for my text.

Kohut continues her commentary, depicting her father Alfred Bettelheim and iconically rendering her father's history. If only briefly, she alludes to the nationalist debates as well as to the religious ferment that made his Hungarian birthplace an arena of radical and liberal change in the period that followed the Enlightenment: Bettelheim allies himself with Kossuth and as part of the larger coalition of Jew and Gentile wins passage for the bill emancipating the Jews in 1867. Alexander Kohut, already a renowned young rabbi, is also present at these negotiations. Later to become the first Jew elected to the Hungarian parliament as representative of their community, we meet, almost parenthetically, the man who will become Kohut's husband.²

On one level, this commentary suggests the source and development of ideas like romanticism and its nationalist outgrowth in western Europe. While a post-colonial era has taught us to be suspicious of a discourse privileging Western thought, and that of

² In the event, Kohut decided to accept a call to come to the United States and accept a position as a rabbi and, as it turned out, leadership of the incipient conservative religious community; it was then that he and Rebekah met. As a consequence, Kohut was actually never seated in the Hungarian parliament. (See Davis, "Appendix," 346.

western Europe in particular, Kohut's maneuver must be understood in light of an unwillingness to surrender to an ideology which assumes that all good flows from one's (re)birth on native American soil. That is, she seeks to counter the prevailing ahistorical mentality of the United States, which bereaves immigrants of their past and obscures the country's own origins in mythology. In the first quarter of the century when Kohut is writing, that mythology has developed almost to the point of parody: a manifest destiny turned in upon itself--isolationist, crudely pro-American and anti-unAmerican. (Kohut's readership is not likely to be nativist, but it is one that has been contaminated by nativist prejudices.) And Kohut, wishing her text to acknowledge that history does not begin (nor end) with one's immigration to the United States, crosses and recrosses the border--geographical, historical, geneological--to expand the textual boundaries of her biography. From a critical perspective, it seems important to note that Kohut's subsequent nationalist rhetoric derives not only from her and her family's commitment to the country where they settled but is a transmutation of nineteenth-century romantic ideals in the service of the state that had their roots else-

where.³

On another level, the iconic allegory depicts the encounter between Jew and Gentile. While one might use this to argue for Kohut's anxious desire to placate a Protestant reader concerned with the Jew's "ghetto mentality," it is also useful to see it as a synchronic emblem of a temporal counterpart--a long history of

³ A lighter example, drawn from Kohut's biographical appreciation of her stepson and colleague, Alexander Kohut, also illustrates my point about a prior commitment to the creation of a national culture. As proof of the Kohut family's allegiance to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Kohut cites the fact that four of her stepdaughters were named after Austrian princesses and a fifth after the empress herself. Indeed, Alexander Kohut, as an important political leader, had made the acquaintance of the emperor, who visited Kohut's synagogue in Grosswardein. (See also *My Portion* 117.)

On a more serious note, I am here trying to counter what I consider to be the somewhat reductive criticism that asserts that "ethnic" writers wrote an Americanist rhetoric that was *simply* a strategy of assimilation; in Dearborn, I think this is in part a failure to consider the Americanist rhetoric that pervaded all writing in the post-Civil War period, both by those who approved a wholesale patriotism and by those who challenged America to live up to the ideals she championed. In other words, this rhetoric was by no means restricted to immigrant writers. And, as I suggest above, this reductionist view ignores the global phenomenon of nationalism and nationalist debates that accompanied secularism and the constitution of the modern state. (It also ignores the special jeopardy under which Jews felt themselves to be as a "nation" and the pains they needed to take to assure the countries in which they settled of their loyalty.) In ignoring this phenomenon, the critical response seems to parallel the naive assumptions of Kohut's original audience and therefore constitutes a parody of it.

Jewish-Gentile relations anterior to the Bettelheim/Kohut situation in America. Related to this history, even serving as its basis, is the role of Jews in public life. For the parable is also postulating the dual aspect of Jewish culture: Bettelheim and Kohut are defined as both secular and spiritual leaders in a discourse that has already learned the distinction between the mundane and the empyrean. In Bettelheim, the dual commitment is first reflected in this country when he becomes a medical student, following in the family tradition that saw many of his male ancestors become doctors to the noble courts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire: "He was already a rabbi, he would be a physician as well, and embody the entire tradition in his own person. He would thus be the genuine healer, ministering to both the soul and the body" (18). Subsequently, he will also seek to "minister" to the body politic, through a variety of interfaith activities, moral reform, and prison reform (20, 41, 54-55)

Kohut's emphasis on her lineage is itself remarkable: it both serves to embed her life in history ("the best history is biography") and to accrue to that endeavor an aura of nobility.⁴ But the historicization

⁴ Rendering genealogy and history equivalent, genealogy as history, I would again stress, are European-identified elements and to be contrasted with America's mythologizing of itself and the country's

of Jewish public life and the Jewish-Gentile encounter is not only evident in the geneology Kohut provides for her father; it is also one that is traced through her female lineage. And the incorporation of that lineage is also remarkable because the interlinking icons then become the basis for redefining the nature of apostasy.

That is, in iconizing the female line, "knowledge," and especially knowledge of the "other," becomes again a site of contestation. What in the opening parable was understood as constitutive of religious fidelity is subsequently understood as defining women's struggle for emancipation and equality. In this transmutation, the trope of women's education is necessarily foregrounded. "My father's grandmother, Eva, was noted for her intellectual attainments and wide culture in a time when higher education for women was generally frowned upon": she became "a learned Talmudist" and "under the famous reformer and evangelical pastor Hodze," she also went on to become "a fine student of classical and modern literature" (7). Kohut's mother,

equation of itself with the democratic/populist ideal, which have been articulated by our most celebrated critics including R.W.B. Lewis, Leo Marx, and Henry Nash Smith. This explanation is not intended to preclude an awareness of Kohut's status anxiety nor that anxiety as a motive for Kohut's delineation.

too, struggled with the norms of a parochial culture: "She was too well educated, too enlightened. As a mere girl she had won their disapproval [that of the Jewish community] by being the first Jewess to become a schoolteacher in Hungary"; and in the Jewish towns of Hungary, where tradition "sat" like a patriarch "upon the throne" of power, Kohut asks us to imagine "what was thought of this woman who chose the classroom rather than the kitchen for her sphere." Consistent, "the Jewish villagers of Komorn" ostracized her mother, labelling her an apostate for knowing other cultures and thinking them good (8-9).⁵

Even more crucial than her education perhaps was the mother Henrietta Weintraub's view of herself. If education breaks the link between gender and biology by proposing untraditional capabilities for women (Smith-Rosenberg 247-250; Rosenberg 52-113),⁶ it also presup-

⁵ The advanced attainments of these generations of women may also be attributed to campaigns conducted by various governments seeking to establish political power through successive programs of Germanization and Magyarization. See Perlman, who notes that "unlike Jewish women in Poland who used prayer books in Yiddish, the women in Hungary usually had books in Hungarian or German" (64).

⁶ See especially Rosenberg's chapter on the new psychology and the new woman: only with the work of Helen Thompson at the University of Chicago and Leta Stetter Hollingworth at Columbia University was a scientific basis developed for severing sexuality from intelligence or intellectual performance. However, this evidence, accumulated just prior to World War I,

poses persons aspiring to realize themselves. Kohut's mother thought of herself as an autonomous *and* as a sexual being, a woman with needs and desires that she could act to fulfill. A widow with a child, she not only returned to teaching after her son's birth, she also dared to remarry, and in the process, violated the rabbinical code that required her to have a dowry in lieu of either the child or the education that she had.

Once again, as in the initial iconic allegory, a woman manifests heroism in defying the conventional norms of the society, but in this case, as distinguished from the earliest instance, her defiance is directed toward the local community rather than toward the dominant culture, and it not only insists on woman's right to her mind, as the allegorical portrait of Kohut's grandmother does, but on woman's right to her body. Rather than winning tolerance or acceptance, however, the mother's re-marriage and continued teaching activity brings further vilification and therefore proves an impetus to the family's expatriation. In the first of several moves that will eventually take them to America, the family resettles in Kaschau and then

also undermined the separate-spheres argument that volunteer activists like Kohut used to extend their domain and justify their public work.

makes its way to the larger city of Freystadt, before carrying Rebekah with them to the United States in 1867.

This originary narrative thus situates Kohut in relation to a prior feminist discourse at the same time that it establishes her in America. (Subsequently, Kohut will also extend this feminist discourse and re-define it in American terms, that is, in terms of local circumstances and social realities.) As the figure of the new woman, Kohut's mother instantiates modernity, with its secular norms and its commitment to public education (as opposed to the apprenticeship as the system of learning) and the rise of professions, its preoccupation with the woman question, and its social and economic mobility. The motive force of migration is also defined by Kohut in terms of a cultural politics that derives from shifting and contested definitions for the public and the private. In particular, she points iconically to her mother as the heroine, her pivotal role in the effort to redraw the boundaries that previously marked the female body as the text of a communal and public discourse.⁷ The nar-

⁷ Concomittantly Kohut's rhetorical strategy involves suppressing the degree to which her father's activities and stances also met with contention within the Jewish community; Bettelheim's own radicalism as well as Weintraub's were probably equal factors in the decision to immigrate.

rative thereby suggests that as with regard to ethnicity, so with regard to gender: in the encounter with modernity, a female identity is to be understood not as born but made, specifically *self-defined*. Kohut's geneological portrait gallery represents us with a complete iconography for her own autobiography.

The gallery serves as a site for the reconstruction of her own identity at a crossroad, at which are met again the figures of religion and ethnicity, nationality, femininity. Put more strongly, the autobiographical structure, its themes and tropes, its organizational patterns and focal elements derive from gender, ethnicity, and nationality. The autobiography depicts Kohut's grappling with the terms of ethnicity and gender in their relation to one another--the terms that she sees as the twin elements of her identity and as the twin sources of apostasy. The significance of these tropes within Kohut's work cannot be fully understood without a knowledge of women's role in Judaism or a knowledge of the theological ferment which institutional Jewry was undergoing, but before initiating that discussion, I would like to show how Kohut extended the terms of identity/apostasy to herself through her life-writing.

Coming from Hungary, Kohut was neither German nor Eastern European; her migration occurred almost immediately after the Civil War but before the great immigrations from the Pale beginning in 1881 and subsequent to the entry of German Jews into this country which began in 1840 and peaked in the decade prior to her own arrival. Rooted in academic, professional, and rabbinical life, her family's culture had little in common with the secular and commercial world of the German Jews and less with their commercial success.⁸ The totally new place of religion in the modern world,

⁸ For a salient discussion of the heterogeneity of Hungarian Jewish immigrants and the differences between them, the Hungarian community, and the German-Jewish community with whom they tended to assimilate, see Perlman, esp 26-45, 86-160, 220-231. Perlman notes that this intelligentsia and revolutionary vanguard was represented not only by Bettelheim but by rabbis Benjamin Szold, Adolph Heubach, Solomon Sonneschein, Leopold Wintner, and Aaron Wise who became leaders of religious reform in this country. Notwithstanding this leadership (or perhaps as the price for gaining this authority), they gradually moved from political and religious radicalism to a position of "moderating influence which emphasized compromise and cooperation," based less on their force as a collective body and more on their force, power, and intellect as individuals (201; 96-97). The rabbi's tenuous position in the United States is a truism of all the historical literature, for example Raphael, Sachar, Davis, Sklare. Finally, it should also be noted that a significant number of daughters and wives of these men became social leaders, among them Rosa Sonneschein and Henrietta Szold.

and especially in the emergent capitalist world of the United States, made her father a potentially marginal figure rather than a commanding one and rendered the family's economic position precarious at best, dependent on Bettelheim's congeniality with those whom he might very well wish to criticize (36, 113-14).⁹ Moreover, these families who constituted Bettelheim's congregation in all likelihood maintained traditional German/American (German-American?) bourgeois households, while paying lip service to a liberal rhetoric. Thus when Kohut began attendance at the University of California, the trustees of the congregation lodged an official objection with her father. Instructed by family history and then by the American suffrage movement, Kohut found herself in a domain in which elements seemed to overlap only to diverge: "It was almost as strange to them [the board of trustees] as my mother's learning had been to the little com-

⁹ In her second autobiographical work, Kohut writes of being "intensely aware of three distinct civilizations in my life, merging so that they no longer have distinctness, but overlap each other": the Jewish side, the European ("Hungary, with its history of a thousand years, its Magyar, Oriental and Slavic roots, its color, music, traditions, greatness and pettiness lives somehow within me."), and the American (300-302). Robert Perlman has seen the group of which Kohut was a part as "bridging three worlds," as he entitles his history of the community.

munities in Hungary" (71). Thus Kohut experienced what we would call downward mobility and an "outsider" status, at odds not only with the dominant group but with her own community, where religious and ethnic affiliation were put in conflict with her developing identity as a young woman.

It should come as no surprise that Kohut defines her struggle through an adolescent rebellion against her father,¹⁰ which is, at the same time, a rebellion against religion and the larger social community as well: "Religion oppressed me" (63). She sees in Judaism a religion that is unable to "'to rejoice in the Lord'" and the "'beauty of the world'. . . . On the holy days in the temple he [the Jew] beat his breast, his voice quivered with the sadness of the memorial service" (67). The institutional sexism and the unregenerate patriarchal ideology that alienates her from her father's "house" is only occasionally foregrounded, though frequently expressed through indirection, as in the episode centered on her refusal to

¹⁰ In a later memoir (1950), having been taught to psychologize events, Kohut "reads" this extended period of turmoil that she underwent regarding Judaism as "purely" a matter of adolescent revolt, ignoring both the historical moment and the several dimensions of sexual politics inhering in her crisis (*More Yesterdays* 164-65).

teach the catechism in Sunday School. Telling the biblical stories of Ruth instead results in her dismissal and embarrassment for her father (54). Most frequently, the struggle with religion's patriarchal politics is tempered by its externalization. That is, Kohut projects Judaism at odds with the dominant culture, both in terms of America's anti-Semitism and its materialist ambitions. But the Sunday-School incident clearly signals the opposition between ethnicity and gender that intensified with her coming of age.

To conclude: Kohut's rebellion against the prescribed norms verges on apostasy. Her pose echoes that of the iconic images of the family history, but it also overtakes and outruns them: Kohut would seem to separate the feminist assertion from the ethnic definition that previous generations had held in alliance, however tenuous.

Yet just as feminism mediates Kohut's rebellion, so it mediates her ultimate reconciliation with Judaism. Simultaneously, this mediation is represented by a significant shift in the iconography of the Gentile-Jewish encounter: Kohut's return to Judaism is mediated through Christian *women*, whom she sees as successfully emancipated and worthy of emulation. They are, first her elementary school teacher Carolina Lora Hunt, second, the principal of her normal school, Mary

Kincaid, whose respect for the very traditions Kohut wishes to renounce causes her to reexamine them, and finally Fidelia Jewett, whom she works for in the kindergarten established by Kate Douglas Wiggin and her stepsister Nora Smith (59, 64, 66, 71). All are accepting of Kohut and of her religion and thus make it possible for her to reconcile her religious identity with her view of herself as an emancipated woman.

Equally true is that Kohut's recognition of the role of women within Jewry and her ability to redefine them in modern terms also creates the possibility for her reconciliation. The turning point comes:

As I learned of the careers of some of the great women of Israel--of the Mendelssohn daughters, of Sarah Copia Sullam, Deborah Ascarelli, high in the councils of the Italian court, of Rebecca Gratz . . . , of Emma Lazarus, equally beloved a century later, of Grace Aguilar and a host of others--a new pride possessed me. More cause for worship, more examples of nobility, richer race consciousness. What would they be like today? Comparison suggested itself with the women of the day who were fighting the battle for the emancipation of their sex.

. . . .

I associated the work of these women [Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Julia Ward Howe, Harriet Beecher Stowe] with the history of the women of my own people, and found much similarity in their ideals and aspirations. Deborah became to me not a prophetess but a great political emancipator. Mother Sarah stood for the single standard of wife and mother in the home. What I learned of the Jewesses of the past caused me to feel the burden of responsibility devolving upon the Jewesses of the present and future. . . . (72,73)

Thus we see Kohut reformulating a religious rhetoric into a feminist one. This rhetoric of female heroism allows her to bring her ethnic and religious identity into accord with her sense of herself as a woman. But, as I have suggested above, the iconography displayed here of the "meeting" of Gentile and Jew is differently limned from those we have previously viewed in our gallery; in both the private and the public realms, in the actual and the ideal encounters between Gentile and Jew, rather than representing the figures in opposition, one triumphant over or in rebellion against the other, Kohut forges a medallion of female solidarity--a sororal icon.

It is also interesting that Kohut assimilates the biblical figures to the suffragists rather than assimilating the activists to the religious idealists: she figures Deborah as political emancipator rather than Howe or Stowe as prophet. In other words, her text suggests that she believes that were these women alive in her own day they would be engaged in secular rather than religious labor. In fact, this issue preoccupies the remainder of Kohut's text, as Kohut seeks to define what a woman's work might be if she carried it on in her Father's House, just as in her life she struggled to do that work while in her father's and husband's houses. In the following section, I am interested in

indicating the biographical/textual displacements that resulted as Kohut struggled with the competing claims of feminism and Judaism.

Kohut's reconciliation with Judaism is indeed a return to the Father's house, understood as the rubric for patriarchal culture and religious order. It coincides with Kohut's coming of age, her young adulthood, her young womanhood. Initially, Kohut defines her "real mission in life" as being "a worker in the front ranks of American Jewish womanhood" (74); she is imbued with "spending myself in service, and in leading a life of significance" (118). But almost as soon as she is swept up by this internal conversion, she meets, falls in love with, and marries Alexander Kohut, a man twice her age, recently widowed, and with eight children. She gives up "for the nonce, all thought of my own individuality and let myself be absorbed by the lives of my husband and children" (120). Thus the return to the Father's house is inscribed within the (re)creation of a patriarchal household, in which Kohut becomes a mother without having had children, (an interesting and not insignificant disjunction between biological and gender roles). In a parody of tragi-comic proportions, Kohut loses herself at almost precisely the same moment that she finds herself.

Yet Kohut does not utterly disavow the decision to go public that was implicit in her feminist commitment. Only now each stage in her development is linked to and defined by the men in her life. She begins by volunteering for the neighborhood playground association and later works with in the Women's Health Protective Association, marking her debut as a public speaker at a protest meeting in Steinway Hall at the age of twenty-three. She notes that her husband's jealousy of the publicity awarded her (she is quoted in the newspaper) doesn't stop her from participating (128-29; 132-33). Nonetheless, it is work that she can leave when she needs to travel with her husband or when they decide that she should take on the responsibilities of his correspondence and the translation of his sermons (135; 155).

Her brother's illness and death and her father's decline and subsequent death in 1890 precipitate a crisis (171-72). Her response is to throw herself into public work, notably of a religious-identified nature: "this was the beginning for me of many years of service in Jewish activities" (173)--first establishing a sisterhood at her husband's temple (Central Synagogue), then setting up a day-nursery and kindergarten to serve immigrant mothers of the Lower East Side. Just as she is to launch her national career, having been invited

to speak at the Exposition of the Jewish Women of America under the Congress of Religions at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, her husband falls fatally ill. Within a year, only eight years after their marriage, she finds herself widowed: "The men I had loved most, whose guidance had been a shining light in life, had been taken from the world. Brother, father, husband; all in four swift years" (192).

Kohut responds at two levels: the first is economic. She immediately acts to fulfill her responsibility as head of the household, and her decision to work is, in part, motivated by necessity. This in itself was a new role being *written* into middle-class definitions of women, and Kohut's descriptions are unpretentious contributions to that account. She notes the difficulty of a woman in her position of determining "appropriate work" and comments at length on the need for a male benefactor to sponsor her series of "parlor lectures on English poets," given in the home of the philanthropist Jacob Schiff soon after she had become a widow. (Her wry comment: "Deep in my heart, I felt the amateurishness of my efforts, but it was no time to question one's abilities too closely" 195.) Later, she teaches confirmation classes to adolescent girls at Temple Emanu-El (222), and, subsequently, she takes the momentous step of opening the

Kohut School for Girls, which she ran for seven years. It is difficult to know how many of the "volunteer" activities she also engaged in carried with them stipends and living expenses, which taken together insured the family's economic security. Yet while Kohut is imprecise where we would most like documentation, she is wonderfully open about the needs themselves. Just as she marks the decision to keep the family intact through her own work (194), so she notes that wise investments and new affluence (accompanied by the gradual contraction of the family as various members married and the additional income provided by her eldest stepson when his renewed health enabled him to assume greater responsibility for the family's maintenance) permitted her once again the opportunity to come to grips with defining her life mission (237-45; 74).

The second response to the death of brother, father, and husband is also about what she was to do. But this response is at once more complicated, ambivalent, and textured. Kohut begins by asking: "What could I do to carry on their work [that of her sibling, father, and husband], to keep their spirit alive, to have them beside me always even if they were gone?" In dialogue with herself, she continues:

The answer to my queries did not come at that time. I saw no special fields in which I could do definite, concrete things in line

with their humanitarianism and love of Jews and Judaism. I could not remotely dream that it was through the awakening of women that the spiritual solution should come, and that by the assertion of my Jewish womanhood as well as the Jewish womanhood the world over I should be carrying on the noble tradition handed down to me (195).

Forces "work to bring the answers to my spiritual problems and put into my hands the means whereby I should always walk in the paths blazed by father and husband and feel that they were constantly with me, my deeply loved companions and leaders" (198). This serves then as the rationale by which she is moved to accept the presidency of the New York chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women (199). (The organization had had its birth under the auspices of the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893, an event to which I shall return in a subsequent section.) What is relevant here is that in 1897, when Kohut assumed this role, the organization was on the cusp of redefining, that is to say, feminizing Judaism. As much as it proved a turning point in the history of women and their relation to Judaism, it likewise was the turning point for Kohut's own life. And her successes and failures were to be mirrored in the successes and failures of the organization as a whole. ("The best history is biography" 72-73).

The discussion of this pivotal event occurs in the chapter entitled "The Emergence of the Jewess" (192-205). The title and what it marks is as noteworthy as the preceding passage with which Kohut prefaces it is curious in its disingenuous disclaimer. After all, "the assertion of my Jewish womanhood" seems a curious statement in light of the fact that Kohut was already well-known both as the wife of an eminent theologian and scholar and as an activist within institutional Jewry as well as within the secular public sphere. Yet this assumption of the role of "Jewess" clearly represents for her a new identity, a rebirth. The explanation for this apparent disjuncture resides in the death of all those men dearest to Kohut. As the introduction to this part of her life poignantly suggests, Kohut's religious involvement served to bind up the traumas that she had suffered; and if brother, father, and husband had abandoned her, she would not abandon them. Indeed she might insure their presence by becoming them, as it were: Thus she speaks of acting as surrogate, taking her "brother's place in the family" (170-71). Kohut had already noticed that with each crisis, she had sought refuge in some institutional aspect of religion; secular public activity was insufficient. In other words, just as her earlier rebellion had linked the father in the house with the

Patriarchal divinity, so her need to hold onto these men in her life found a symbolic substitute in intensified religious identification.

And it is at this transposed level that she can, in effect, take the place of these men, without acknowledging any desire to supplant them. For the assumption of the title of Jewess, which the text implicitly recognizes, could occur only by displacing the Father, that is to say, the patriarchal definition of religion. This definition had been reconfirmed by Alexander Kohut when he assumed the intellectual leadership within institutional Jewry. In doing so, he had insisted that religion resided in the traditions of the fathers, of which, by definition, Kohut and other women could have no part. To be a Jewess in this context was to take on a burden of religious identification for which there was no real historical precedent. It was in the former's religious terms, apostasy.

Thus if religious commitment enabled Kohut to rationalize activity that for her time was extraordinary, it was itself never quite free of guilt. To work in her Father's house was meant to insure that her audaciousness as a woman would be sanctioned by her fidelity as a Jew. But the very claim to a positive, self-defining religious identity engendered its own anxiety. Thus the life--and the text--shaped by the

twin and sometimes rival claims of feminism and Judaism is one inevitably defined by a variety of strategems. These strategems obscure as much as they reveal the varied efforts to assuage, evade, and undo the patriarchal norms that constituted the dominant culture and thus also symbolize Kohut's ambivalent submission to them. I want to emphasize one major episode in Kohut's autobiography as an exemplary instance of Kohut's textual strategies for inscribing her resistances, successes, and failures in defining herself as a feminist within patriarchy: her establishment of a school for girls.

Opening in 1899 with 100 students, the Kohut School for Girls was a success. The success might be attributed to the new status Kohut had achieved within the Americanized bourgeois Jewish community of New York City. The significance of the school's founding, however, goes far beyond its value in delineating Kohut's status or even the new status of the Jewish community. First, Kohut's position as its founder symbolized significant new roles for women, specifically the assumption of administrative, as well as policy-making responsibility for educational, and as we shall see, religious goals. Second, the school rested on the successful realization of feminist claims for all women's right to education and implied a new agenda for

the Jewish American middle-class woman in secular society. Third, the school's curriculum and organization also implied a new and different role for women *within* Judaism. Rather than assert these claims directly, however, and risk censure of her overt challenge to tradition, Kohut describes them indirectly in terms of her activities at the school.

The episode is also valuable because it is delineated by Kohut's meditative efforts to clarify the relationship of the feminist and religious/ethnic identities that I have been tracing. She notes that "It was ironic that this enterprise which I had launched for the sake of my family's maintenance should be instrumental in keeping me from them" (231). Yet in her planning, she "foresaw that in a few years the hearth would be deserted, and the school would almost be like a family on a larger scale. The school and the home were always complementary in my mind; I was a teacher in the home, and a mother in the school" (234). This is consistent with the domestic rhetoric she had earlier used to sum up her newly developed public role "that while woman's interests ought to begin at home and ought to end there, they need not necessarily confine themselves to it alone" (206-07). It is also consistent with the "domestic" rhetoric that American

women activists had developed to enlarge their public roles (see Chapter Six).

Yet Kohut also makes more expansive claims for her activity. The school was a "a real vocation . . . something solid and substantial, *and* a career."¹¹ Moreover," Kohut goes on, the school "met a religious need of mine" (234). These assertions are striking. Establishing the school meant consultation with a variety of business and education leaders, attending courses, visiting other institutions--all of which Kohut threw herself into with enthusiasm. Then running the school drew on a multitude of her interests and desires. For as well as acting as administrator, Kohut took direct responsibility for the girls' religious educations, insuring their "knowledge of the Bible and ceremonial

¹¹ Although Kohut does not spell out what made this experience different from her role as the leader of an organization with # of members during her tenure, one may speculate that Kohut found herself increasingly uncomfortable placing herself within the category of volunteer activism, with its particular class bias, its association with an old-style philanthropy, with which, as we shall see, she was much disillusioned, its concomitant lack of professionalism, and indeed perhaps even the lack of payment with which it was associated. A later discussion will also illuminate the crisis within the organization, one which would, on one hand, serve to "professionalize" and render philanthropy "scientific," and, on the other hand, turn the organization from its earlier, more radical religious-feminist aims to philanthropic endeavor in a new but acceptable redefinition of women's work that permitted its appropriation by institutional Jewry.

observance" as well as instilling in them "certain moral and ethical standards" of behavior (228). She is there to light the Sabbath candles at sundown on Friday, attending the services on Friday and Saturday, and holding classes in Jewish history during the week (229). At the school, in other words, within its secularized domain, Kohut authorized herself to define the terms of a Jewish female identity, not only teaching as her mother had done, but setting the institutional policy and defining the school's religious philosophy as well. The institution and her role there represented another successful phase in the successive fusions of her feminism and Judaism.

Nonetheless by 1906, Kohut had closed the school. Perhaps the pivotal element in its closing was not the inability to reconcile the demands of home and school life but her discovery that her stepson was dissatisfied by the secondary role that he played in the school (230). Neither may have predominated; rather than external pressures, the critical factor may have been Kohut's inability to sustain her autonomy; she may not have been able to resist the internalization of patriarchal definitions that insisted on the secondary role of women and on women's placing the fulfillment of their needs second to those of men and children. It is otherwise difficult to explain Kohut's abrupt decision

to make "the greatest personal sacrifice I had been called upon to make" (232). Nothing in the text quite justifies it, on one hand; on the other, the whirlwind of activity that Kohut describes and the intensity of her dedication which it signifies is patent. Similar tensions and repressions can be discerned in subsequent episodes, less so when Kohut discusses her establishment of the Employment Bureau at the YWHA and more so when she describes her efforts to organize women independently for reconstruction work during the First World War (253-254; 268-270). These tensions and repressions may also account for the modest tone with which she appraises her work in establishing the World Council of Jewish Women (280-184). The muted text thus speaks, or rather, muted, becomes itself an icon establishing the limits of a woman writing in her father's house.

After Kohut returned to the Jewish fold, she used that textual moment to introduce us to "the significant Jewish history" being made in America, describing the controversies sweeping through Jewish congregational life in the 1880s and early 1890s. (Recognizing the Christian component of her audience, Kohut notes: "We have seen a similar alignment during the last few years between the fundamentalists and modernists of the

Protestant Church," 76). While Bettelheim might have counted himself among the radical reformers, the entry of Kohut's husband onto the American scene, as I have previously suggested, proved as fateful for institutional developments as it did for Kohut's personal life. With his particular combination of skills of modern historical scholarship and sentimental attachments to tradition, and his gentle mien, lack of pettiness, and remoteness from the personalities and their quarrels with one another, Alexander provided theological and intellectual leadership. In particular, he gave new support to the more conservative elements among reformers and thus proved decisive in a realignment of forces (79-86). A new division emerged among those seeking religious change, between those who were to become the leaders of Reform Jewry, and those that Davis has called members of the Historical School, who were to be the intellectual forebears of what eventually came to be known as Conservative Judaism.

Chapter 5

Reform Judaism and the Woman Question

While institutional Jewry was undergoing ferment that subsequently resulted in the three major divisions of Reform, Conservatism, and Orthodoxy, it was also, through its male theologians and documented by its male historians (who were frequently one and the same), writing rules and footnotes regarding the role of women in religious life. This section, then, has two purposes: On one hand, it is intended to provide a summary of the relationship between the efforts to reform or modernize Judaism and the role of women within modern Jewry, historical background which I think necessary to an understanding of the women being considered in this chapter and their autobiographical projects. On the other hand, it also undertakes a feminist analysis of the historical sources themselves in order better to understand the ways in which women and the role of women are and are not acknowledged. Both the rhetorical presence of women and the gaps and fissures in the statements about them, along with the absence of women's own statements, are meaningful contexts for the

autobiographical projects that Kohut and Solomon undertook.¹

In 1837, in a now-famous essay "The Position of the Woman of Our Time," Samuel Geiger, a reform scholar and rabbi, called for the abolition of legalities inhibiting or penalizing women and proposed that men and women be considered equal in religion *except where differentiation flowed from natural distinctions* (Meyer 140). This statement, including the qualifying phrase I have underscored, conditioned the religious relationship between American-Jewish men and women through 1920, and, in certain segments of the religious community, through World War II and beyond--Kohut herself refers to it as late as 1932 (*Jewish Women's Organization* 172). In its earliest form, it signals a post-Enlightenment rhetoric being reshaped by a masculinist culture, one which proved amenable to the developing separate-spheres ideology of the women's movement of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century

¹ The decision to begin this historical discussion with religious developments in Germany is supported by most historians, however they choose to understand the relationship between the developments there and those in the United States. See, for example, Philipson (329), Raphael (9), Sachar (157), Sklare (23); Davis (*Conservative Judaism* 6-7) and Jick (160) tend to see American reform as representing a more or less sharp break with German antecedents.

America. It is a rhetoric that was to be given a variety of class and political permutations as Jewish men reshaped the role of women within a reformed religious context.²

Its significance cannot be overstated--not only for what it says about the definition of women within Judaism, but for how it redefines the accepted notion of reform. The crisis to which the statement spoke, in other words, was not merely a religious crisis, but a

² The earliest historical documentation of women's concern with regard to their role within Jewry has been noted only recently by the latest historian of the Jewish Reform Movement: it is to be found in the architectural plans and subsequent engravings of the first "reform" temple in Hamburg dedicated in 1818, which allocated a little less than half the space of the temple to women in the balcony. What was significant was that there was no partition between the women and the site of the male congregation and that relatively more room was devoted to women's seating than was common in traditional synagogues; previously, religious codes would have obviated the need for seats for single women, who thus would not have been counted in determining space needs. A contemporary observer explains that "'the inclination for a reform of the worship service was stirred among many, especially among the female sex'" (See Meyer 55, 408n). Several historians also mention that confirmation ceremonies initiated in 1814 in Scandinavian communities were imported into Germany, beginning 1828. Available to both boys and girls, these ceremonies, probably appropriated from Christian counterparts, signal a new kind of equity within the synagogue, which also extends to the religious education that was of necessity being provided for *both* sexes. Later in the text I shall note similar developments when they occur in the United States.

gender crisis. Or, put another way, the religious crisis was inherently a crisis of gender. This intrinsic linkage is repressed in the mainstream literature; it is suggested in the feminist analyses of women's involvement in Judaism.

Initially, then, this statement set the stage for the first of a series of rabbinical conferences held in Germany intended to respond to the growing crisis. For that conference in Frankfurt in 1845, Rabbi Samuel Adler prepared a learned paper in Hebrew, in which he argued for the religious emancipation of women based on an extensive consideration of talmudic sources. It was thus not likely to be understood by women auditors or observers, who traditionally knew only Yiddish or German, and generally lacked access to rabbinical learning. The bolder, more radical Samuel Holdheim issued a refutation in German, insisting that the arguments for woman's religious emancipation could not rest on a misguided effort to rationalize rabbinical authority and harmonize Talmudic argument with so-called scientific principles; instead, female equality must rely on principles that break sharply with the past (Meyer 140, 429n). In the rabbinical conference at Breslau that followed in 1846, the men notably failed to discuss the report of the commission that they had empowered to explore the issue. Both Philipson and

Meyer accept uncritically the historical record which indicates that the lack of time prohibited discussion of the report (221-222; 140).

The report that was neither discussed nor voted upon favored full and absolute religious equality for women. The most significant provisions, as Meyer tells us, "obligated women to time-related duties considered still binding, such as prayer, made them countable members of the worship quorum (*minyan*), and declared that women's vows could not be abrogated by husbands or fathers" (140).

Though no more rabbinical assemblies were convened in Germany, an appeal issued by members of the Reform Congregation of Berlin called for a forum to discuss and then to issue an authoritative statement that would be "*binding* upon the representatives" in such matters as "marriage and divorce, . . . [and] the position of women" (Philipson 236). Out of the forum grew the Association for Reform in Judaism, which was indeed responsible for instituting such "bold" institutional innovations as the use of female voices in the choir and the seating of men and women on the left and right sides of the auditorium, respectively (rather than placing women either in a balcony area away from the altar as had been done at Hamburg or behind a curtain or other cordoned area as required by Orthodox prac-

tices) (245-246). Philipson, in describing the significance of these changes quickly moves from the assertion that "The first [practical] step was taken toward the religious emancipation" to the annunciation "that the Jewish woman had entered a new kingdom" (250). This may serve as a prelude to his quotation from the Association's general credo: "'Let there be from now on no distinction between duties for men and women, unless flowing from the natural laws governing the sexes; no assumption of spiritual minority, as though she were incapable of grasping the deep things in religion; no institution of the public service, either in form or content, which shuts the doors of the temple in the face of the woman; no degradation of woman in the form of the marriage service, and no applying the fetters which may destroy woman's happiness'" (247). Since the Hamburg Temple and Berlin Reform Congregation remained the only religious reform communities in Germany, they were the only ones who were in a position to fulfill the spirit of the testament. Secondary sources do not record evidence of women participating or assessments of the congregants' fulfillment of the discipline placed on them. In the event, such matters as female equality within religious reform were superceded by the revolutions of 1848, which effectively put an end to further agitation.

As I have indicated before, the discourse of female emancipation within the synagogue was extended in the United States. While the liturgical reform and the inclusion of sermons in German and then in English was by no means addressed exclusively to women, the use of the vernacular signalled an acceptance and an encouragement of an increasingly female laity who had never been permitted to learn Hebrew. Though initially the vernacular was German, Isaac Leeser, beginning in 1849, and then Morris Raphall at B'nai Jeshurun in New York City, preached in English (Leeser's congregation Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia opposed the practice for a number of years); in addition, Raphall published *Ruhama, Devotional Exercises for the Use of the Daughters of Israel* (1852), consistent both with more radical efforts to involve women in the Congregation and to do so within the framework of a "separate-spheres" ideology (Davis, *Conservative Judaism* 123-24; 347-49; 356-58). At about the same time, Max Lilienthal had introduced confirmation ceremonies in his synagogue, implying educational requirements for girls (Marcus 186).³ In an increasingly secular

³ Confirmation seems originally to have been defined as a solemn religious-school graduation ceremony rather than one of a specially religious or sacramental nature. Although it is not clear from my sources, it would seem that in America it became an integral feature of the divine service of the holiday

society, in which men were as likely as women to be ignorant of Jewish history and law, reform moved to devote less and less time to Torah reading and concomitantly more time to rabbinical exegesis and innovative practices, which established the temple more as a center of education than as a site of worship. While this tended to equalize men and women, the site still remained one controlled by males and masculinist notions of women's involvement.

In practice, this meant that they offered the greatest resistance to liturgical practices.⁴ In con-

of Shavuot. See Kaufmann Kohler "Bar Mitzvah," *CCAR Responsa* 81.

⁴ One clear example of the persistence of a patriarchally-oriented ideology concerns the retention of the bar mitzvah ("son of the covenant") ceremony and the rhetoric surrounding it: Despite the desire of some radical reformers to eliminate the practice as sexist (Kaufmann Kohler wrote the responsa of 1913), confirmation ceremonies did not supplant bar mitzvahs, and it was not until the 1920s that the bat mitzvah, a comparable initiation ceremony for girls, was instituted. At that time it was widely accepted by Reform and Conservative congregations, as well as some Orthodox ones, indicating perhaps how quickly congregations, whatever their theological orientations, responded to and absorbed existing secular norms. Yet as late as 1954, while the reform rabbinate reluctantly encouraged the continuation or resurrection of the bar mitzvah ceremony, it continued, officially and adamantly, to oppose the bat mitzvah as running "counter to tradition," and one for which it claimed there was neither desire "no[r] popular demand"--hardly possible, if in fact the petition for a rabbinical judgment was being called for (*CCAR Responsa*, 79-82; 83-86)! The 1979 responsa did finally respond to this contradiction, by supporting both the bar and bat mitzvahs in Jewish ceremony.

trast, the rabbinate proved more receptive to and often initiated changes in the structure of women's participation in the service. Analogous to the architectural reshaping of the Temple in Hamburg, these might be categorized as changes in the domestic interior of Judaism. In the same year that Raphall developed texts for women, for example, the conservative congregants in Cincinnati's Bene Israel bitterly though unsuccessfully contested women's participation in the choir; Isaac Wise introduced mixed seating in his congregation in Albany (Philipson 473n). This measure was quickly adopted by most "synagogues in imitation of American churches," as Meyer remarks, "where it symbolized not only a higher degree of women's equality but also a link between religion and the values of family life" (242). In fact, Sklare argues that "the family pew system," is a doubly self-reinforcing expression of women's increased participation in the synagogue by virtue of its symbolic expression of her newly-found economic/leisure status and her newly won status within the ethnic group (89). For Rebekah Kohut, its presence was a symbol of liberated Judaism, and she somewhat compulsively referred to its absence as a benchmark of

women's oppression within Judaism. (Much the same way some women in Islamic cultures, especially during the early modern period, have seen in the veil the root of patriarchal evil and, in its elimination, a panacea.)

Changes in liturgical and synagogal practice loomed large in the early stages of modern Jewry, and their impact on women was significant. Two other areas of major importance provide still other bases for assessing the redistribution of power between men and women. One is the theological and legislative arena and the other is political and concerned with self-governance. The reformers acted first in the theological and legislative domain.

At the time that members of the radical wing met to issue their first public statement in 1869, they also adopted a number of resolutions reforming rabbinical legislation on marriage and divorce. Instead of spending pages quoting this material and discussing the subtleties of debate, as he does with regard to all other doctrinal and political issues, Philipson, a reform rabbi, a major spokesman along with Kohler and Hirsch (discussed below) for reform in its second generation, and the first modern historian of the reform movement, relegates this occurrence to a footnote and records it without comment: (1) men and women were to participate in the marriage ceremony as equals,

exchanging rings and the same vows of marriage; (2) certain restrictions, such as the *chalitzah* (the requirement of a widow to marry her brother-in-law with release only possible through the male's refusal) or levirate marriages, as well as polygyny, were nullified; the issue of *agunah* (an abandoned or deserted wife seeking to remarry) was transferred to the domain of the civil court; (3) likewise, divorce was to be considered a civil procedure; remarriage within the synagogue was approved with the proviso that both parties of the divorced couple had agreed to the divorce; the rabbi was urged to investigate and act judiciously regarding other cases (484n). If not for Jewish male historians, then for Jewish women, this might be perceived as the first major breakthrough in the patriarchal religious constraints preventing their egalitarian participation. *Even if such theological assertion merely sanctioned already existing practice*, it marks a legal turning point, one that legitimated the custom of the country and a nonpatriarchal inscription of women within Judaism.

But the fact is that this text was by no means a footnote to history. Not surprisingly, this theological abnegation was critical in destroying the strained coalition of the non-orthodox rabbinate. As Davis notes, from the point of view of the more conservative

members, abolishing the *ketubah*, the traditional marriage contract, and the biblical injunction against a kohen marrying a divorcée and, in general, abrogating Jewish law in marriage and divorce proceedings, made mixed marriages inevitable, and therefore was catastrophic for the continuity of the Jewish community (285). Davis is the only historian to note gender relations as pivotal to the reorganization of institutional Jewry. What he does not say or see is the degree to which traditional religious organization is structured through the erasure of woman's right to choose: female autonomy is made subservient to the preservation of patriarchal authority; by her inscription within the patriarchal text, the female became the womb/carrier of a Jewish identity but only when authorized by the father. Thus radical male reformers, in sweeping away the rabbinical apparatus of a patriarchal religion also dismantled the phallocentric structure that organized Judaic gender relations. They did so inevitably, though perhaps without fully realizing the consequences, since the two in a religious context seem inextricably bound to one another. The 1869 statement approved by no official body both recognizes a *fait accompli* and underscores a *fait manqué*.

By 1885 reformers existed in sufficient numbers, and felt under sufficient threat that they met once

again to formulate a clear platform that would stave off further defections and permit consolidation. Kaufmann Kohler's conference report provided, as I have indicated, the working basis for the reform rabbi's official platform. What is most notable, however, is Kohler's commitment to go forward and to make Judaism "a religion of life," all of which was designed to recommend itself to Jewish women. "Our religious life in America," he notes, "demands woman's help and participation. And I do not hesitate to claim for myself the priority of the claim for *woman's* full admission *into the membership* of the Jewish congregation." He goes on:

Reform Judaism has pulled down the screen from the gallery behind which alone the Jewish woman of old was allowed to take part in divine service. Reform Judaism has denounced as an abuse the old Hebrew benediction: 'Blessed be God who has *not made me a woman*,' borrowed from Plato who, notwithstanding his soul's lofty flights in the highest realms of thought, never realized the high dignity of woman as the co-partner and helpmate of man. Reform Judaism will never reach its higher goal without having first accorded to the congregational council and in the entire religious and moral sphere of life, equal voice to woman with man (Kohler 96).

What is notable and seems to go unnoted till one hundred years after the fact was that the 1885 Conference that constituted the official break between the radical wing and the more conservative historical

school did nothing to deal with the issue raised by Kohler's statement. Regarding women's issues, the 1869 Conference was far more sweeping and radical (Sigal 42). And although "a new spirit" seemed to have "gained hold of the reformers, a kind of Reform triumphalism," they did not see fit to include some statement on women (Plaut 22).⁵ Thus the most radical moment in the history of American reform is silent on the role of women within the movement. Specifically, at a time when the American Jewish reform movement issues a manifesto preparatory to organizing itself institutionally, it does so in a way that provides women with no *political* role and gives them no political base.

Women's political participation within institutional Judaism was thus to be established on a case-by-case basis; every woman, or group of women, would be forced to struggle with her rabbi, with her husband, with the male members of her community without being able to fall back on a standard that had been set by

⁵ As Plaut astutely notes, the reformers used a far more radical vocabulary in the 1869 platform, and in a number of areas, the reformers went far beyond earlier conferences: they denounced *kashrut*, or dietary restrictions, declared Israel to be a religious community and no longer a nation, and broke new ground by declaring social action a part of Jewish religious obligations and by tackling the issue of interfaith relations (22-23).

the community, or its official representatives. Not infrequently, the rhetoric inevitably used to win political gains drew on the language of "natural right," rather than relying on such concepts as individual autonomy. It thus failed to attack the basic premises of patriarchy. As a consequence, widows and unmarried women were able to gain individual memberships (Meyer 285), presumably because they did not have men to represent them, while married women continued to be voiceless. Even without any say-so in the synagogue, many women formed auxiliaries; these were conduits for fundraising, benevolent activity and the fulfillment of traditional social duties, such as providing charity or visiting the sick and those in mourning who were members of the synagogue. Increasingly, women were given responsibility for providing religious education. These auxiliaries, despite their significant contribution to the health and welfare of the community and the synagogue, were given secondary status and forced to importune for inadequate appropriations and to seek authorization for their actions from all-male boards.

In 1887 Rabbi Gustav Gottheil, articulating a religious framework for social justice, inspired the establishment of a Sisterhood for Personal Service in the Reform Temple Emanu-El. Announced in various

Jewish American newspapers, the idea soon spread to congregations throughout the country, and by 1904 counted 6,000 women actively engaged in social service work under its rubric. These sisterhoods responded to the needs of Jews migrating from Eastern Europe; in New York, as well as in other cities, these organizations eventually expanded to include religious schools, week-day kindergartens, an employment bureau, and workrooms for teaching various trades, and later social clubs and cultural groups and music classes staffed by women and older girls of the temple. Despite the obvious ability of these women to organize and govern themselves, the founding president and secretary of the sisterhood were Gottheil and Rabbi Joseph Silverman, respectively (Sobel 211-215).⁶

Meanwhile auxiliary sisterhoods had grown sufficiently, and the Reform rabbinate, yet again anxious

⁶ When Hannah Solomon established a Bureau of Personal Service in Chicago a decade later, she instituted it outside the confines of the temple and chaired it from its inception to 1910, when it was absorbed by the Associated Jewish Charities. As Sochen tells us, the agency served as a "clearinghouse . . . to deal with the multiple needs of the Russian Jewish immigrants in the seventh ward of Chicago," including finances, housing and problem children. The bureau "studied tenement conditions for industrial reports, directed parents with troubled children to the proper agencies, and cooperated regularly with the settlement houses in the area, such as Hull House" (*Consecrate Every Day* 53-54).

for its survival, in 1913 invited delegates from each temple to a conference to federate temple sisterhoods under the aegis of its collective body, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC). David Philipson, erstwhile historian of the movement, does not report his delivering the opening address in which he "defined the task of the new federation as a 'religious and congregational organization' that would be 'the counterpart'" to the male group; notwithstanding, the federation would not initiate change, but "'maintain'" congregations and the Union. The synagogue was a "'man's society,'" and woman's role was to sustain it through the 'inspiration' of home life and by virtue of her superior "'moral personality'" (Kuzmack 173)⁷.

Michael Meyer stresses that the founding president of the federation was someone who believed that a woman's "'first duty was to home and childbearing'" (285-286). But Linda Gordon Kuzmack emphasizes that Carrie Simon had been an active suffragist since the 1890s as well as the first NCJW president of the Cincinnati section, and "far from agreeing that the synagogue was a 'man's society,'" Simon insisted that "'The Synagog shall hear the call of the Sister. The

⁷ Comparable organizations were formed by the Conservative movement (the Women's League of the U.S.) by Mathilde Schechter in 1919 and the orthodox movement (the Women's Branch of the Union of Orthodox Jewish

Synagog is not a masculine institution; it must provide a place of equal *privilege, prayer, activity and responsibility* for the Jewess'" (174).

In 1925, Joseph Leiser could say that "The organization of the synagog in America recruiting membership from among men and women and allowing women a voice in the administration of the synagog, exhibits the instinct of democracy which is one of the most pronounced tendencies in the Judaism of the diaspora" (13). Yet as can be inferred from the preceeding, individual Reform temples extended voting rights to women on an ad hoc basis, beginning only in 1897 with Chicago's Temple Isaiah (Kuzmack 43). Moreover the practice spread slowly probably accompanying either state suffrage or the constitutional amendment in 1920. And consequently it was not until then that women began to gain significant access to religious school committees and in some instances to synagogue boards. Further, as another feminist scholar, Sue Ellen Levi Elwell, indicates, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, established in 1873, "offered women no opportunities for involvement in local or institutional affairs. During the first thirty years of its exist-

Congregations of America) in 1922 (Raphael, 116,135).

ence, not one woman served on the executive board or on the board of governors; nor were any appointed to serve on the committees of the UAHC" (30).⁸

⁸ Kuzmack does detail the efforts of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS) to work for change: It "taught ritual to women, created women's study circles in Judaism, improved synagogue religious schools, and instituted parent teacher associations for them Determined to place women in influential positions within the Reform religious establishment, NFTS secured membership for women on synagogue school boards and on temple boards of trustees. After steady lobbying by NFTS, the UAHC Board declared women eligible for membership on the Executive Board in 1923." But it was not until 1932 that Board membership included three NFTS representatives. NFTS did not, however, as a body oppose the rabbinate, or more specifically, reform rabbinical institutions, who refused to ordain women until 1972 (175, 177). As will become clear in subsequent discussion, Simon is clearly treating NFTS as a successor to the National Council of Jewish Women.

Within the Conservative and Orthodox movements, women became the topic of conscious change and revision only after a 1947 address given by Mordecai Kaplan, leader of Reconstructionism, an offshoot of orthodoxy, and faculty member of the Jewish Theological Seminary. This address stimulated debate that led to revisions approved by the legislative arm of Conservative Jewry, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, meeting in 1955. These revisions essentially placed Conservative women on a par with Reform women in matters of marriage and divorce and congregational participation (Raphael 108). Again, it is difficult to know to what degree this constituted a clarion call or sanction for practices already in place, but it does seem that the United Synagogue of America would not have had to urge its 500 affiliated congregations to give married women a voice and vote equal to their husbands, to offer membership to single women, and permit women to run for any congregational office in 1955, unless these remained live issues. Notwithstanding, Moshe Davis believed the roots of this feminist reformation lay not only with the radical wing of reform but in the changes and adaptations made "internally" by those who originally worked with the more radical wing but ultimately identified themselves as Conservative Jews

While Kohut contended with the beliefs of her father and husband, Hannah Solomon's ideas were shaped in the religious house ruled by Emil G. Hirsch, along with Kohler, his brother-in-law, and David Philipson, a leading advocate of radical reform.⁹ Longtime rabbi of Temple Sinai in Chicago, the founder and editor of *The Reform Advocate*, as well as professor of Rabbinic Literature and Philosophy at the University of Chicago, "his extraordinary oratorical talent regularly" drew some 2,000 listeners (Meyer 272); as the head of Sinai, he was Solomon's congregational leader and her ostensible spiritual advisor. He was also almost exactly her peer. Thus they both were nurtured by the

(124). Thus, he would argue that Kaplan himself is only fulfilling the best tradition of the early twentieth-century conservative movement. Certainly, this is relevant to Kohut's biography and religious position.

⁹ Kohler and Hirsch both married daughters of David Einhorn, the most radical of reformers to migrate from Germany and the one chiefly responsible for articulating a serious theoretical position for reform much as Rebekah Kohut's husband Alexander did precisely thirty years later for the more moderate historical school; Hirsch was the son of the German-born reformer Samuel. I indicate this only to suggest the pattern within the Jewish community of having kinship ties that coincide with ideological positions, a relationship that is then reflected in the rhetorical tropes that characterize the autobiographical discourse, to be examined later.)

same historical climate. Their views constituted by a particular rhetoric afford an opportunity for a study of subtle contrasts, serving as icons of the relationships between gender and ethnicity while suggesting the difference of gender in articulating them, differences due to material/social realities in which their ideological differences were embedded.

In his best-known work, *My Religion* (1925), Hirsch touches on a number of issues that illuminate his view of Judaism and its relation to sexuality and gender. To begin with, he argues that what distinguishes Christianity from Judaism, at least historically, is the former's acceptance and idealization of celibacy as embodied in the personal life of Jesus. Thus, while insisting on Jesus's Jewish identity, Hirsch sees his divergence primarily in his refusal "to assume the responsibility of the married state" and to consecrate married life and therefore be a model for the perpetuation of humanity; Jesus is no Jew in his rejection of filial duty and familial loyalty: From the Jewish point of view there is no contradiction between loyalty to family and loyalty to mankind (44). In fact, this theology is consistent with the reform Jewish effort to develop an ideology of married life in this period. Partly a way of distinguishing Judaism from Christianity, the effort speaks to the group's anxious

regard for its survival, and the search by a highly assimilated community for boundary markers that will set it off from the dominant group. Put another way, the trope of marriage and family life is an allegory for differentiating Jew from Gentile; it narrativizes the difference between two groups who otherwise might well be demographically and culturally indistinguishable. It is overtly understood as a strategy for decentering Judaism: the synagogue along with its adjacent yeshiva or shul are no longer the primary institutions for perpetuating religion. In an increasingly secularized society with the concomitant separation of home and workplace under capitalism, the female, mother and wife, become the agents of assimilation, and thus of religious education and affiliation. In either case, the rhetorical strategy works to gender Judaism and thus re-inscribe the female within a phallocentric border.¹⁰ It might be argued that this con-

¹⁰ Hirsch was not the first nor the only preacher to invoke this rhetoric. Rebekah Kohut had apparently used it for much the same purposes in a widely disseminated and much translated speech she gave at a National Mother's Congress sponsored by the Cleveland White House in 1897. Its title, "Parental Reverence in the Jewish Home," is given only in the *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, and I have been unable to track it down. Giving the speech was personally momentous for Kohut, as well as an important milestone in her career as a public speaker, and she refers to it on several occasions and in her first two memoirs.

stitutes, to borrow post-structuralist terminology from Elizabeth Meese, a double-cross on Hirsch's part, a going over the de-genderized terrain of Reform, in order to remap it in the terms of dual spheres ideology (Meese). Or perhaps, to extend Marjorie Garber's notion, it is a transvestite rhetorical strategy, in which the male presumes to speak as a woman, establishing a patriarchy in drag, without redressing underlying inequalities. This becomes most apparent when we analyze Hirsch's texts that focus specifically on women. (Garber also sees the motif as one that points to cultural anxiety, an insight I will use later in the discussion.)

Hirsch's notion of the role of Jewish women, given the significant role he assigns to family life in the Jewish tradition, makes him receptive to the ideology of separate spheres. We can see both the incorporation of a Christian/romantic ethos, from which the ideology in part derived, and Hirsch's effort to rival and surpass that ideal, thus constituting a contribution to the ethnicizing of gender; thus he blurs Christian maid with pagan mistress and counterposes them to Jewish female *relation*: "Whatever tribute knightly chivalry and courtly minstrelsy may have paid to women rings faint and false, when the melodious harmonies dedicated to the work and worth of the household's queen by the

Hebrew bard are asked to speak to us." The Jewish woman is held responsible for man's survival but only at the price of being translated out of history and deprived of agency: "On every page of Jewish history abounds the testimony that if the Jew were steeled to suffer, it was his mother, his wife, his sister, that taught him how to endure;" and "Heavy was the burden fate laid on the Jew. Mother and wife gave him the strength to carry it. . . ("The Old and the New Jewish Woman" 359-360). In another maneuver, nineteenth-century Anglo-American norms and mythology are fused with an equally mythological notion of the powerless Jew to reinforce a dichotomy between domestic wealth, status, and power, and their antithesis in the public realm: "A beggar on the streets where target was he for every insult and injury that mob could devise, a king the Jew became the moment he stepped across the threshold of his home. It was his wife that wove his purple and hung his shoulders with the drapery of royalty. It was the mother that keyed the souls of sons and daughters to the melody of duty" (362).

Departing somewhat from his rhapsodizing and standing on his reform and progressive associations, Hirsch notes that "The 'law,' the 'Halakkah' refuses, indeed to recognize woman's royal distinction. But Jewish 'ethics,' the 'Haggadah,' reverting to and

rooted in the better understanding of Biblical tradition, naming Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel, naming Jakebed and Miriam, Deborah and Huldah, Hannah and Ruth and Esther, weaves around the Jewish woman's brow a fragrant wreath of choicest flowers: (361). Despite this authoritative parade of exceptional Jewish women, Hirsch is not eager for contemporary women to be inspired by their heroic precursors, and to seek "worldly knowledge." In fact his comments on women's historical ignorance omit a consideration of the patriarchal oppression that might be responsible for it, and stamp the woman who labors under it as the very antithesis: "it was she who really was the philosopher" (362). Her "philosophy," in other words, resides in her passive acceptance of her domestic fate: "While the range of her ambition may not have been wide, she herself found within this restricted sphere the largest opportunity and intensest incentive to fullest growth. . . ; Her life superficially trivial was fundamentally tremendous" (365, 368).

Hirsch in drag leaves no doubt that the new woman should merely be the old in modern dress. His text lingers lovingly over the sublimity of motherhood, constantly doubling back to characterize it as the noblest ideal; even women's enlarged opportunities for "intellectual and spiritual culture" are valued

primarily because they will supply her with qualities and skills that will enhance her maternal, that is domestic, roles as artist, prophet, social engineer, and goddess. After sermonizing for some ten pages on the matriarch of the home, he concedes for the third time in his digression, that "domesticity cannot absorb all the energies of a fast-growing class of women." And here Hirsch also wants not only to ethnicize gender but to locate its class dimensions: "The home first certainly, the home for the well-to-do and for the indigent." But for the group of women seeking a new sphere for her talents: "Ah! the world is starving for the want of love. It is woman's part to bring love to fruition. A new field is calling for her, a field which opens golden opportunities for planting and ploughing before women of serious purpose. Social service we have denominated this modern consecration. Volunteers and professional experts are needed in this hierarchy--in fact a holy ministry." Nor do working women escape his benediction: "And even they who must leave home to earn their bread by the side of their brothers may retain the best which their grandmothers owned. . . . As long as in honorable work whatever its nature, she serves, her distinction as one of Israel's women is in no danger." And so he concludes, quite statisfied that "Our 'new' Jewish women indeed have

been true to the ideals of their 'older' mothers and sisters" (369, 370).¹¹

The combination of complacency and condescension is evident. Dated as having been preached in 1905, it is difficult to know to what degree this was intended to and actually did either inhibit or encourage women to extend their prerogative. Women had already been extending their sphere throughout the nineteenth century and most especially since the Civil War. Philanthropy, subsequently redefined as settlement work, civic reform, and municipal housekeeping, proved necessary, and women were the people targeted to practice it, since it was not inconsistent with the tradi-

¹¹ I offer this reading as a conscious revision both of Hirsch's liberalism/radicalism, and of his role as mentor to Hannah Solomon, which is uncritically accepted in the literature, even by feminists. (See esp. Meyer 272, Golumb 59, Kuzmack 32, 42-43.) Hirsch did support political suffrage in the secular domain, though my research has not yet uncovered any evidence of his commitment to religious suffrage; his relation to NCJW to be discussed later in the chapter indicates a stance consistent with the one I have been propounding in this analysis. Oddly enough, Kuzmack recognizes the double maneuver earlier when she reports on the parallel relationship between Rebecca Gratz, founder of the first Jewish Sunday School in 1838, to serve Philadelphia's Jewish community, and Isaac Leeser, rabbi of Philadelphia's Mikve Israel congregation and publisher of the *Occident*, in which, as she tells us, he "simultaneously glorified Jewish women's role as wives and mothers and reinforced their traditional role in the synagogue, while praising Jewish women's benevolent societies and their participation in a wide range of philanthropic activities" (20-21).

tional roles of women within the religious sphere. In fact this rhetoric may be set side by side other commentary by Hirsch and other rabbis in response to women's activity some ten years earlier in preparation for the Columbia Exposition of 1893, the World's Fair to be held in Chicago. Its real significance perhaps lies in the degree to which the gendering of Judaism, initially an effort designed to allay the anxiety of ethnic absorption, proved only partly successful in containing women, and thus engendered anxiety of another sort, more clearly rooted in issues of gender role-assimilation. What the men feared, in other words, was the usurpation of their religious roles, as well as the overturning of their patriarchal authority in defining religion.

This issue becomes most clear when we look at the work of Hirsch's student Joseph Leiser. More than his mentor, Leiser appropriately extended what might be referred to as domestic judaism. He did so by iterating that "the unique feature of American Judaism is in all likelihood the American Jewess." (9; 178) He is never clear in his analysis if it was America, Judaism broadly speaking, or the reform that freed Jewry from its "orientalism," that was critical for women's emancipation, nor whether he should give priority to women's emancipation or to what he calls American

Judaism in their causal or definitional relation to one another. Notwithstanding, he devotes an entire chapter in his historical study of Jews in the United States to the American Jewess, as he entitles her. There he chronicles the redistribution of power within the synagogue, through the participation of women in all congregational duties and the development of temple sisterhoods concerned with all aspects of the maintenance of the religious organization. He also describes the re-allocation of charity and philanthropic work, what he calls the "practical work of applied religion," to women, the motives for and development of the National Council of Jewish Women and women's work within the secular Jewish community.¹²

One of the most interesting aspects of the text is a consequence of Leiser's patriotic objective: much of his rhetoric devolves from his desire to secure the Jews in the United States against possible persecution in the face of rising anti-Semitism here and abroad by insisting on the fidelity of the Jews to the state and,

¹² The importance he assigns to NCJW is in part in keeping with his mentor Hirsch's subsequent redirection, but also given a different historical juncture, is suggestive that the organization was no longer a threat and Reform Judaism was significantly in need of the organization's cooperation to sustain its own power.

somewhat more comically, defending the democratic origins of Jewry and Judaism, in order to be able to emphasize the synchronic ideologies of the two communities. Thus he argues that "What is distinctly American in Judaism is the application of democracy inherent in Jewish tradition to local situations" (129)! His purpose in the chapter on Jewish women is, in part, to use her increasing activity and changing roles both within and without the synagogue to support his contention of an inherently and increasingly democratic institution. Then, too, he wants to justify his particular brand of Judaism, vaunting it as the solution for the American Jewish community in a potential struggle with the state; to do so he must perforce redefine his original political argument with regard to the democratic nature of the religious institution. Given recent historical events and the rhetoric developed around the issue of women's suffrage, Leiser extends his discussion by an analogy with the woman question.¹³

¹³ The trope--the comparison between the female body and the nation is of course not an uncommon one, and was used by others as well even earlier in the nineteenth century. Thus another German Jewish teacher who settled in Chicago, Liebman Adler remarked: The tendency of culture is to place the weak on an equal footing with the strong. And thus Israel, like woman, has been the gainer by the advance of culture. . . . Wherever you find woman oppressed, her claims disregarded, there Israel likewise does not lie upon a bed

Thus he recognizes the principle of autonomy inherent in women's political enfranchisement and argues that a religion, to be consistent with the political principles of the state, must provide for women's religious equality and women's religious enfranchisement. Inversely, Orthodoxy is not truly American, because it continues to deny women their individuality; it defines woman as someone who "is created by the 'Will of God' to be the underling of her husband, whom she must serve alone in fealty without an expression of opinion on the fundamental, social, political or economic questions of her city, state or country." Conversely, women who choose Orthodoxy deny their citizenship (192).

This openhandedness seems to be confirmed even when Leiser expresses the fears of some that "the synagogue threatens to become effeminate due to the feministic movement of the age 'And there is a danger that the synagogue which in ages past was the exclusive property of men [will] be handed over to

of roses; and where woman succeeds in asserting her rights, Israel also is permitted to grow in dignity. In no land upon earth is woman held in higher esteem than in our blessed United States. Here, too, the Israelite may enjoy every privilege" (from a sermon delivered in the early 1880s, excerpted in Marcus 323).

women entirely'" for he concludes that "The trustees of all congregations now agree that the support and co-operation of the Jewish women of a community is the breath of life of the organization." It comes as an enormous shock when Leiser addresses himself to theological or even simply to more strictly religious questions. At that juncture, Leiser's feminism is aborted. Beginning diffidently, Leiser rhetoric grows increasingly tendentious and captious.

If there is any criticism one might proffer the Jewish woman . . . it is the caution that they [sic] leave to the scholars and teachers of Israel the prerogative which belongs to them. . . . It has been shown that the Jewish women fill a vital definite function in the social economy of the community and the congregation of Israel. But this function does not include the privilege of deciding or establishing what is or is not Jewish. . . . There is the ever present danger that the Jewish woman will usurp the right of the teacher and scholar . . . without qualifications to do so.

He is apparently particularly outraged by two recent petitions, obviously presented to some official arm of Jewish reform (he does not specify which organization), "'to introduce religion into the home'" and "'to institute a week of religious revivals among Jews.'" Despite his diatribe at what he perceives to be proposals inconsistent with Jewish tenets and practices, the substance of these seems irrelevant. Rather it is the development of a female agenda, an effort on

the part of women to reshape religion and religious practice directly that provokes Leiser's wrath. Notwithstanding Leiser's caveat that it is a question of women lacking "adequate training in the theology and literature of Judaism," he nowhere indicates his support for such training as a remedy to errant theologizing. Nonetheless, when the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the chief institutional organ of the reform rabbinate, brought the issue to a vote in 1922, Leiser, in a convoluted argument, urged the rabbinic education of women and supported their admission to the rabbinate. Even so:

The pulpit, and whatever pertains to it, is--and remains--a plane wherein man is by nature and temperament best qualified, although not exclusively so. . . . Men are prone to be idealists. They are quick to see visions. They are the dreamers. . . . Men are called upon by God to be pathfinders, liberators, protagonists of right, brandishing the shining sword of justice before the hosts of evil-doers. In the defense of right, men will face the outrages of the world alone.

On the other hand, women are conservative, and seldom are impelled to stand forth and proclaim these eternal convictions. They are pacifists, importunists, moderators, trimming their sails to whatever winds blow on the seven seas of thought ("Ordination of Women," *CCAR Responsa* 41).

At the juncture at which Reform Jewry legally sanctioned full religious equality for their sisters, Leiser still insisted on a rhetoric of gendered

polarity designed to reinforce women's inequality in the religious sphere.

In conclusion, reform Judaism generally championed the cause of women--indeed the rights of women were central to the project of reform--and over time, reform extended to women the full privileges of membership, retroactively affirming their institutional and spiritual absence. By its very affirmation, reform Jewry indicated the patriarchal domination under which women had labored within religious institutions. This is not to say, however, that the relationship between women and the rabbinate was not fraught with anxiety and efforts on the part of masculinist authorities to control and shape women's identity. This is manifest in the rhetoric of a gendered Judaism which gives women an enhanced role while continuing to keep woman in her place. Moreover, male historians have given us a distorted and misshapen record that is extraordinary in its failure to document women's writings, statements, or points of view. Only three books written by women devote themselves to the historical role of the Jewish women in modern American society and offer a feminist interpretation of that history (Baum and Hyman; Sochen; Kuzmack); none of them documents women's formative role within the religious sphere or goes much beyond published sources. While modern Jewish women in official

capacities or as parts of organizations made use of print reproduction to an usual degree, these statements often are limited in their capacity to capture the motives, tensions, and underlying issues that impelled particular positions. Without considering correspondence, diaries, autobiographies, and other genres to which women most especially have resorted to express themselves, the historical assessment can only be provisional.

Chapter 6

Secular Feminism, Progressivism, and the Formation of the National Council of Jewish Women

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg in a seminal essay on women's relation to religion argued that recent historical and sociological models of religious reform emphasize the mediating power of spiritual institutions in time of economic upheaval and social restructuring, while ignoring the ways in which they provide an opportunity for those individuals and groups repressed by the hegemonic culture "to press for a redistribution of power and a redefinition of roles" ("The Cross and the Pedestal" 138-139). Thus, when, after the period of upheaval known as the Great Awakening, a new order was established within churches that sanctioned a hierarchy and morality consistent with an emergent capitalism, "those women who had imbibed activism at a religious font had either to renounce her expectations for radical new social and religious roles or re-examine her adherence to evangelical Protestantism. Women did both" (133). Smith-Rosenberg then points to the disproportionate number of women who, having previously repudiated orthodox religion, were no longer willing to accept conformity, and became leaders of the developing women's movement. These included Susan B. Anthony,

Lucretia Mott, Sally Holley, Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

In trying to understand why these women chose to continue their revolt and moved into the secular domain to do so, she argues that the crucial variables were the degree to which these women and their families remained either socially marginal to the developing capitalist structure or ideologically marginal to the bourgeois discourse, including its developing cult of true womanhood, which enabled them to resist "assimilation" (160, 164). Such women became leaders not only within the female sphere, while others developed a progressive ideology and concomittant framework for engaging in civic reform and social welfare, which was to alleviate the worst excesses of capitalist oppression and exploitation. Arguable as the Progressivist ideal may be, I believe that its "feminist" proponents clearly sought a redistribution of power.¹ And as feminists proposed a redistribution along gender lines, so progressives proposed a redistribution along class lines

¹ While Nancy Cott notes that feminism as a term did not come into widespread use until 1910-1913, there is no adjectival form that is as apt to my meaning; the term was already being used in France in the 1880s to signal "a semantic claim to female modernism" (15).

For a review article that summarizes the modern scholarship on and interpretations of Progressivism, see Brownell; revisionist historians have contested progressivism's radical, even liberal, credentials, and a multi-voiced progressivism has emerged.

as well.²

The issue that Smith-Rosenberg raises is extremely interesting, because it isolates gender (and class) as critical variables, to which we might add the additional component of religious ideology and ethnic identity when these are subordinate to that of the dominant culture. As I have suggested above, Reform Jewry eagerly sought to "Americanize" its discourse and it did so largely in aid of streamlining its religious ideal to accord with the emergent capitalist tendencies of its congregants as well as of the larger secular society. (The Americanization rhetoric was constituted by the post-Civil War ideology to obliterate the schisms of that conflict.) Despite the best efforts of late nineteenth century Judaism, indeed Judaism up to World War II, however, the dominant culture continued to resist its absorption, a factor that probably accounted for the degree to which female resistance and protest was muted.

Nonetheless, women within institutional Jewry found themselves in the unenviable position of confront-

² As the previous footnote implies, there was no necessary congruence of feminism and progressivism. Just as it has been documented that some progressives were strongly nativist in their outlook, so one can find people like Lillian Wald, for example, who were progressive in the best sense but who did not identify as feminists, although Wald herself did slowly change her views (see Lissak; Wald; Lagemann).

ing an egalitarian rhetoric that inadequately defined the reality of their lives, even while, ironically, it probably derived as much from the revitalization of that rhetoric by the women's movement in the United States as it did from Judaism's institutional origins in the post-Enlightenment rhetoric of the Austro-Hungarian empire. In a counter-strategy, women turned that rhetoric against itself both by contesting the definitions of a gendered Judaism *and* at the same time establishing institutional alternatives that judaicized gender or, if you will, ethnicized feminism. This section is therefore focussed on illuminating the alternatives and their origins in the nineteenth-century woman's movement and progressive settlement work.

Feminist historians who have examined this period of American women's lives can help us to understand what made this achievement possible and the conditions under which women produced certain autobiographical writings that attested to that achievement. As feminist historians like Smith-Rosenberg and Blair make clear, the club movement was critical in politicizing gender by translating the ideology of separate spheres into what might be termed domestic feminism that permitted

women's participation in the public domain (Blair 176). Originally established in 1868 with the founding of Sorosis and the New England Women's Club, these were initially networking organizations for professional women; subsequently, the club movement, still restricted to a middle-class elite and often excluding members by applying standards that were consistent with its Protestant ethic, racist politics, and nativist prejudices, provided an arena for self-education. In an era when women's education was not widely available or accepted, and women of a certain class and marital status were not eligible for it, the club movement's cultural politics were radical with regard to its own population. The club was the place in which (upper) middle-class single and, significantly, married women could develop discipline and acquire a certain intellectual ease and self-confidence through reading, analyzing and presenting ideas on certain topics or books; clubwomen also developed skills in organizing programs, managing club affairs, and leading other women. The impact on a personal level, and its particular value in self-education as signalled by the schoolhouse trope, can be best assessed from a representative comment:

I believe I express the sentiment of every one who has been for any length of time a member One of the greatest needs of

women is motive for mental activity--an hospitable entertainment of their thought. For me Sorosis met precisely this want; it afforded me an atmosphere so genial, an appreciation so prompt, a faith so generous, that every possibility of my nature seemed intensified, and all its latent powers quickened into life. If in the years to come I do any worthy work, speak any word that has power to help a despondent soul, shed any gleam of light on the dark and dreary ways that so many women are called upon to tread, it will be to Sorosis, that it will be due in large measure--to this school where I have been educated to better hopes, to nobler aspirations, and to a larger life (Celia Burleigh, as quoted from Jane Cunningham Croly, *Sorosis, Its Origin and History* [New York: Press of J.J. Little, 1886] in Blair 31).

This rhetoric is what we shall find again at the founding of the National Council of Jewish Women. As tame as it may seem, it served at both junctures to disrupt the link between biology and gender, to undermine the notion that women were fit only for marriage and child-bearing, without adequate mental capacity for informed decisionmaking (Smith-Rosenberg 250; see also Rosenberg 52-113). It undermined the traditional polarity between mind and body as respectively defining male and female roles. The groups themselves operated to develop sororal solidarity, and with the newly acquired self-confidence in their own views, women also developed a greater willingness to criticize the values and opinions of their male peers (Blair 27). Through the establishment of the American Association of Women in 1873, the club movement expanded its population

across the nation. With the organization of the National Council of Women in 1888, a model for a multi-group structure was established.

Influenced by the social gospel movement and reluctant perhaps to deviate from the separate-spheres and religious rhetoric, which both sanctioned and masked significant changes in women's roles, the club movement was inspired by the establishment of organizations such as the Women's Educational and Industrial Unions (WEIU) in 1877 and the New York Association of Working Girls Societies (1885) to enlarge both the concept of domestic feminism and to widen the field of female public activity. Initially, this simply involved an argument that women's domestic talents could and should appropriately be applied to solving social problems; it annexed the ideal of social service to its domain (Blair 46). A feminist perspective also enabled the organization to extend traditional and non-traditional aid to working women and thus in some measure to develop a cross-class sisterhood. This project would subsequently be developed under the aegis of progressivism.

The club movement served as a training ground for highly assimilated Jewish women who then went on to form their own organization, appropriating the methods, structures, and goals of the movement. Hannah Solomon

was the first Jewish woman to become a member of the Chicago Woman's Club in 1877, and indeed the first to speak on a religious topic in its history, in 1892; all early Council members in leadership positions had a history of involvement in other women's organizations (Elwell 58, 96), but different historians have argued for and against widespread Jewish involvement within the club movement itself and within other feminist, suffragist organizations. Blair has indicated that the clubs were racist, anti-semitic, and nativist in their attitudes, and these attitudes were likely to mitigate against Jewish memberships; further, she contends that battles over the admission of certain groups (most particularly blacks) after the federation of women's clubs in 1889 led to the institutionalization of certain discriminatory practices that previously were applied unsystematically; Golumb, in contrast, argues that Christian and Jewish women shared a quasi-religious and ethical commitment to the new field of social service, and that women's clubs as an indigenous growth tended to be somewhat more democratic than their male counterparts and thus more willing to admit Jewish women.³

³ Golumb draws a clear line between suffrage and club involvement, arguing that Jewish women joined clubs but not suffrage organizations; in an otherwise acute analysis, she fails to discuss Jewish women's political conservatism and anti-egalitarian motives as a factor in their non-participation in suffrage organi-

Kuzmack goes further, insisting that "club membership soon became a hallmark of German-Jewish women's acceptance into American life and the primary stepping stone" from benevolent societies to city, state, and national secular feminist structures (31). As Blair's discussion suggests, Jewish membership was probably highly variable and largely dependent on local conditions and relations; it is also possible that Jewish women did not identify as Jews in these settings, and that simultaneously, these organizations did not always acknowledge the assistance and involvement of Jews as such in their efforts (Lerner "American Feminism and the Jewish Question," 307, 324). Another variable is chronological: Blair's documentation refers to an earlier period both in the club movement and in American-Jewish history. In all likelihood Jewish women's involvement in the club movement peaked in the late 1880s, while participation in the suffrage movement did not take place until the next decade, and even later, when labor leaders and their working-class constituency of Eastern European origin also became extensively involved.

zations.

If Jewish women were initiated through the club movement, they also were developing a tradition of secular, public philanthropic and educational activity within their own community. These organizations were part of the movement away from the synagogue as the defining institution of Jewish life and the ethnicization of American Jewry through the proliferation of a variety of communal organizations. These should not be overlooked as models and sources for developing organizing and programming skills. Rebekah Kohut, at the latter end of her career in the vanguard of both religious and civic reform, is eager to provide a specifically Jewish geneology for women's voluntary activism. Thus she begins her 1932 history of Jewish women's organizations with Rebecca Gratz, who along with other women in her Philadelphia community, "'desireous of rendering themselves useful to their indigent sisters of the House of Israel,'" had initiated the first women's charitable organization (168). Sometime thereafter Gratz was also responsible for initiating the first Sunday School (est. 1838), created and staffed mostly by women and designed for the members of its own congregation as well as poor immigrant children.

Sobel tells us that, in New York City, the Hebrew Free School Association was founded in 1864 to counter

prosletyzing missionary schools; as immigration increased, the association was particularly concerned to meet the needs of children on the lower East Side. Long before Gottheil called for the Sisterhood of Personal Service, Kohut's friend and colleague, Minnie Louis, had established the Downtown Sabbath and Daily School (1880-81), among the most well known of the free schools, and recruited women and older girls from the confirmation classes of Temple Emanu-El to teach its classes. In 1890, the organization merged with other philanthropic and educational organizations to form the Educational Alliance.

The Alliance opened its doors in 1891, and along with the House on Henry Street established by Lillian Wald and Mary Webster in 1895, it became the most important embodiment of the progressive ideal and the major arena for settlement work among Jews on the lower East Side. (Other vehicles included Dr. Jane Robbins' College Settlement, which, established in 1889, was among the earliest, University Settlement, and Greenwich House, directed by Mary Simkowitz.)⁴ While not specifically restricted to and staffed by women, both organizations relied heavily on a middle-class largely

⁴ All of these save College Settlement continue to exist and are still largely led by women.

German-Jewish women's network; Kuzmack notes that Wald was particularly successful in enlisting "a cadre of wealthy women volunteers . . . including Irene and Alice Lewisohn, Rita Wallach Morgenthau and Nina Loeb Warburg" (103-104), as well as Helen Arthur and Mabel Hyde Kittredge, for whom the women's "world of love and ritual" was a significant factor (Smith-Rosenberg; see also Lagemann 80-83). Finally, as Kohut notes, there were also a variety of female auxiliaries of existing male societies, and as adjuncts to a variety of charitable and religious institutions "maintained by women for the traditional social duties, such as aiding poor maternity cases, providing dowries for poor girls of marriageable age, arranging weddings for poor brides, and caring for the needy and the sick. These societies were usually organized as Landsmannschaften, being composed of groups coming from the same city or the same districts or country 'back home.' These groups usually were found in the ghettos, and functioned within the dimensions of the district" (172-173). Kohut is eager to see these as old-fashioned organizations, drawing on old-fashioned methods administering ad-hoc charity, to be contrasted with those organizations based on the new scientific methods and systematically concerned with reform; she is also exhibiting her somewhat erratic condescension towards

those whom she occasionally viewed in a class inferior to her own. Notwithstanding, they constituted important indigenous--if unassimilated--vehicles of self-help (see also Lissak 32, 37, 81-82). Nonetheless, although these organizations may have been run or staffed by women, they were not necessarily woman-identified, and although they were organized by Jews primarily on behalf of Jews, they were not significantly religious-identified. They were also local.

Organizations which were of national scope did exist within the Jewish community. The United Order of True Sisters, begun in 1846 as a sororal "lodge," by members of Temple Emanu-El, possibly as the female counterpart to or affiliate of B'nai Brith, was the first nonsectarian national women's organization. With 12,000 members in 1930, the organization continued to provide a women-identified support network for its members and to engage in traditional philanthropy, providing medical and financial aid to those in need.

Another national communal organization was the YMHA-YWHA: Yet another friend and colleague of Kohut, Julia Richman, first woman principal and afterward superintendent of NYC schools, prevailed upon the New York branch of the YMHA to establish a separate women's auxiliary in 1888. As the director of the first YWHA, she instituted cultural classes, "home circle clubs,"

an Americanization program, and a vacation house for working girls, which made the organization a model for other cities. The Jewish Women's "Y" thus contributed to the secularized but Jewish-identified public organization of communal life (Elwell 38-39). Yet, as these examples show, these vehicles which provided women an enlarged domain of secular activity constituted themselves specifically neither as religious organizations nor as feminist ones.

In her organizational history, Kohut is eager to suppress the degree to which the project of women searching out and developing roles outside the synagogue was a reaction to perceived inequality and oppression and therefore an expression of protest and resistance.⁵ Instead we see her engaged in an ameliorative politics rooted in an evolutionary ideal that finds its optimistic climax in her own contemporary period as the best of all possible worlds. Thus the text that establishes the genealogy of women's organizing opens as follows:

The exemption of the woman from the performance of all legal and ceremonial obligations imposed by Jewish law on the male has placed her in an anomalous position where she appears virtually ignored, whereas, morally,

⁵ As I have previously noted, she is more willing to do so in her own autobiography (see *My Portion* 54-55, 72-73).

she is an object of exaltation. . . .
 However, from time immemorial, we see her
 combatting this supposedly inferior social
 status, and today we see that she has suc-
 cessfully assumed a place of leadership in
 the community, and has applied to this task
 all the inherent wisdom and beauty of spirit
 which have become proverbial of the Jewess.
 (165)

As female geneologist, Kohut lists the names of female precursors and sanctions an ever-widening sphere of activity for women in a newly defined field of social welfare; she is therefore not willing to stress the Jewish woman's anomalous position within Judaism; ergo her insertion of "supposedly" to suggest that even in the past, women's social status was actually higher than the religious and legal tradition might suggest. She is also insistent that whatever inequalities did exist have been eliminated by women assuming certain leadership roles. Her rhetoric is in accord with the tradition espoused by Hirsch and Leiser. Her history consequently erases the gender conflicts and gender celebrations that accompanied the founding of women-led organizations.

The move to establish independent secular organizations culminated in the late 1880s: The 1890s saw a quickening of what might be called a specifically Jewish feminism, a rash of activity stimulated in part by the rhetoric of reform Jewry, in part by the

organizing of secular feminism. Three events distinguish themselves: Ray Frank, beginning in 1890, seized the pulpit and became "the first Jewish woman in America to attempt spiritual leadership," symbolizing "Jewish women's desire for increased equality in religious life"; Rosa Sonneschein, beginning in 1895, briefly published the first independent feminist newspaper, *The American Jewess*, in which she called for "national, Jewish communal and religious suffrage 'in the pulpit and the pew'"; and Jewish-American middle-class women in great numbers participated in the Columbian Exposition in 1893, under which auspices the National Council for Jewish Women (NCJW) was founded (Kuzmack 34, 1; Golumb).

Invited by her women's club mentor, Ellen Henriotin, president of the Federation of Women's Clubs and member of the planning program of the World's Fair, Hannah Solomon proceeded to organize a Jewish Women's Congress. Emil Hirsch, addressing the planning program for that Congress, urged the women to participate in the fair "'simply as women and not as members of their sect'" (Elwell 68). For Solomon, however, the decision to identify oneself as a Jew meant that, by definition, the participating women were not simply women. Elwell suggests, that for a Reform Jew like Solomon, Judaism was religiously rather than culturally defined; I would

argue that Solomon acted in accord with what we would now term identity politics. Thus she elected to affiliate the Congress with the Parliament of Religions rather than with the Department of Women's Progress (68, 58). As representative of the Jewish Women's Congress, she then turned to the organizers of the Jewish Denominational Congress and proposed a joint conference only to have the latter's all-male program committee suggest that the women serve as hostesses; the men were certainly not prepared to give the women a place in the program, which without "a single woman's name," as Solomon remarked, nonetheless, seemed to them '"complete just as it stands'" (82-83).

Solomon does not publicly record a turning point, the critical moment at which she decided the Congress could be used to establish a Jewish women's national organization, but the Congress did bring together 93 delegates from 29 cities who came knowing they were there to constitute an organization "that would establish women's place in Judaism," as co-founder Sadie American asserted (Elwell 75). Recalling its founding, the editor of the report of the organization's first convention intoned: "For the woman this was an epoch-making day; to her it accorded for the first time the recognition of her individuality, her independence of

thought, and of her right to represent these herself, and not by proxy" (Elwell 144).

Elwell, the historian of NCJW, and now rabbi and director of the Los Angeles Jewish Feminist Center, has argued that the radicalism of the organization lay, above all, in its role of self-education, and the way in which that was directly connected to women's capacity and willingness to develop a particularly female agenda for Judaism. Initially, then, the NCJW placed the greatest emphasis on developing a feminist Judaism. The members accomplished this through "the practice of various rituals, [the institution of] programs on religious topics, the establishment and continuation of various adult study groups, and [the development of] Sabbath school work" (Elwell 101). Rituals included prayers at section (branch) meetings, invocations and benedictions at national triennial meetings, as well as hymn singing (often taken from *The Songs of Zion*, prepared by the Jewish Women's Congress as a souvenir of the World's Fair) and psalm reading (Elwell 103-04).⁶ Members also customarily brought apt Biblical

⁶ Even several decades later, probably sometime in the 1920s, NCJW instituted the custom/celebration of what its members called the "Council Sabbath," that sabbath nearest Purim. Since the holiday itself "commemorates the heroism of Queen Esther who, because of her willingness to sacrifice her very life for her faith and her people, saved them from destruction" (itself a decidedly feminist reading of Purim), the

quotations for discussion and exposition. The assumption of religious responsibility was itself a significant aspect of women's religious development, especially in light of the old rabbinic codes that had operated to relieve women of any responsibilities outside the home.⁷

Education would of course permit women to develop their knowledge of religion and thus serve as an antidote to the chronic accusations that women were ignorant of religious matters and therefore incapable of accurately assessing religious issues, as previous discussions have suggested. Such knowledge might provide a more adequate basis for such judgments. More significant, women's empowerment might and did lead to

Council appropriated it to pay a more general "tribute to the heroism of Jewish womanhood." In anticipating its celebration, the national chairwoman of religion hoped that it might inspire women "to make every Sabbath a Council Sabbath" *Reform Advocate*, February 27, 1926, 105).

One might also compare this creation of new, specifically women-centered rituals to the situation that pertained at the end of the long period of Protestant revivalism. Smith-Rosenberg indicates that for those women who remained in the church, their "renunciation of anti-ritualism and their acceptance of the new rituals became the symbol of stability within the new order" (164).

⁷ Though Reform Jewry officially supported the assumption of religious commandments by women, clearly the disruptive potential of these particular ceremonies authorized by women for women were beyond the ken.

independent religious judgments and religious revision, as Leiser himself indicated in his denunciation.

Rather than accepting the gendered judaism inscribed by patriarchy, women acted to develop a judaism from a feminist perspective, to ethnicize feminism. So much does Elwell believe that this was in the process of developing, that she denominates the early history of NCJW Council Judaism.

Within NCJW, educational effort took two forms: (1) programs on religious themes and (2) religious study circles. With regard to subject matter, the first program of work listed 42 topics, including Jewish philosophy and philosophers, messianism, and various books of the Bible (Elwell 111, 116). While these topics and methods may have been appropriated because women in literary clubs were familiar with them in a secular context, Sadie American in particular stressed the value to be derived from non-hierarchically structured peer learning in contrast to the pedagogue-centered lecture (*Proceedings*, 1906, 100). These study circles, then, were revolutionary in involving women in Jewish study and using skilled women as group facilitators to encourage collaborative learning. They permitted a certain kind of consciousness-raising to evolve.

If the rabbis had been opposed to women identifying themselves and their activities as Jews in a national event, they were even more threatened by women's move to constitute a separate power base, and potentially a distinctive religious ideology. Hirsch, as well as Kohler and Pereira Mendes used the American-Jewish press to express their opposition. As late as 1895, Hirsch editorialized: "The Council is inter-congregational; let it not become anti-congregational" (*The Reform Advocate*, January 18, 1895, 333-334). In his unwillingness to cede any patriarchal power or authority, he grew increasingly hostile (See 7 November 1896, 179, and 5 December 1896, 244) Only by 1905 did he begin to soften, although he then wanted to take credit for the organization (16 December, 504), a position only too many recent scholars have been willing to grant him. In the end, Elwell argues, this opposition proved effective and contributed to the demise of Council Judaism (125).

In imitation of the evolving club movement and of Jewish communal organizations, Council women also sought to extend their sphere through a commitment to what was to be called social work, most especially as it concerned women, and issues of concern to a female constituency. Originally, the organization envisioned

a bipolar relationship between self-education/religion and charity; American stated it thus: "We are a distinctly religious body, therefore it behooves us to do philanthropic work" (*First Annual Report, NCJW, 1894-95, 26*). She later expanded this epigrammatic paradox to partake of a Hegelian dialectic:

This, then, is our real purpose . . . to study Judaism, to know ourselves, that we may be something, for to a Jew to be something means to do something. You cannot separate them; and all apparent being and saying which does not express itself in conduct is a mere sham (*Proceedings, 1900, 100*).

Gradually study and self-education were wedded to concepts of research and social inquiry that could then be used to formulate political demands, social legislation, and policy statements. Given the dislocations incident to capitalism and an increasing immigrant population, the club movement's domestic rhetoric was reformulated for the purpose of civic reform. The highly elaborated trope of "Municipal housekeeping" was used to extend women's proper sphere:⁸

Woman has a special function in developing the welfare of humanity which man cannot perform. This function consists in her power to

⁸ See also Ida Husted Harper, "Woman's Broom in Municipal Housekeeping," *Delineator* 73 (February 1909): 213-216 and Sarah Comstock, "Her Town in Order," *Colliers* 48 (March 9, 1912): 38-39. There was a comparable suffrage trope. The British Suffragette Pankhurst indicated that "Politics is simply housekeeping on a grand scale."

make, of any place in which she may happen to live, a *home* for all those who come there. Women must now learn to make of their cities great community homes for all the people" (Mrs. T.J. Bowlker 863; see also Harper; Comstock).

The birth of the National Council more or less coincided with the birth of the progressive ideal; the Council's shift to "philanthropy" after 1905 was conducted according to its standards. Even before then, Solomon tells us that she had conscripted her good friend Jane Addams to address the 1902 convention about settlement work (*Fabric* 114). And of the triennial convention of 1905, she notes that "the talks on philanthropy set forth the newest and best methods in social work" by various heads of settlements as well as the founder of Chicago's first school of social service (145). That is, rather than emphasizing "the individual causes of poverty, settlement work. . . stressed the social and economic conditions that made people poor." Its effort was directed to social change as much as it was to the generosity of giving (Davis 19). NCJW's decision to foreground reform was therefore, as Solomon indicates, "in step with the times" (110); "Jewish women, always interested in philanthropic and Jewish projects, should now participate more actively in civic and legislative affairs" (146).

Solomon's own career, which transcends her role as founder of NCJW, is shaped by this progressive ideal that I have been articulating. In addition to her involvement in the Chicago Women's Club, Solomon joined the NCW in 1888, shared the convention chair with Frances Willard in 1895, and in 1904 represented the United States with Susan B. Anthony and May Wright Sewall at the International Conference held in Berlin. When the Federation of Women's Club's was formed, she assisted in organizing Illinois and then spearheaded the organization's involvement in a number of reform activities, in particular those concerned with women and children, including lobbying for support of child labor laws, the development of a juvenile court system, and the renovation of trade and vocational schools for girls. Thus she worked with Lucy Flower and Julia Lathrop in establishing the first juvenile court, in Chicago's Cook County. In 1905, she began her efforts to rehabilitate the Illinois Industrial School for Girls, serving for many years on the Board along with Addams and Henrotin. Beginning with a statistical survey of the immigrants in the Jewish district, Solomon had won the support of the Chicago branch of the NCJW to establish the Bureau of Personal Service, as previously noted. A charter member of Chicago's City Club founded in 1910, Solomon made an overhaul of the

city's sanitation system her priority before her "retirement" from public life.⁹

Given these progressive credentials, and given her warm and long relationship to Jane Addams, it is perhaps not surprising that Solomon chose to write an autobiography that in a sense constituted a parody of Addams own. Addams used her own life as the occasion for immortalizing the work and aims of Hull House.¹⁰ Like its precursor, Solomon's work memorialized not only her activist role but served as a foundational text for the organization she had worked to establish; in one aspect the books are what are termed institutional histories, given color and warmth through concrete and imaginative detail, personalized by the use of significant anecdote. The birth of the National Council of Jewish Women coincided more or less with that of Hull House. Like Hull House, the Council

⁹ This presentation is based on Solomon's autobiography, but it also draws on material in *Notable American Women*, where Solomon is indexed as a social and civic reformer (and not as a religious leader); see also Davis, *Spearheads for Reform* 127.

¹⁰ My research suggests that little work has been done with regard to an analysis of Addams' work either as an example of the autobiographical genre or as part of the literary work of Progressivism. Almost the only literary critic to deal with Addams is Leibowitz, who devotes an entire chapter to her ("The Sheltering Self: Jane Addams's Twenty Years at Hull-House" 115-155).

served as complex symbol and touchstone for a new vision both of ethnicity and gender; it synthesized female emancipation and progressive ideals. The texts, then, also serve to legitimize a liberal, feminist bourgeois ideology, utilizing an autobiographical discourse to provide a "tradition" for that which their authors are in the process of inventing.

Yet just as Solomon's text is a subtle critique of and response to the pseudoliberal reform platform and sermonizing of reformers like Hirsch and Leiser, so it is also a subtle critique of and response to the progressive and "ethnic" ideal that Addams thematized and used to structure her text. Put another way, Solomon's autobiography represents an indirect complement to that of her sister Chicagoan and civic reformer, friend, and compatriot.

Without engaging in a full-scale literary analysis of Addams' *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1910), I would like to suggest that there are three issues that are paralleled in Solomon's text that are given extensive treatment in Addams' own: religious definition; nationalism vs. ethnicity; and female identity which are the engendering sources of her text. To begin with the last: perhaps the most dramatic moment in Addams' work for a modern (a woman?) reader comes early on when Addams denounces women's emancipation as

an adequate source of self-realization; rather than empowering her to construct a self-conscious female identity, her education leaves Addams debilitated and caught in what she and Tolstoy before her calls "the snare of preparation." Some time ago, Christopher Lasch argued that this anomie characterized the most significant intellectuals of the period and was the conundrum around which they developed their most innovative ideas (*New Radicalism*; see also Lears). This separation of intellect and emotion is a hallmark of modernity and in a variety of ways has characterized the literary movements until our own since romanticism. What is interesting is that Addams defines a gendered version of the trope. That is, although Addams does not directly define education as patriarchal, her description of the problem and the solution she offers, is clearly in part an acceptance of the significance of gender (qua biology?). Her epiphany occurs in Europe as she views East London from an omnibus, and recalls De Quincey's "The Vision of Sudden Death"; she experiences a mingled:

sense of futility, of misdirected energy, the belief that the pursuit of cultivation would not in the end bring either solace or relief. I gradually reached a conviction that the first generation of college women had taken their learning too quickly, had departed too suddenly from the active, emotional life led by their grandmothers and great-grandmothers; that the contemporary education of young

women had developed too exclusively the power of acquiring knowledge and of merely receiving impressions; that somewhere in the process of "being educated" they had lost that simple and almost automatic response to the human appeal, that old healthful reaction resulting in activity from the mere presence of suffering or of helplessness. . . (71).

She then goes on to create an imaginary mother and daughter, touring Europe and then returning home. Addams has the "ignorant mother" seizing the life around her, impulsively reaching out to the people she sees, while "her better educated daughter" remains aloof from her surroundings, only able to immerse herself in high culture; once at home, the mother yearns wistfully for time and training that would have allowed her to cultivate her talent, while the daughter is left with the uneasy awareness that only education brings, which is that her own talent is paltry, less than minor compared with those embodied in the works of the Great Masters housed in the illustrious museums of Europe (72-73). In another context, Addams engages in a discussion that seems strangely abortive, but is nonetheless evocative. She points to the disparity in middle-class life between its high moral stance and actual indifference to real poor people; this seems to her most typified by families who develop the altruism of their daughters and then prevent these young women from enacting those ideals (118-120).

These expositions may be seen as a critique of the material consumption of the middle class and its "feverish search after culture" in the capitals of Europe (75); they can also be understood as a critique of education that led Addams to embrace her fellow Chicagoan's pragmatic philosophy, which sought not only to connect experience to abstract learning but to imbue learning with moral and political value. But I am struck by the feminist implications of Addams' argument as well. Without real changes in the method, goals, and scope of knowledge, she suggests, women appropriate only a patriarchal construction of the world, and one which neither empowers them to imagine a different one nor to act on it; patriarchal knowledge, now re-articulated through capitalism, will simply continue to enslave women, to render them or their knowledge useless. To conclude then, Addams while seeming to retreat from female ideals of self-education and self-definition, in fact argues for women's greatly enlarged role not only in public life but also in intellectual life, in recognition of women's capacity to transform knowledge.¹¹ (Ultimately, I believe Addams' ideal to be an androgynous one.)

¹¹ For an interesting related discussion on the relationship between the education of the progressive generation and their goals, as well as possible gender implications, see Lagemann 163. Lasch also treats

The second rhetorical domain that the text maps is that of nationalism. It is initiated with Addams' description of Lincoln's death; as an icon of nationalism, Lincoln's symbolic power is intense. Through this introduction, we learn of her father's service in the Illinois State Senate and his early friendship with the President. Aside from testifying to the crucible of the Civil War in forging a reconstituted national identity, the discussion serves to link idealism to a belief in democracy and *patria*-- both father and country. This is also connected to Addams' effort to root Hull House in native soil: Addams asserts its populist rather than British origins, and by definition assures her readers of her loyalties. This discourse of Americanism is complicated by the nativist ideology directed against immigrants, and the rhetoric of Hull House, which served and empowered members of various ethnicized communities--all conducted on this terrain. Here and there in the text are traces of the struggle to resist assaults to which both Addams and Hull House were subject in seeking to protect those with divergent political beliefs, especially anarchists but also

these same passages but reads the feminist implications differently (*New Radicalism* 17-36; 68).

socialists, or even simply to provide them with a forum. At work is a strategy of containment, Addams striving to insure that she is not contaminated by charges of foreignness; her text is filled with efforts to render the immigrant population less exotic.¹²

Finally, there is the key metaphor of religion. Addams engages religious definition in a number of ways. The book opens with her early impressions, in which her father and his Quaker heritage dominate; by the mid-nineteenth century, the pietistic inner light of Quakerism had transmuted into the high standards of moral conduct and political courage internalized by her own father and passed on to her; this heritage seems to have been conveyed to her both in a strongly internalized sense of self-abasement as well as in the form of an immeasurable sense of responsibility for the affairs of the world; various adolescent experiences operate to imbue her with a greater sense of toleration toward

¹² My reading here differs greatly from that of Leibowitz, who sees the autobiography conducting a "tacit running argument with what Addams viewed as the doctrinaire radical creeds that would have discredited her efforts" (though he does not document any specific opposition to her on the part of the left wing). "Though admiring the radicals' habit in discussion of getting at the root of matters, she disliked their insistence on violent confrontation and on the immutable fact of class warfare and economic determinism--their tendency to view the masses, monolithically, as a redemptive force" (144).

others, if not to herself--a recognition, in other words of "the genuine relationship which may exist between men who share large hopes and like desires, even though they differ in nationality, language, and creed" (21): under the press of democratic idealism this becomes a belief that the good that the bourgeoisie secure for themselves "is precarious and uncertain . . . until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life" (116); under the aegis of a benign evolutionary theory this idea becomes a belief in what she calls "the race progress" (125).

She argues against any specific religious creed motivating her or Hull House; yet elsewhere she must refute charges of irreligiosity. Consequently in discussing the "subjective necessity" for settlement work, both her own background and the political context in which her text is created move her to define an ideal that is clearly rooted in the social gospel tradition and the primacy of Christ as social archetype: She indicates that one of the motives of those participating in the creation of Hull House is "this renaissance of the early Christian humanitarianism." Though she is very careful to assert that it is not "a set of ideas which belong to the religious consciousness" nor dogmas instituted by a particular institution, she nonetheless avers that "it is the spirit of Christ within each

individual" (123) that moves him or her to engage in the work at Hull House. And, finally, as Leibowitz notes, her style, too, derives from the simple homilies and parables of the Gospels (132). Though I in no way want to suggest that Addams prostelytized, I do want to emphasize the degree to which her text is the product of and responds to the dominant culture, one characterized by the Christian paradigm.¹³

Consistent with this central paradigm, Addams' second revelatory experience (after the one in the East End of London) comes to her in the Cathedral at Ulm, in whose windows and carvings a mixture of symbolic and historic representations of Greek philosophers, Hebrew prophets, even the revolutionary Luther pre-figure a "'cathedral of humanity'" one created by "a fellowship of the deed" (83). Moreover, this anarcho-socialist ideal of fellowship originates in that spirit of Christ that is embodied only in and through the social organism (124). Addams, quite properly, invokes a rhetoric of voluntarist association as organizing metaphor for her text. Over and over again, she resorts to

¹³ Lasch, too, for rather different reasons, argues for "the persistence of piety" bereft of theological content and notes that Addams exalted "the religion of experience" as a means of escaping the narrow confines of female bourgeois life (*New Radicalism* 15, 63).

this communitarian ideal. She recognizes that it is only through sanctioning and validating non-traditional relationships, the implication of which is a re-organization of the social structure, is it possible to realize a utopian venture. Only through non-traditional relationships can the participants "construct the world anew and . . . conform it to their own ideals," as Addams herself brilliantly understands (87-88).¹⁴

On one hand, the aspect of this communitarian definition that emphasizes the inextricable relation between belief and action is parallel to, and therefore not so different from the one provided by Sadie American as the guiding motif for the National Council of Jewish Women. On the other, the aspect of this definition that emphasizes its source in Christian ideology renders voluntarism itself suspicious. Given its appearance in the most progressive text of the historical canon must have given Solomon pause. Her text offers proof that she was reluctant to trust to a voluntaristic ideal that even in its most secularized

¹⁴ Anna Wilson in a paper presented at the NYMLA, October 21, 1991 also forges a link between utopian vision and the voluntarist tropes exploited by the lesbian literary text and contrasts it with the pervasive use of the geneological motives present in writing by black American women.

form was defined by the dominant Christian ethos; she also rejected a metaphorical definition of association that rested exclusively in social activism. She therefore sought a series of related tropes that would embody/engender a specifically Jewish and female identity. This then is the controlling purpose of her autobiography.

Chapter 7

Hannah Solomon: Autobiography as Ritual

Solomon's work, *Fabric of My Life* (1946), like Addams's, is an institutional history, intended to instantiate through the figuration of her own life those characteristics that helped to create the Jewish women's movement, to articulate the scope, methods, and goals of the organization that contained it, and to highlight those features that will perpetuate it. By definition, it is not the work of someone who revels in exposure, who is interested in shaping a traditional narrative, either in terms of developing character or dramatic incident, all those elements which we define as the conventional elements of an esthetically satisfying experience. Nor is Solomon someone who can move us by an expression of any self-doubt, of agonized soul-searching, and spiritual or social crisis; she does not even deal with any of the public, political, and social conflicts that must have faced women as they developed new roles for themselves and new organizations through which these roles were to be developed; indeed, the text occasionally reflects on the absence of such contention and the placidity of its own sur-

face.¹ Despite its personal reticence and apparent complacency, qualities commented on by critics in general with regard to the autobiographies of women with significant public lives, the autobiography has one great attraction that often marks these autobiographies and is little discussed;² it compels by virtue of its intelligence.

The intelligence of Solomon's autobiography is manifest above all in the elegant simplicity with which Solomon uses her own life to construct a feminist ethnic identity (I am using the metonymic language most often used to characterize mathematical or scientific solutions); by melding the events of her personal life with the life of the organization which she had created, she imposes on the latter the apparent naturalness and organic quality of the former. Smith-Rosenberg would argue that Solomon is contributing to the development of a bourgeois discourse, whose assumption of a prior existence provides tacit approval for

¹ As a consequence Elwell even disputes its value as an organizational history (84).

² See especially Jelinek, "Introduction: Women's Autobiography and the Male Tradition" (1-20) and Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Selves in Hiding" (112-132) in the volume of critical essays on women's autobiography edited by Jelinek for more general discussion of the issues of the relationship of the public and the private in the autobiographies of eminent women.

its validity, and therefore, of its continued existence. This assumption disguises the revolutionary nature of such a discourse, a discourse that contributes to the redistribution of power through capitalism and the woman's movement and renders that redistribution of power natural, an argument that other historians have been more willing to make about these volunteer activists than Smith-Rosenberg has been.³

To the degree that Solomon participated in this social/textual economy, her discourse is congruent with that of other middle-class women who sought escape from the domestic sphere; to the degree that she sought to appropriate the language of Reform Jewry, her religious discourse serves to ethnicize that bourgeois discourse. To the degree that she sought to enlarge the sphere of women within religion, she utilized a metaphoric language that distinguished itself from that used by the Jewish male hierarchy. While Smith-Rosenberg considers only the different social experiences of gender as constitutive of "two distinct metaphoric languages," (142) within the evangelical religious movements of the 1840s and 1850s, I would argue that this serves to mask the

³ Hyman has been the foremost historian arguing in favor of the radicalism of these volunteer activists (22). Golumb and Blair are inclined to take Smith-Rosenberg's part (66-67; 4-5, 57-58).

role of religion, ethnicity, and race as constitutive of a "third" metaphoric language, which thus disguises the hegemony of a Christian ethos and its institutional dominance within a reconstituted hierarchy of power.⁴

Solomon's autobiography of ideas is radical in constituting itself as a site for deconstructing the halachic code of Judaism, creating within itself a space for the female protagonist as a bourgeois American, a site for reconstructing a reform Jewry that will make a place for her as a woman, and the arena in which woman's emancipation re-writes itself in accord with a dissenting ethnic/ethical imperative. As we shall see, Solomon writes the text that paradoxically "reveals" a life that is an embodiment of the Book. Finally, then, my reading challenges the omission of religion on one hand and the omission of women on the other as reflexive categories of textual inscription and literary analysis.⁵

⁴ The same criticism might just as well be directed toward Barbara Welter's equally excellent and pathbreaking work: when she discusses the feminization of American religion, she refers exclusively to Protestant sects (unless the Mormon religion is excluded from that category) and fails to consider that other religious institutions might even be formally excluded from the terrain.

⁵ This is indicated by the relative lack of critical literature devoted to modern spiritual autobiography. What there is gives little attention to women and is mostly concerned with materials written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, covering the

Such a reading is also authorized by Solomon's invocation of weaving in the title of her work: It summons up the tapestry of life--a trope that simultaneously plaits together the life and the art. In other words, a figure that, as Jane Marcus has suggested, is rooted both in the world of work/life and art, it points to a poetic practice that celebrates "the intimate connection between art and the labor which produced it." In a related sense, it also establishes the book as a "living text"; if the life embodies the Book, the book lives only in the sense that the life-text becomes an object of daily use. The book itself embodies an idea of "culture [that] consists in passing on the technique of its making" ("Still Practice" 84)--which is precisely Solomon's intention in writing it. If Solomon equates weaving with writing, I also want to offer a complementary critical practice of reading: that is, the chapter itself weaves "those representations of writing" that

following: (1) (American) Puritan and Quaker narratives (Shea; Edkins); (1) African-American autobiographies (Andrews; Butterfield; Foster) and (1) Native American Indian narratives (Carr; Krupat; Bataille and Sands). However, for an important synthetic work that covers a variety of traditions while not restricting itself to autobiography, see the forthcoming work by Annette Van Dyke.

"figure the production of the female artist," and follows the threads that describe the relation of the text/textile of the female artist to the dominant cultures .

If an understanding of Kohut's work was grounded in the icon as the heraldic opening into her text, an analysis of Solomon's text reveals the grounding of the text in ritual, ritual understood both as structuring device as well as narrative content. Through the creation of autobiography as ritual, Solomon constructs a gendered Jewish identity. The autobiography is ritualized through the use of the scriptural epigraphs Solomon provides for each chapter, the distaff leitmotif which she takes from the title and in turn uses to structure her text, and the emphasis on the key themes--genealogy/family and ritual--that she uses to "weave" her construction.

The first invocation to ritual is the scriptural quotations that serve as chapter headings to bracket and thus structure Solomon's own text.⁶ In addition to their aptness as clues to the substance of her dis-

⁶ This is in contrast to the very different calendric ritual that structures Chagall's text, that I have examined in Chapter One. The latter is rooted in an oral/matriarchal tradition, while Solomon's text positions itself in relation to a written, patriarchally-defined discourse.

course, these biblical phrases have various allegorical values. Drawn exclusively from the Old Testament, and primarily from the books of the Prophets (Samuel, Joel, Malachi, Nehemiah, Jeremiah) as well as Genesis, Psalms, and Deuteronomy, they testify to Solomon's Jewish identity. In particular, they identify her commitment to the Prophetic tradition, with its emphasis on individual righteousness and practical ethics, which the Reformed rabbinate had emphasized in its teachings.⁷ Thus the quotations signal her position within the Jewish community to her Jewish readership, specifically her own position within the religious spectrum.

However, her allegiance to reform must also be understood vis-à-vis the dominant Christian community. The intention was to delineate Judaism specifically as a religion rather than a complex code of tribal practices isolating the community from the American mainstream. The Reform disposition is thus the one which was most "readable" by the dominant community and indeed, compatible with the Christian church's reform efforts to develop a theology and course of action relevant to modern life and the capitalist state (Elwell 65; Smith-Rosenberg). Thus Solomon also sig-

⁷ I cannot locate the source for this idea.

nals the value of her life as a paradigm of "enlightened" Judaism, in her period, the sector of the religious community most committed to dialogue with the dominant, Christian community; her Christian readers could predictably find there a pattern of "interfaith" cooperation.

Another related way to see/say this is to recognize the degree to which certain Protestant groups and even the secular community drew on a religious rhetoric that privileged the Old Testament (Bercovitch). This rhetoric gave birth to a network of images and symbols through which Americans defined themselves as a chosen people, and their community as a city set upon a hill, whose political corruption and social tumult could be understood in terms of spiritual backsliding lamented precisely by those same prophets invoked by Hannah Solomon. Solomon, first of all, upends the prophetic mode, using it for the purposes of celebration rather than lamentation. Her textual selections, save in two instances, are optimistic, upbeat. But this reversal is not of primary relevance. More significant is the point that such rhetoric, in effect, was not religious in nature, but nationalist, and Solomon's use of it part of a pattern of Americanist imagery and symbolism that is also written into the text, whereby she casts herself, her family, and the women with whom she has

affiliated as pioneers.⁸ Solomon thus uses the scriptural paradigm as a means of inserting herself, and, insofar as she is representative of the Jewish people, inserting the Jew into the American community (Dearborn 71-96).

This last assumption warrants these epigraphs as a framing device for Solomon's own life. Again this was not uncommon among Protestants either as the terms for understanding their own lives, or as the terms of writing their own autobiographies. Her life is to be read as parable and as moral allegory, a realization and embodiment of religious, that is spiritual, that is Jewish, practice. But Solomon is not merely representative; she is not everywoman. Indeed the scriptural commentary may also be understood as helping the reader to understand her role as leader, or prophet. And, in support of such an interpretation, a number of chapters bear explicit testimony to her prostelytizing and missionary roles (esp. 116-125; 126-143). Her text can then be seen as part of an evolving secular scripture

⁸ In this she would also seem to follow in the sermonic tradition of the Puritans as well; Bercovitch isolates the use of Election sermons as part of a ritualistic process that serves to draw Puritans together and establish their collective identity; that is they are rhetorical vehicles of social cohesion, incantatory rituals of consensus for an advancing, emergent middle-class culture.

if you will, that will witness to Jewish women's achievement, that is contributing not only to the secular world as I have noted above, but defining women's leadership in the *spiritual* domain as well, in her own terms rather than that of the male establishment: "The motivation for the enterprises and activities in which I have engaged has come, it seems to me, from the Biblical injunction to do justly and to love mercy,' and through the Jewish concept of universal brotherhood posited upon the belief in one God over all" (260-261). To conclude then, Solomon is at one and the same time appropriating culture and creating it through this particular rhetorical strategy.

If the scriptural epigraphs are one ritualistic means of constructing a gendered female identity, so also is the overall structure of the text: Solomon organizes the book into three major sections using language derived from the title of the book and traditionally identified with the female, that of weaving: Part I is entitled "Warp and Weft," indicating that the family and early community life established the matrix for her public life; Part II she entitles "Pattern," and it is the section given over primarily to her public activities, and her life as exemplar and force for the creation of a feminist Jewish identity; the last

section is entitled "Texture," and is essentially focused on her retirement and old age. Structurally a kind of postlude, this last section is surrounded by the aura of a posthumous existence.⁹

Solomon derives the organizing language from a text written by her sister, a text that also serves as epigraph to her own:¹⁰

If we could see the whole fabric of our lives
spread out what a wonderful weaving it might
show; many a thread that we thought lost

⁹ Marked by reminiscence and the replay of a series of celebrations, this section of the text displays the kind of compulsive concern with chronology that often overtakes the autobiographical writer, who forswears the coherence of design in favor of making the text approach absolute coincidence with life, a maneuver which often results in the autobiography sounding like a scratched record repeating itself. While Solomon maintains a sprightly air of gratitude and strained optimism and even sustains certain structures of thought that underlie the intellectual organization of the autobiography, the major ideas that have animated her life are irrelevant to the catastrophic events of the midcentury, and the former are trivialized by being expressed in the shadow of the latter. It is hard to say if this is a mark of the autobiographical genre, per se, a generic hazard, as it were, or of its appropriation by the amateur and the amateur's chronic tendency to confuse art and life. Nonetheless, I shall return to a consideration of this section of Solomon's autobiography and of the theme most emphasized there at the end of the chapter.

¹⁰ Note this association between genealogy, gender, and inscription, in Solomon's taking her sister's text as her own; she thus establishes a female lineage authorizing her text, along with the patriarchal one that she has established with her use of Scripture. I will deal with the question of inscription as a reflexive trope in Solomon's text at the end of the chapter.

would re-appear and form strange patterns of cause and effect. But God holds the spindle and until He cuts the thread we go on adding a bit each day.

She uses the metaphor only occasionally and generally in the latter sections of the book, but it is worthwhile to look at these instances. Once she uses it to symbolize the experience of death and loss "that color each one's weaving" (191). Twice she uses the motif to counter these experiences, suggesting on one occasion that "These [people now dead] were deeply woven into our hearts, a rich and beloved motif in the pattern of our home" (188-189) and on another, "We remember with thanks the many bright days of the long ago when all our lives were interwoven into brilliant blending patterns of joyful living" (246). In an odd, poignant, inexplicable incident, in one of Solomon's many notations of her frequent journeys abroad, she records her intense response to hearing the Tunesian Jews chant the *sh'ma* or Jewish credo, which was "knit into the very fiber of our being" (194), never to be forgotten, forever enriching the soul. Later, referring to her public work in Chicago, she remarks:

In the warp and woof of my own story, the strand which constitutes my interest in our city stands out colorfully for me, but even beyond it, with the exception of those cords which define my personal relationships, the National Council of Jewish Women assumes major importance, for into it are woven my attitudes and aspirations as a Jewess (259).

Finally, Solomon returns to the leitmotif to conclude her text:

The fabric of my life is now spread out . . .
 .the threads, uncut . . . the spindle not yet
 stilled. And through it all, sometimes sub-
 merged, again predominant, two golden strands
 appear and reappear . . . pointing, accent-
 ing, making strong the elsewhere fragile
 stuff. Two endless golden strands . . . the
 family . . . the Council . . . back and forth
 they've shuttled through the years! How
 calmly one may consider the inevitable ending
 of one's personal pattern, buoyed by the
 certainty that these two precious threads
 will yet go on. From generation to gener-
 ation they continue. . . . weaving newer pat-
 terns . . . enriching other fabrics . . . the
 spindle guided, ever, by the Unseen Hand"
 (263).

Solomon has fused scripture, distaff imagery, and biological metaphor. What has she accomplished by her combinatory powers? She has first of all defined life as imbued with divine purpose and then merged the life woven by divinity with the shape she has provided for it as creator of her own destiny and with the form she has made through the weaving of her text.¹¹ If she has derived her authority from a divine source, and given thus her text a divine authority, she has also imbued

¹¹ Compare Spengemann's characterization of Augustine's autobiographical style: "Even his language aspires continually to divinity, as he labors to maintain a level of discourse that will move smoothly in and out of Scriptural quotation with no syntactic break or tonal seam, and thus to demonstrate rhetorically the consonance of his own words with the divine Word" (9).

divinity itself with a feminine aspect. In other words, while life and text are divinely inspired and thus ordained, the spiritual life, and the institutions which nurture it, are thereby gendered as female. Both the gendering of Judaism and the ethnicizing of female emancipation are used to ratify the organization that in turn define these elements. Another relationship suggests itself, as well. Solomon has interwoven the language of family, community, and organization, so that they seem to constitute an indissoluble, indeed organic, entity.

To understand more fully how Solomon accomplishes this, we need perhaps to circle back to the beginning of her text, in which she draws on a traditional trope of autobiographical rhetoric, answering the question of why one writes autobiography by asserting that one does so "chiefly for one's children and grandchildren, and it is at the insistence of mine that I begin this chronicle" (xiii); this ritualistic invocation initiates a significant genealogical pattern that Solomon develops throughout the text.¹² What is it

¹² In the use of this trope and in the particular relationship between the family and the collective identity she establishes, I am reminded of Anne Bradstreet's "To My Dear Children," written some two hundred years earlier than Solomon's work. See Mason for a discussion of the poem (227-235).

doing in a text being constructed as a foundational autobiography, part of the ideological apparatus necessary to sustain an organization? The trope, as traditional as it is, and as apparently inconsistent with the public audience that is otherwise implied by the text, is no mere adornment. It seems critical to the inscription of the Jewish woman, as distinguished from the Protestant one, essential in other words in the construction of a gendered ethnic identity. The ritualistic metaphor of genealogy is the intentional, paradoxical means by which a gendered Jewish identity is constructed.

The two elements of family life that Solomon stresses are those that she wishes to bequeath to the organization: (1) the reciprocal relationship between affectional/communal and kinship/communal ties and (2) inventing and maintaining rituals as the means of establishing those reciprocal relations. At the heart of the triadic relationship of affectional, familial, and communal ties is a keystone of the Greenebaum family mythology that she has "inherited" as one of its members; her grandfather asserts that the family made "the perilous journey" to America not for the sake of economic improvement nor to escape from religious persecution but so "that . . . [members of the family] might not be separated on different continents" for

which, as Solomon tells us in his own words, her grandfather "'demanded nothing of you except unity among yourselves'" (62). This connectedness then is the virtual motto and spur of family, social, and communal life.

It is expressed in the description of two other journeys, one in which "a deep family feeling which was so marked a characteristic of my father, [that it] caused him to travel" to meet newly settled family in New York, where he found in his cousin Sarah someone to be his wife (7) and the other, that led to the establishment of the relationship with Ohio relatives: "This early visit . . . cemented a lifelong friendship between the children of the two families . . . It marked, in fact, the beginning of the close association and devotion of the eldest daughter, Lizzie, and myself who, ever afterward, played and worked together in complete harmony and understanding, each relying with utmost confidence upon the other" (16). Marriages represent opportunities for knitting up communal life. Thus Solomon notes of her brothers' brides: "All these charming young girls had been members of our social circle and each was most happily welcomed into the clan" (62).

Like organizations, families, too, create and maintain rituals.¹³ Thus Solomon remarks that "we Greenebaums possessed an immense capacity for celebration, and so large a family that there was always in the offing, some reason for it. And if there was no legitimate excuse, we were quick to invent one!" (72). Moreover, these traditions and rituals are linked not only to family but to home life as well:

After we married, Friday of each week brought us together for our special evening reunion. When we left to return to our respective homes, Mother always refused to allow the chairs to be set back in place that night, because she loved to come into the parlors the next morning and picture each of us as she had seen us seated the night before (62).

Later, in rhetoric designed both to express the continuity of tradition and to indicate the responsibility of each generation to renew it, she extends the description of this ritual:

Just as, during my parents' lifetime, Friday nights found us all together at their home, so Friday evening at the Solomons, now became an established custom [She visualizes] our long table, twinkling with candlelight and fragrant with massed flowers and festively arrayed with the 'best' china, glassware and silver. But the crowning happiness was, of course, to be found in the dear relatives and friends whose presence provided the real fillip to the gathering

¹³ I am here alluding to my previous discussion of the rituals that marked the National Council of Jewish Women.

(68).

Of the many other rituals she recounts--"noodle" parties (called after the requisite menu of favorite family foods of chicken, noodles and ice cream), birthday celebrations, religious holiday get-togethers, summer picnics and winter sleigh-rides, open air concerts and "unique of all our family 'doings' . . . the family auction!"¹⁴--one is notable for its link to other significant tropes in the text. It extends the domestic imagery that emphasizes the relation between family and home through the use of a splendid architectural metaphor, reminiscent of a comment made of Boswell that he not only built castles in the air, but he moved in and lived in them as well.

Many years before the particular celebration she records, Solomon indicates that her father had expressed the wish that "he might possess a home so big

¹⁴ This ritual is notable for what it conveys about the fun-loving Solomon family: "A strictly 'For Ladies Only' affair, each participant was expected to bring articles of apparel with which she was willing to part, and these were auctioned off to the highest bidder. Once a garment was up for sale, no last-minute change of heart was tolerated, and it frequently happened that a member of the group would have to buy back an article she, herself, has contributed and decided--just too late--she'd prefer to keep! In fact, one niece had to pay a pretty penny in order to re-purchase her brand new spring hat, inadvertantly included among the auction merchandise" (73-74).

that all of his children and grandchildren could be gathered together in it." So as part of the first-year anniversary among her now-wedded children, one of them had drawn the equivalent:

a huge blueprint of just such an imaginary estate in which each of us had a special niche, a domain appropriate to our individual talents or pursuits dubbed "Villa Garnix" (Gar nichts, German for "nothing at all"), a name sister Rose adopted for the house on the farm she bought, near Torrington, Connecticut. And a true gathering place of the clan, her Villa Garnix became! From hither and yon we arrived to spend a few hours or days en route to other destinations, or for prolonged visits with Rose and her children and grandchildren (127).

Though Solomon uses the metaphor, she does so with the recognition that "home" is defined by proximity and harmony of family. Only once, when she acknowledges the shock of loss that she experienced with her husband's death, does she talk of the "years of restlessness," when, "wherever I was, I felt uprooted!" That restlessness is assuaged when her daughter returns to Chicago with her family to make her home with her now aging mother. Solomon then briefly mourns the departure from the Michigan Avenue home in whose large rooms she had raised her children and which had been the stage as it were for those many rituals, celebrations, and increasingly, meetings occasioned by death and illness for sharing sorrow rather than joy (184-185). She recognizes that "none of our memories would be left

behind" (189) and the unity lies in "remembrance [of loved ones] that continues to gladden our lives" (76). Elsewhere, she again concludes that "it is a joy to look back and realize anew, that harmony was, at all times, the keynote of our family life. And better still, to be able to record with veracity that it was a harmony of the heart rather than of the mind; a oneness of the spirit which was the host at every gathering" (71-72). Thus Solomon's autobiography celebrates homes as container for, and family events as a sign of, the family's unity and continuity.

In turning to her career and public life, Solomon both begins and concludes the section by focusing on the founding and continuity of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW). She uses the traditional biological metaphor of genealogy and the metonym of generations to do so. Thus, writing of the organization's early stages, Solomon asks:

What mother does not watch with mingled hopes and prayers her child's each new development? With what an intertwining of joy and fear does she see him take those first uncertain steps. . . . We Council mothers followed that immemorial and traditional pattern. . . . For how could we be certain, despite our zeal and confidence, that . . . our infant organization, lusty though it seemed, would grow in time to span even the dividing oceans? (101)

Speaking of her attendance at the 1938 Triennial Convention, Solomon notes the new members who "joined the

ranks with Council's first and second generations. Many were daughters and granddaughters of the founders in their communities. We of the older group spoke together of the problems encountered during the forty-five years in which we had worked together, of the difficulties we had surmounted and of the great tasks confronting those whose years of active service lay just ahead" (251). This fusion of the personal with the public is also marked with regard to herself; beginning with her seventieth birthday, she is honored by NCJW with a "succession of elaborate celebrations . . . all of which I managed to survive with equanimity . . . due, in part, . . . to the realization that I seem to have become, perhaps a kind of symbol as founder of the National Council of Jewish women, and am, thus, but the tangible recipient of tribute vouchsafed the organization (221). (Her modesty does not permit her to consider that the reverse might be true.)

Not only does family and private life constitute the personal basis of one's movement into the public sphere, they provide the communal network that is constitutive of public life itself. In this we may see a relationship with the domestic metaphoric language used by the female bourgeoisie to furnish its separate-spheres ideology with its justification for a wider public activity; through this maneuver Solomon

appropriates the domestic sphere into the public domain. However, Solomon's use of this metonymic language seems to me significantly different in content and tone from its Protestant version. Her stress is on family events and habits, themselves ritualistic in character, rather than on domesticity per se; in fact many of these are ceremonious occasions that are quasi-public affairs. And her delineation is lacking the characteristic tone with which Protestant women arrogated to themselves what they considered to be a requisite moral superiority for public action. Rather, her tone is celebratory and festive, the proper counterpart to her ritualistic form.

If Solomon forges links between the public and the private through the metaphoric language of genology and generation metonyms, she is not content to limit her vision of public life to that which is proscribed by genealogy and biological generations; nor is her work restricted to the religious or philanthropic work of the Jewish community. Her mothering text therefore nurtures/defines a larger women's community, who--and here she borrows from her family's motto--offer "a living refutation of the hackneyed argument that women cannot work constructively and in harmony, together" (100). Solomon begins by noting:

Social changes had occurred, giving women an opportunity for more active participation in

religious, civic and political life. It was a period of almost miraculous growth and development for all women. Our leaders realized that Jewish women, always interested in philanthropic and Jewish projects, should now participate more actively in civic and legislative affairs (146).

Though women's participation was one to which the male establishment had given belated approval, Solomon's rhetorical strategy elides the conflict in most cases (though I have previously noted her insistence on documenting Hirsch's and the religious establishment's resistance to women's religious role in 1893); from her point of view, history has been on the women's side. In fact, as a record of women's public life, the autobiography wants to intertwine the self with history, particularly to stress women's making of history, that is, to document not only the birth of the modern but to stress women's contribution--Jewish women's contribution, specifically--in defining what is modern. Thus it is she, as part of a woman's collective, who re-defines the scope and methods of the new work in which they are all engaged: "With the widening scope of women's civic and philanthropic activities, it became necessary, in 1895, to evolve some effective method by which the various organizations might function cooperatively." Led by her cousin Lizzie Barbe, the first Conference of Jewish Women met to rationalize the activities of twenty-six different groups which had

sprung up to contend with the many consequences of the social upheaval around them, an organizational effort that was superceded in 1900 by the formation of Associated Jewish Charities. This organization in turn was transformed by Solomon in 1910, when she created the Conference of Jewish Women's Organizations, which acted as a clearinghouse, developed a calender of activities, and focused cooperation for project development, but most of all, as Solomon puts it, created "opportunities for the interpretation of each unit to the others, thereby providing a medium through which all advance together in the interest of the many causes they espouse" (100). Earlier, Solomon had noted her own conclusions, published as a report to the Bureau of Personal Service, which in Chicago had been established as an adjunct of NCJW: "We can no more run charities on the old lines than a business house can chalk the names of its customers on the barn door" (95). In all these ways Solomon is pointing to women engaged in the task of modernity and to Jewish women taking up the twin ideals of Progressivism--ideals of social justice and modern techniques of efficiency (see also 165, 177, 197-198). Most often she expresses these ideals using a modern vocabulary. But at other times the rhetoric of dual spheres dominates: thus women "bind the wounds that are inflicted by the injustice of the political

and industrial world" (165).

Regarding the focus of women's work, Solomon emphasizes that women were particularly concerned to meet the needs of women and children; here is how she describes her early participation in civic work (in a language that submerges her own ego totally in that of the organizational ethos): "More and more did the [Women's] Club become a factor in education. From its earliest days, the Kindergarten, then a new pedagogic field, enlisted its interest. The Club's insistence that women be appointed to the Board of Education met with success." Later she notes the appointment of a woman physician at Dunning, in the Cook County Insane Asylum, as a result of the Club's financial subsidy and political pressure, just as earlier she indicates their role in "placing a teacher in the city jail and paying her salary" (155-156). Then she points to the significant contribution of Lucy Flower and Julia Lathrop, who led the fight in developing a juvenile court and system better suited to meet the needs of children, the first of its kind in the country. She describes her own role, along with that of Jane Addams and Ellen Henrirotin, in reforming the Illinois Industrial School for Girls, and notes the model network that cooperated to provide appropriate services: the Vocation School Committee furnished a summer teacher; the Art Institute

loaned members for teaching arts and crafts; and the School of Domestic Arts and Science provided instruction in cooking and sewing (154). She concludes, "The constant increase in numbers of women in organization work has added, immeasurably to their service in legislating for better conditions for women and children" (157).¹⁵

As the foregoing suggests, it is almost impossible to be aware of the focus of women's work without at the same time becoming aware of the women doing it--and both were at stake in defining the modern era. Another way to put this is to say that the autobiography seeks to document women's encounter with modernity by underscoring the individual contributions of middle-class women, foregrounding their new roles. This accounts for Solomon's *naming* the many women who, in keeping with the Americanist rhetoric she also draws on, were "pioneers," not merely in coming to this new world but in creating it: Ellen Henrotin, Jane Addams, Lizzie Barbe, Susan B. Anthony and Carrie Chapman Catt,

¹⁵ Kuzmack has argued that an increasing radicalism is signaled in the shift from service to reform, particularly in work focussed on girls and women (63-75).

Rebekah Kohut.¹⁶ Elsewhere she memorializes the Continental Jewish leaders--among them Bertha Pappenheim, Madame Zadac Kahn, daughter of the former grand rabbi of France, and Rosa Melzer Pomeranz, the only Jew in the Polish Parliament. She holds before our view all those ceremonies and celebrations that also laud women's progress and women's leadership in developing the social good: the dedication of Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago and its service for the Recognition of the Leadership of Women, honoring among others her niece Rose Alschuler for her pioneering work in nursery schools (226), and the World's Fair of 1933, which under the general rubric of the "Century of Progress," gave a series of lectures and presentations on "The Progress of Women" (239).

I have argued that Solomon seeks to create a gendered ethnic identity as one that is defined by its

¹⁶ This is another aspect that bears comparison with Jane Addams's work: while Solomon is at such pains to name names, refusing the subsumption of feminism under progressivism, Addams's text is noteworthy for the absence of rich portraits of brilliant women like Alice Hamilton, Florence Kelley, Julia Lathrop, Ellen Starr, not to speak of Hannah Solomon, Ellen Henrotin, and other fellow Chicagoans named here, who helped her to realize the ideals of Hull House. Leibowitz himself remarks that it is Addams's one "conscious lapse," although I am not quite sure of his meaning; he provides no quotation or source to indicate that Addams had explicitly decided, whether on moral, intellectual, or literary grounds, to omit this information (154).

entrance into the modern, to which the autobiography is witness, partly by its insistence on the Jewish woman's encounter with the great social forces making for history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. A particularly notable aspect of this appropriation of the modern is also manifest in Solomon's avid insistence on writing and inscription. That is, she makes us aware of writing and inscription through a broad array of devices. The previous discussion was intended to define one issue that was at stake: Solomon knows the value of writing for inscribing women, and particularly Jewish women, in the public sphere; in hindsight, her concern was particularly correct, since as I have tried to suggest, (Jewish) men have been niggardly in devoting space to women's achievements. But so also were Protestant women both historical figures as well as contemporary feminist historians and literary critics sparing in apportioning space to Jewish women and their achievements.

But Solomon's obsession with the text goes beyond this concern. Her particular religious and communal heritage also contributed to define the concern with textual preservation and its specific permutations.

Among the many rituals Solomon describes, she frequently invokes the related motif of inscription. In one early instance, the focus is on the Greenebaum's/Solomon's regular New Year's Eve celebrations. The festivities traditionally culminated in singing the "family song" set to the tune of "Laute Schöne Leut Sind Wir" [What Fine People We Are]--"a ditty," Solomon remarks, "that grew, in time to awe-inspiring length," as a verse existed for each family member and a new one "was added for each person who married into the family" (75). This intense need to memorialize individuals and events through textual inscription is the stated purpose of the autobiography; but its frequent notation accumulates to suggest that inscription itself is the subject of the text.

Thus she explicitly records her use of Jacob Greenebaum's autobiography (4-5; 36) and establishes her father's settlement in Chicago by referring to the city's second directory; notes the travel diaries maintained by her sisters and herself, used to describe her grand tour of the Northeast (54 et. seq.) as well as later trips to Europe (192) and the Far East, which, she suspects "if placed end to end, would encircle the globe . . . (54; 55, 56, 60); describes the minutes she keeps as secretary of the family's New Year celebrations (!; 75); remarks on the publication of a volume

of liturgical songs and melodies as the first fruit of the Jewish women's section of the Parliament of religions (90); makes use of a newspaper text to describe her own historically momentous appearance in the pulpit of her and Hirsch's Bar Sinai Temple (112); and quotes the published goals of NCJW as well as from the minutes and records of the conventions of NCJW (105; 207-210). Newspaper articles also attest to various conferences, the debate regarding the establishment of the Children's Bureau, while reports are the basis of discussions on the Bureau of Personal Service (97) and the activities of the Committee on Reconstruction (210-213). When talking of individual women, Solomon's highest testimony to them is frequently their ability to wield the pen or control the reproduction of text (83), while part of her mission in speaking to women and Jews throughout the world involves urging the study of Jewish history and literature (125, 176-177, 186, 193-194). It is no surprise that when Jewish male establishment refused to consider a joint program at the World's Fair in 1893, Solomon demanded that their exchange be "expunged from the record" (83).

Concomittantly, perhaps, the *text*, rather than the autobiographer, exhibits the fear of erasure. If the use of Scripture endows the text with authority, the other references and devices that call attention to its

writing undercuts that authority with anxiety. Crammed full with references to the textual sources of its own making, the autobiography suggests that modernity is also defined in terms of the interpenetration of the life and the text; it is as if the life does not exist except as it is documented. Moreover in the last section, which opens with a reminiscence of the celebration of her seventieth birthday, life and the autobiographical text converge through a series of vertiginous if also humorous replays. They are in fact "theatricals" or skits held in Solomon's honor, re-presented through the text. At the NCJW dinner, in the "Biography," a play celebrating her life written by her sister-in-law, the roles are played by the younger generation:

The episode enacted carried us back to the day when I formed my sisters and brothers into a "club" of which, in some unexplained manner, Hannah was always the president. I had one staunch disciple, however, in my baby sister, Rose, whose sole but continuous contribution consisted of one repeated contribution, "Ain't we gonna have a constitution?"

The dizzying quality lies partly in the parodic quality of having a children's game represent the formation of the National Council, partly in Solomon's referring to herself first in the third person (meaning the person representing her in the play and emphasizing the difference between the representation and the self) and

then shifting to the first person (and thus eliding the distinction between self and representation), referring to her own sister, who nonetheless, is made to speak the lines of the child portrayed on stage. This is also complicated by various other levels of reality and (play)acting, in which various persons stand in and stand for others. In a subsequent episode, for example, Solomon is "represented" by her daughter, Helen, and in the final act Solomon is permitted to represent "'Hannah, Herself'" (222). In another celebration at the temple "An Evening in Michael Greenebaum's Home, 1878" is enacted, in which her niece portrays her mother, "and Frances Hannah [her granddaughter] was I" (223). Most bizarrely, "The Days of Her Years" written by Hattie Greenebaum to celebrate Solomon's seventy-fifth birthday, five years later, is taken as Solomon tells us, "from this very account of my life which I had already begun." Moreover, the dramatization of the play is located on a stage set with "an enormous book, and from its pages the actors slipped," to bring to life the characters in Solomon's autobiography. The embodiment of the text occurs, of course, through the medium of dramatic representation suggesting proliferating alternatives to the reality of the life (255-256.)

While these inscriptions can be taken for mere anecdotes, textual equivalents to cocktail conversation to insure that one's good spirits do not flag before the party is over, they are better seen and understood as loaded symbols. On one hand, they signal the inevitability of the text overtaking and subsuming the life. Yet they also fuse the theme of the interpenetration of text and life with other elements already privileged by Solomon's autobiographical plan: the significance of ritual and ceremony, and the focus on generations. The repetitions with variations of scenes that are drawn from texts drawn from life or from still other texts, like the substitutions of various people for others in theatricals that themselves are textual embodiments, suggest simultaneously a procession and a circuit--that is to say they embody precisely what ritual/ceremony enact in the social domain and what generations enact in the biological one--the possibility of continuity despite change; unity despite difference.

Together, then, they point to means through which individuals, even groups, seek transcendence, the means whereby they can survive themselves. The textual reflections of anxiety over death give way to the assurances textuality offers for posterity, resonating with the Jews' cultural self-identification as a people

of the Book. Thus the postlude is not superfluous, as I originally conjectured, but is symbolically highly relevant to an autobiography that fabricates the seamlessness of the private and the public, the union of the Jewish aspect of the self with the female, the harmony of Christian and Jew, which Solomon believed defined her encounter with modernity.

Homesickness! that long
 exposed weariness!
 It's all the same to me now
 where I am altogether lonely
 (Marina Tsvetáeva, "Toská po ródine! Davnó")

I know that I sing.
 The song is everything.
 The rhythmic wing has eternal blood,
 And I know that one day I shall be dumb:
 --Nothing more.
 (Cecília Meireles, "Motivo")

Nabokov asserts: "Thus, in a way, I inherited an
 exquisite simulacrum--the beauty of intangible prop-
 erty, unreal estate--and this proved a splendid train-
 ing for the endurance of later losses.
 (Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak Memory: An Autobiography*
 Revisited)¹

¹ The poem by Tsvetáeva is translated by Elaine
 Feinstein; the one by Meireles by John Nist. Nabokov
 is here referring to his mother's tendency to view her
 life and the world of the Russian aristocracy with a
 "retrospective fervor."

Part III

Paradigm Shift: Gendered Ethnic Modernism

Bounded mythically by the ghetto, the autobiography showcased by the traditional canon defined the immigrant's life as "exemplary social experience" (Klein, *Foreigners* 34). In writing such a pattern of their lives, Antin and Stern (in her first work) had expressed a certain nostalgic yearning for certainty and simplicity. Thus their autobiographies documented the immigrants' "arrival" in the various senses American culture gives to that term. The autobiographies of Kohut (with reservations) and Solomon continued to affirm such a model. They did so by turning away from the audience that grew increasingly critical and more willing to constitute Jews yet again as alien as the century wore on. The reductive reading of their works reproduced these texts as evidence that the immigrant was at home in America, her aspirations equal to the options available to her. For such critics, these texts were cultural buffers against the upheaval of modern life. But the immigrants' promised land was in reality an urban wasteland--a capitalist society marked by the exploitation of resources and the devastation of human life. And a text more responsive to this reality might undo the original premises of immigrant autobiography. With

Pauline Leader, the ethnic autobiography accomplished precisely that.²

Leader's text, *And No Birds Sing* (1931), argues for a life without a past, reveals home as prison/exile, and represents the self as a stranger. In a genre that is premised on the coherence of the ego, she raises questions regarding the ontological status of the self. Or put another way, she foregrounds female subjectivity at the same time that subjectivity is rendered increasingly problematic by mass culture and the proletarianization of modern life. If these features present a reversal of the original form of the immigrant autobiography, they also show how this new paradigm might be consistent with and precursor to the literary tradition that comes to dominate the Depression decade.

Merely isolating these themes may be evidence for realistic content which has been captured for sociological analysis, dutifully conveying a heightened awareness of the relations between psychology and sociology. But that barely defines Leader's significance. Indeed, her text offers us the opportunity

² Of course Stern's second work had already begun the task of remapping the landscape of immigrant autobiography by engaging in gender and ethnic critique; however, Leader's indictment, as the chapter will show, is far more scathing and sweeping than Stern's and internally consistent in a way that Stern's is not.

for examining the relationship of the immigrant autobiography to the high modernist mode. It raises the question of how a radical experiment in living might be tied to radical experiments in style and how, in turn, a radical experiment in style might be used to engage in a radical social critique. In a genre that has even more insistently than the novel demanded a particular kind of narrative coherence, Leader infused dream, myth, and symbol to re-imagine its structure and invent a new syntax for its prose. And rather than use these elements to seal off the text, she made them responsive to the conditions of modernity, writing the nation's sense of its own dislocation and displacement.

One might argue, as does a recent historian of modernism, that, in a period of corruption and exploitation, the literary text and the artist both were isolated from society, defined by an esthetic norm that valorized individual response, dreams, and private myth (Eksteins 293-4). The modernist text from this point of view is seen as increasingly obscure, cut loose from the nexus of social convention, an esthetic object impervious to social reality, increasingly irresponsible. However, this seems to me to be a naive reading of the social text, and an oversimplified one. The autobiographical project, when tied to modernism, more nearly embodied the personal view--realized style as vision--but also reflected the fragmentation of com-

munity and the fragmentation of self as a consequence of social disorganization.

Tentatively, we might counter Eksteins' view with Edmund Wilson's definition of literary modernism as defined by the fusion of symbolism and naturalism to frame my argument. But the autobiographical tradition had already been allegorized. And precisely because it once reflected an exemplary social experience in America, the autobiography came, under the conditions of modernity, to exemplify as well as to represent the failure of America. For conveying the ironies of an unassimilable self and an unlivable life, there could be no more exemplary form than the ethnic woman's autobiography and therefore no more exemplary a modernist text than the ethnic woman's autobiography. The ethnic American woman was the one best suited to write it. To clarify the reasons for this, I would like to establish a context that draws on both classical theories of modernism and feminist revisions of those theories, which have deepened our sense of the significance of gender in re/defining modernism.³

³ Only now is the issue of ethnicity (or race) beginning to be addressed, in part by viewing such writers as Yeziarska and Hurston as figures constituting modernism, rather than as writers outside modernism; notably feminist critics have begun to dismantle the female as a monolithic subject. See, for example, *Women's Writing in Exile*, eds. Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram, and Suzanne Clark's *Sentimental Modernism*.

Literary modernism and the modernity with which it may or may not be coterminous might in general be defined by a sense of radical dislocation or disjunction with the past and its values. Just as Darwin represents a critical juncture for modernity, World War I was the crucible in which a subsequent generation was forged. In a variety of ways the War had put an end to the past, had, one might say, with the lives it had taken, literally destroyed it. In the United States (as distinguished, for example, from Britain or Germany), the sense of horror at the death of civilization was less dominant than the degree to which the war exposed the moral bankruptcy of the intelligentsia and permitted the reassertion of traditional values (Berthoff 297; see also May).

The modernist recoiled from this corrupt reactionary stance and rejected values (including artistic and aesthetic ones) that were seen as archaic and moralistic. Modernist artists saw themselves battling against a restrictive conventionality. For women, such conventionality was linked with traditional gender definitions, and so they more than men focused their critique on sexuality. It was the focus of rebellion in their lives and the scandal of their art. In the United States, the end of the war coincided with

extensive repression and a reversion to traditional values (Prohibition, renewed religious fervor, isolationism, and provincialism) that seriously ended or undermined the women's movement as well as women's emancipation. If the new American woman had earlier chosen to revolt from the small-town village and to relocate herself to another Village where she might realize her bohemian ideal, she now chose Europe as the site for a similar freedom from convention that New York City once had offered.⁴

For many, then, the choice of expatriatism was about the opportunity to lead politically or personally radical lives--or by implication, to continue to make connections between the individual and the historical process, between the political and the personal. Thus women like H.D., Djuna Barnes, Natalie Barney, Gertrude Stein, and Kay Boyle were in the vanguard of the flight of artists to Europe and of the consequent link between

⁴ The phrase itself ("the revolt from the village") comes from an article of the same name written by Carl van Doren for the *Nation* (12 Oct. 1921), which attempted to establish a critical taxonomy of contemporary writing; as Anthony Hilfer points out in a more recent literary study of the phenomenon, the writers who criticized the ideal of the small-town village as an empty or corrupt myth also embodied the revolt in their personal lives. See *The Revolt from the Village, 1915-1930* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1969).

expatriation and modernism.⁵ However, it might also be argued that modernism has too frequently been defined exclusively by its expatriate production; one result has been a failure to consider those women who came as immigrants or who stayed behind to conduct a critique of the political retrenchment and social exploitation at home. The most eminent member in the former category is of course Emma Goldman, who synthesized various American traditions with her anarchist theory to indict America (Clark 42-66). But native writers like Susan Glaspell, Dorothy Scarborough, Zona Gale, Evelyn Scott also developed a modernist critique, using a variety of experimental techniques in their playwriting and their fiction.⁶ Thus, what might be called an internal exile or immigrant/ethnic modernism, though understudied and much undervalued, was ironically like its expatriate version in conveying a sense of dispossession.

The war also ended the tolerance shown the immigrant: the first anti-immigration statutes aborted

⁵ For more extensive discussion of this concept, see Shari Benstock, "Expatriate Modernism: Writing on the Cultural Rim," *Women's Writing in Exile*, eds. Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram (Chapel Hill and London: U of North Carolina P) 19-40. Benstock's historical work on the expatriate women's community, *Women of the Left Bank, Paris, 1900-1940* is essential reading.

⁶ See, for example, Glaspell's *The Inheritors* and Zona Gale's *Miss Zulu Betts*, both 1921; in fiction, I am thinking of Gale's *Faint Perfume* (1923), Scarborough's *The Wind* (1925), and Evelyn Scott's *The Narrow House* (1921).

whatever respect for ethnic difference that had previously existed. The legislation in 1917, 1921, and 1924 represented major restrictionist provisions, including literacy requirements, political limitations (and procedures for deportation), and nationally or ethnically defined quotas (Higham 52-56). Even success on America's own terms became an invitation to contempt (Klein, *Foreigners* 29). The United States had been adamant in its demand of immigrants to slough off religious orthodoxy and a medieval world view that lacked relevance to the modern American experience; nonetheless, the ethnic American (artist) would subsequently be damned for apostasy: what had previously been exacted by a harshly materialist society was now scorned by a reinvigorated isolationism and recrudescant anti-semitism. Ellen Moers has told the story of the repression of Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* from the point of view of its rejection of a conventional morality, but one might well retell the vagaries of Dreiser's reputation from the point of view of a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant male literary establishment intent on maintaining its standards of gentility against the immigrant son of German-speaking pietistic family whose various members had disappeared into the fringes of society while their brother achieved a com-

mercial success that was largely dependent on the popular culture of the mass media. (The distaste of neoclassical humanist critic Stuart Sherman is palpable across the decades.)⁷ Moreover, the chief American modernist texts of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Hemingway bear significant traces of the anti-semitism of the period and provide additional literary evidence of the dangers that beset the immigrant women writer (Wilentz 186-193). One might well ask how the artist might be defined by/choose to represent an outworn ethnicity that was used to stigmatize her.

Both as a woman then, and as a Jew, the artist perceived her self alienated from her time and place. Yet even without these particularities to contend with, the modern self was being redefined or rather reconstituted by the new discoveries and insights of modern psychology, anthropology, and sociology--all new disciplines that served to intellectualize and consequently to distance our selves from ourselves. This distancing signalled a reification. Here is Mann drawing on Schopenhauer to help us understand the modern self:

⁷ For the former see *Two Dreisers* (New York: Viking, 1969); for Sherman's article, see the historical critical response on Dreiser ; Henry F. May seeking to place it in context, discusses the anti-German fervor in this country generated by the Great War (*The End of American Innocence*).

"Precisely as in a dream, it is one's own will that unconsciously appears as inexorable objective destiny, everything in it preceding out of ourselves and each of us being the secret theatre-manager of our own dreams, so also in reality . . . our fate may be the product of our inmost selves, of our wills, and we are actually bringing about what seems to be happening us."

It is out of this premise that Mann argues for "the unity of the ego and the world" (Spears 56). Simmel, also influenced by Freud, argues in a complementary if antithetical fashion:

"The essence of modernity as such is psychologism, the experiencing and interpretation of the world in terms of the reactions of our inner life and indeed as an inner world, the dissolution of fixed contents in the fluid element of the soul, from which all that is substantive is filtered and whose forms are merely forms of motion" (Frisby 46).

This fusion of the objective with the subjective was differently inflected by women. Departing from traditional notions of female selfhood, women were in the position of inventing themselves; thus their identities were defined not only by "what had *happened* to them, but [by] what it was like *to be* them" (Hanscombe, Smyers 9). Similarly, the modernist immigrant knew that her life constituted an innovation precisely because she could rely neither on the pieties of Jewish life nor on the pietistic or repressive conventionalities of American culture as the bases on which she might pattern herself.

Given that one's self was created in and through mundane life, what dominates the period is a preoccupation with the present, a concern with the "just now," or the everyday and ordinary, from which the word *modern* derives and evolves. In the United States in particular, this concept translates into a local subject matter, into an aesthetic that respects expression "which would be minimally fictive, and exciting because of its unmediated engagement with common, current fact" (Klein, *Foreigners* 76; see also Kenner 1975 and Homberger). Not the least reason for this was the artist's desire to *document* a reality denied by bourgeois respectability, to expose what much traditional prose or genteel fiction evaded--a documentation that holds doubly or triply true, as it were, for women. Also for women the "common, current fact" was itself vivified, made *new* (to draw on another sense of modern) by its relation to subjectivity; what was a way of life rewrote traditional narrative and challenged conventions of literary discourse.

Just as women sought to obliterate the traditional distinction between self and the world in their lives, so women writers hoped to erase the traditional distinctions between art and reality that had served to perpetuate those distinctions and to invent new techniques for constituting themselves (Groves 26-27; Hanscombe and Smyers 9). Critics focus on the poetic or

fictional work of such authors as Jean Rhys, Djuna Barnes, Gertrude Stein, and H.D and Bryher in forming their generalizations about these new stylistic strategies; despite feminist interest in nontraditional genres, however, little has been done to seek out women's modernist prose or to define a modernist non-fiction aesthetic. In scrutinizing these genres, the aesthetic might also be differently constituted by elements of gender and ethnicity.

The issues that I have foregrounded not only contribute to creating the modernist autobiography; they also signal the immigrant/ethnic female autobiography as *the* modernist mode. Put another way, the genre is arguably the quintessential means of engendering the female self; the autobiographical text incarnates the female body without refusing either mind or feeling. Yet, while incarnating a new intersection between art and reality, the modernist autobiography undermines its own existence. It posits a mimetic tradition and then writes the narrative in an experimental style. Such a style reveals life as a phantasmagoria, shows the living as dead, relations as transitory and meaningless, habitation as homelessness, relocation as rootlessness, immigration as exile. It replaces nostalgia with exposé. In its ironic documentation of the conditions of modern life, the text realizes the impossibility of forging a genuine ethnic female

identity within it. In describing the absence of continuity and a sustaining (immigrant/female) community, the modernist autobiography forces an acknowledgement of the inability of creating a unified (ethnic female) self.⁸

Taking her turn from Deleuze and Guattari, Caren Kaplan has used the term "deterritorialization" to describe the rewriting of home and exile in Western feminist discourse. Referring to contemporary autobiographical writing, she argues that current feminist work has sought "to deconstruct the terms of social privilege and power" rather than to insist on the "sensation of being homesick while at 'home'" (Kaplan 193). It is in this sense, for example, that I also use and oppose the terms of *exposé* and nostalgia above; however, while Kaplan sees this deconstruction that locates "the fissures in our identities" and unravels "the seams of our territories" as a refusal of former certainties and simplistic explanations, and as one which successfully avoids repeating the "imperializing moves" of canonical literature, I am not sure that using this strategy of deterritorialization

⁸ Catherine Belsey formulates it this way: The text "contains within itself the critique of its own values" and through the critical process "provide[s] a knowledge of the limits of ideological representation" (57)

insures that we, or the ethnic women writers who are our surrogates, will come to "reinhabit a world of our making" (194-195). Indeed this chapter is intended as an exploration of precisely that dilemma, as it is described by Pauline Leader.

Chapter 8

**Pauline Leader and the Modernist Autobiography: The
Immigrant as Exile**

And No Birds Sing was written by a young woman of twenty-two. Given that it has not been reprinted since its publication in 1931, I would like to begin by summarizing the book. It tells the story of an emigrant child, the eldest of six children, raised in a small city in Vermont, where her family, along with the owner of the town's department store, were probably the sole Jews. Although her parents achieve a modicum of economic success, the family remain socially marginal. Under a variety of stresses, family life deteriorates, intensified by an unspecified accident that the mother suffers at work that sends her into a decline from which she never recovers, and which then seems to precipitate a nervous condition. Then the child, on the verge of adolescence, suffers an illness that leaves her totally deaf. The child's earlier rebelliousness temporarily abates and the family is drawn together by this crisis; in particular, the mother and child form a bond during Pauline's illness and recovery. It is a tie that eventually proves constraining as the daughter seeks to heal herself and gain the independence that would permit her to become an autonomous adult. Desperate "to stand up," as she

calls her efforts to regain her self-esteem and her ability for self-determining action, she returns to high school. However, the educational institution is unable to cope with her handicap, and she is eventually expelled, leaving her unoccupied and idle. Medical solutions to her problem are equally unavailing. Without adequate communal support and care, the internal cohesiveness of the family proves transient, and a pattern of abuse re-asserts itself. Subject to increasing violence, the again desperate and lonely protagonist uses her mother's temporary hospitalization and the ensuing household disorganization as a cover to run away from home. She has some notion of fleeing to become a writer.

She arrives in New York City and, in the tradition of other would-be artists who have preceded her, manages to locate Greenwich Village and to rent a room there. She is nineteen, and for the moment, made euphoric by her liberation and successful effort of re-definition/relocation.

Eventually her resources diminish and then evaporate, causing her to move to less expensive quarters and begin the arduous task of job hunting, a cycle that repeats itself several times in the book and one that was chronic for the working-class writers I have been considering but which is made more difficult

by Leader's deafness and her refusal/inability to develop adequate means for coping with the limits that her deafness imposes. Near penury, she finally gets work as a dishwasher and then, her economic concerns somewhat appeased, works up the courage to track down the poet whose own story had inspired her and with whom she had briefly corresponded. He advises her to return home and, when she refuses to take his advice, will have nothing more to do with her.

Fired from work, she roams the city, until, hungry for food and human company, she enters a cafeteria and finds a warmth and liveliness that stirs in her a desire, somehow, to "connect." Having gotten a job in the garment district, Leader lives a double life: submitting to the ordeal of demeaning and meaningless sweatshop work from sun-up to sundown, she then metamorphoses into a bohemian at the witching hour of midnight. The news of her mother's premature death comes at this time and sends her into a depression, which she believes costs her her job. At about the same time, she learns that the crowd who have befriended her have planned a benefit dance on her behalf. From the monies accumulated, she is able to take the summer off, ostensibly to write. However, the funds dwindle, and she finds herself with nothing by

way of creative work to show for her time off and the chill of the upcoming winter settling on her.

She also fears that she may be pregnant. Groundless as her anxiety may be, she seeks medical advice and suddenly finds herself the object of bizarre scrutiny, soon installed in a reformatory for pregnant women; barely a week later, she begins to menstruate, and some time soon after that, but not without some difficulty, manages to persuade the staff of the error in her being there. But it is not until her family have forwarded ten dollars that she is permitted to leave. The book ends on a subdued and inconclusive note: Leader departs but without any clear destination.

This then is the stark summary of the autobiography. Even in its barest outline, it has little resemblance to any of the texts we have considered. I have purposely stressed its naturalistic content and have shaped the story somewhat differently from its authorial point of view, as a foil to the discussion that will follow--for this matter is delivered in a highly wrought, carefully crafted prose.

The circumstances of the cafeteria suggest that Leader herself had achieved some celebrity, as "a girl of 19 years, a struggling poet of the imagist manner" as the *New York Times* had it, when it published a small

article on the benefit to be held in her honor, though the motive is not made clear; certainly if one did not already know that she was deaf, it would be difficult to determine that from the text (June 8, 1927). Be that as it may, perhaps because she became something of a Village character, her book was widely reviewed by the establishment press both here and abroad upon its publication in both the United States and England. At best, the reviews were mixed.

Only *The Nation* found its message worthwhile (and that most reviews focused on the message is an indication of the moralistic bias of book reviewing during the period). Others were either more enraged or more embarrassed by what they considered to be the book's "intensely personal story"; they considered it to be a book of "devouring egoism," (SR) a "testimony to the cult of individual experience" (*Outlook and Independence*); and in one case provided the verbal equivalent of a sound thrashing, which concluded with the following: "As a case report of a thwarted and sordid life, the book has much value. Unfortunately, it is offered in all good faith as an indictment of our civilization." (*Bookman*). As if one were separable from the other. Prima facie, the text cited by the reviews would seem to meet all the criteria of modernity established by contemporary philosophers and thinkers.

In Pauline Leader's work, the critique of morality and dislocation of self is simultaneously signalled by the persistent definition of the self as other--alien, outcast, foreigner, and Jew, with which the other is considered synonymous. All of these are metonymic, contiguous with one another. And by association, otherness is linked with being an outcast or exile and with being a prisoner or caged.

Leader first represents this otherness through an economic construct: her parents own a meat market, and she yearns to be free of that "association," an association that is given a kind of sensory weight:

The market-smell that stuck to my clothes, that I took with me into the classroom. A smell of cold meat, of cold pork, a peculiar raw smell--the market-smell. I could not get away from it. Everywhere I went it went with me. It ostracized me. Why couldn't my father have a decent store? A drug store. The druggist's children smelled beautifully. They did not smell like me. Nobody refused to play with the druggist's children. But then, the druggist was also not a Jew, a dirty Jew (22).

It is the family's concern with money and economic survival, their involvement with *trade* that, in the child's mind, distinguishes them from their middle-class neighbors. But their otherness, as the quotation above clarifies, is also *embodied* and personified. That is, it is persistently identified by bodily asso-

ciations that suggest physical degradation along with acquiring an affinity to an older, medieval order of sin: "filthy" lucre is the operative term by means of which economic activity is perceived as contagion and rendered biological. Before the child is very much older, her parents have purchased a rooming house, and the income they derive from boarders replaces the butcher shop as the source of their economic independence. No longer smelly or dirty, Leader describes the way in which she herself is turned into a "sign" by virtue of her parents' decision to advertise furnished rooms (64). Once again she marks the difference between the community and herself by pointing to her place in a network of commodification. Later, she delineates her stigmatized status as outsider:

It was a street given over for the most part to middle-aged men and women. The children who lived on the street appeared to be middle-aged also in their staidness. They had been what is known as properly brought up, and we had *escaped being brought up*. . . . So we were *barbarians*. . . , thorns in the side of respectable small-town folk. . . . (65, my italics)

Leader's use of the term which the Greeks used for foreigners is compelling. To the fifth-century Athenian, all non-Hellenes sounded as if they were saying barbar-bar: their foreign language characterized them as barbarians. Also equating political participation with humanness, the Athenian saw all those not born within

the borders of his *polis* as uncivilized. He thus rendered genealogy and culture synonymous. Here, she captures the parallel maneuver in America by which the emigrant was deprived of language and civilization, with a strategy that simultaneously eradicated family and social history. It is as if spatial dislocation had also succeeded in erasing the temporal dimension and thus in annulling the past. With such a strategy, the emigrant is transformed into an internal exile, unless she opts for the kitsch exploitation of the past, nostalgia.

To Leader, Sunday serves as another marker of her separation, of her inability to achieve the gentility that she associates with the middle-class existence of her neighbors:

On Sunday I was an *outcast*. I did not belong with them, the American little girls, all dressed up in their hats and gloves. . . . Hats came to symbolize the difference between myself and the American little girls. . . . And never more so than on Sundays I wanted something. I wanted a symbol too. I wanted a clean, sweet Sunday dress, a hat and thin gloves and white stockings and shoes. But it was more than that. I did not want to be an *alien* in all this Sunday beauty (8, 10, my italics).

It is her being Jewish, which is conceived in virtually racial terms, that makes such a desire to belong unattainable. In fact, what was sign becomes stigma

and a semiosis of genealogical difference, incorporated into a non-referential *sytem* of meaning.

Just as her Jewishness marks her as irretrievably other within her community, so does her deafness become the feature through which her family defines her as other. It is this that imprisons her in her "tower of silence" (167; 236) and renders her a "prisoner in [her] own house, at the mercy of the jailers" (141). Mapped onto the public/social domain, the metaphor conveys her perception that her deafness leads people to define her "as a freak," and in so defining her, to "cage" her (221). Here the cultural merely converts the biological to its purpose rather than biologizing its construction of ethnicity.

How does Leader respond to this sense of an otherness that is both imposed and created, both chosen and inherent? The answer is complex and subtle. As many of the quotations from the text suggest, rather than holding those responsible who have ostracized her, she throws the curses that have been used against her at her parents: "Damned Jews!" (18), a strategy that expresses self-hatred, the internalization of her own frustration and non-acceptance. Later she self-consciously defines her resentment of her father in these terms, an expression of projection: "Mixed in with my hatred of my father was shame. I looked at him

with the eyes of the Americans" (44); as a consequence, "I conceived a hatred for Jewish men. Jews let their women-folk work for them" (46; 61). Similarly, her view of her mother is in part a reflection of grotesque efforts of compensation, her American aspirations.

Why didn't my mother dress like other mothers, go out like other mothers? My mother never went out. She was chained to the market and the sort of uniform she wore in it. It was a round, shapeless apron covering her dress (46).

In sum, Leader yearns for her parents to acquire the conventional respectability that she acknowledges everywhere else is bought at the cost of denial and hypocrisy, what she later calls "surface" (271). And she does so, interestingly enough, in terms of demanding conformity to traditionally defined *American* gender roles, very much at variance with Jewish views of male and female roles.¹

This ambivalence is apparent in other ways as well. America itself is linked to the very idea of con-

¹ For Jews of East European background, it was not uncommon to have women be economic sustainers, leaving men free to pursue scholarship and spiritual and religious studies, or at the least for them to participate with men in insuring economic survival under the exiguous circumstances of ghetto or Russian urban life (See Baum, Hyman, and Michel 55-59). Note Leader's comment above, regarding the hatred she conceived for her father because, as the girl-child perceived, he insisted that her mother work.

ventionality ("America has taught me to be a good American," she announces, "to snicker at anything unusual, 'foreign'" [129-30]). And as with Stern, that conventionality is associated with rooms, houses, an appropriate décor:

I wanted a home like other girls. I didn't want a market and two rooms upstairs. I wanted a home that was a house by itself. A house with a hallway in it. I dreamed of that hallway. It was a symbol--like Sunday (18)

And the hallway of her dreams, as she puts it, represents an order that is both aesthetically and morally proper--although one can by now discern a certain degree of irony toward the subject:

A hallway where you took off your things, where you coughed a little to announce your presence, where you made little noises, shuffling noises with your feet, where you hung up your things instead of flinging them wildly on a chair . . . such a house would most certainly have a hallway (49-50)

In this context a piano becomes still "another symbol of that world where there were no markets, no two rooms, no dirty public hallways, no stinks, no drudgery, no impatience, no sharp words, no smaller brothers and sisters always to be cared for" (20).

Despite Leader's intermittent desire to find a reprieve from her own alienation and to rest in bourgeois complacency, the dominant note is rejection of American materialism and mores. In fact the imagery

that defines her alienation and isolation described above simultaneously critiques the myth of the small town as an embodiment of the communal myth. The irony that is lacking in Stern's text is pervasive here. Nowhere is this note sounded more poignantly nor more bitterly than with regard to her mother's relationship to America.

Thus Leader recognizes the ways in which her mother out-Americans Americans (and forces in us the same recognition). Eager to insure that the rooming houses the family owned were filled to capacity, Mrs. Leader persistently argued with regard to her tenants: "'Never mind the kind of people. . . , it's their money that counts. If they can pay, they're as good as anybody'" to which Leader dryly adds: "My mother was a believer in democracy" (65). The American reward for assent to materialism is, of course, ascent, or material success. But, as Leader suggests "prosperity" is what gives Americans permission to sacrifice their lives to a material standard: "My mother worked harder than ever, my mother with a perpetual line between her eyes, her voice sharper and sharper. I could almost see my mother working herself to death" (50). And when her mother dies at the age of 39, Leader once again evokes her memory and links it with money and democracy: "'If you've got the money, you're as good as anybody else.'

An absolute American, my mother. No one had ever been more American than my mother. America could be proud of her. She was one of its pioneers" (225).

Even more relevant thematically to Leader's rejection of American moral standards, perhaps, is her definition of America as shaped by conventional ideas of sexuality and gender roles that Leader herself rejects and of which her text constitutes a critique. Despite her early desire to have her parents conform to the American gender pattern, she comes to recognize that American culture defines sexuality as evil; she spurns both the "vile and nasty" conceptions of sexuality expressed in her environment and the idealized notions she discovers in books (147); assessing the unhappy relations between men and women, she simultaneously recognizes the consequences of the double standard and rejects marriage as the alternative to women's condemnation (148). At first, this insight ties her with other outcasts, grotesques that link her small town to the world of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919): the lawyer "sometimes in his office, but more often . . . in the saloon across the road," (15) from whose "exposure" she barely escapes; the eldest daughter left by her mother's death to care for a family of 7, who becomes the subject of gossip and is eventually driven out of town for sleeping with

the men she takes in as boarders (47); the illicit lovers whose shadows haunt the night streets as they seek cover from the town's oppressive scrutiny (165).

Then, in school, she observes two girls fawning over an Adonis-like Francis; she becomes their emissary, passing their notes to the young man, even as she ponders their attraction to him and to his dreamy sexuality:

They wanted to capture for their very own that sweet lovely smile which held all the lightness, all the summer of the world, which had the power to make the world into something other than the common thing it was. . . . This was what would lighten the drudgery of the schoolday, the drudgery of life. . . . There was nothing back of the lovely blue eyes, but what of that . . . ? He was halfway into another world. Who went with him would be taken halfway into that other world, a more beautiful world than this (41).

She admits that she loves him too but some premonition leads her to view his loveliness with fatalism; "One day the teacher announced that Francis had died. . . . A little later the two girls left school to go to work in the mills"(42). The incident as a whole, and the concluding quotation indirectly convey Leader's prescience and extraordinary wisdom. Her sense that sexuality is a life force, somehow akin to the transforming power of the imagination--even when both have been distorted by social repression--is one of the factors in her decision to acquaint herself with Mr. Mays:

Mr. Mays was over sixty when I first met him. Drink and women were his two passions; to acquire them he worked eight hours a day in the mills. On Saturday afternoons and Sundays he sat on the porch and watched the world go by He told me stories of his life. He told me about the women he had known. He was even more ingenuous and naive than I was, although neither of us knew that we were ingenuous or naive There was one thing, and one thing only in the world, and that thing was sex.

Forbidden to visit, she nonetheless defies both convention and her parents, for "his attempts to touch me, place his arm around me, I regarded rightly as being of no importance. What mattered was the sense of companionship he gave me. I guessed that he was as lonely as I was in spite of all the memories he had to keep him company. He was as much an anomaly in a small town as I" (122-24).

Locked in battle with her parents, tormented by her mother's accusations and her father's physical abuse, and then expelled from school, Leader is increasingly thrown in upon herself and isolated. "After a time, I had voluntarily enclosed myself, as the only way to escape" (221). Living in a world in which "everybody seemed to see without seeing" (148), she is "against the people" (165) as much as they are at odds with her. Finally Leader seeks refuge from the narrow, provincial world that constitutes her prison in the anonymous indifference of the city. There she hopes

to find emotional and sexual expression, to insure herself against intellectual conformity; as she puts it, to sustain a continuity between her body and her mind (236) that will put an end to her sense of dispossession. Ironically, however, once in the city, she is still further alienated from herself and the body yet again is a source of betrayal. The imagery of imprisonment becomes the actuality of a medical clinic with "iron bars at the windows." The possibility of having a baby becomes a criminal act. The metaphors of exile and outcast become reality--life takes on the aspect of allegory and the world is a prison house.

Spears and most other critics who have dealt with the city as a literary artifact have confirmed its role as the *mise-en-scène* of modernity. Yet these same critics have formulated these generalizations without surveying the writings of women, particularly those of the working class, so that it is difficult but groundbreaking to discuss the role of the urban landscape in the work of the female ethnic writer, and whether it is in any way reshaped by the conditions of gender, ethnicity, or class. It is the purpose of this section to explore this issue and to suggest the ways in which the historical and social circumstances as typified in Leader's life contribute to a revision of a series of

urban oxymorons, or oxymoronic conceits--the city as the home of the alien(ated), birthplace of the homeless cosmopolitan.²

Modernism understands the city as the container for, the vehicle of a new kind of informing and defining experience. Substituting for the school and the university, the city serves as the source of knowledge; yet its education is neither analytical nor structured, nor is it coherent. By definition, then, it supplies a knowledge that is fictive, arbitrary, and accidental--and the self it constitutes is of a similar nature.³ Thus only an experimental genre, the modernist autobiography, can chronicle and give shape to the self and reality created therein, simultaneously remaining faithful to the primacy of sensation and to the construction of the ego as itself an artifact. In other words, the quest for self proceeds in tandem with the creation of art, both of which posit an imaginary, hypothetical unity. The work of the German philosopher

² Feminist work that has gendered the urban narrative has largely been written by historians: see, for example, Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986) and Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

³ This sense of life, and of the self, is captured in the informal phrase: "I made it up as I went along."

Ernest Mach has suggested the former line of thought; the work of the German sociologist Simmel had still earlier supplied the link between urban experience, which Simmel equated with "adventure," and general aesthetic form: "The [adventure-] experience itself has self-defined boundaries, organically determined and thus allies itself with a work of art." The urban experience is analogously related "to the totality of life itself"; but epistemologically, it is defined by virtue of its form, rather than its content ("The Adventurer" 190).

Leader, by centering her text on the flight /urban quest, creates *ab ova sua* the modernist autobiography, that is, that which makes self, city, and genre congruent. In other words, the city that is to be found at the center of her text (and by extension in all modernist autobiography) derives its particular quality partly from the role it plays in the (creation of the) writer's "psychic life." The "particular encompassing of the accidentally external by the internally necessary" within the boundaries of the city (Simmel 191-192) leads to the etherealization of the city. Thus the adventure/landscape that Leader describes has the "quality of a dream." Ultimately, she finds herself submerged in, or swept up by the momentum of urban life. When she is unwittingly trapped in the dream,

contingency converting to necessity, the city becomes nightmarish. The text of the nightmare is something to which I will circle back.

Examining the phenomenon of urban life from an observer's point of view, the British critic Malcolm Bradbury has commented that "it is the journalist, the social scientist, the visionary or surrealistic prophet, the underground men"--or, as his literary categories somewhat mask--working-class women and men, immigrants, who were best able "to probe the contingency, multifariousness, and principles of conflict and growth in urban life" (99). Such types occupy the status of itinerant middlemen, on one hand providing needed urban services or creating them, on the other remaining marginal to the dominant society and isolated from its central values (Zenner 130). Bradbury's metaphoric description and Zenner's historical method reverberate with the existential reality depicted in Leader's text. There are two reciprocal sources for this existential reality, one derived from Leader's status as a Jewish immigrant, the other from her identity as a woman.

From the point of view of her life as a woman, the journey is an ironic rupture with the past: it constitutes a poor woman's expatriatism, if you will, what Susan Stanford Friedman has suggested in another con-

text is a "geographic manifestation of a more fundamental exile from convention." In other words, it signals and symbolizes the "alienation from a conventional female destiny" (92, 95). Thus, to amend Benstock's comment, a woman need hardly leave home to be exiled and expatriated. Yet the central defining events of Leader's experience in the city are the defining experiences for women in a phallogentric system; in still another twist of the screw, the climax of the text undoes and denies the very effort to escape from convention even as it interrogates the possibility of liberating oneself from the destiny of biology.⁴ Beyond that, it suggests the epistemic principle that makes exile an inescapable definition of female reality. At the same time that the text speaks to the chaos and unreality of urban life, it seeks to show the specific ways in which the urban reality is inimical to women in particular.

And so we arrive at the text of the nightmare. It begins with a rape that never occurs, although it might have. The (non)event thus constitutes a (meta-

⁴ Insofar, that is, as the climax is understood to involve the equation of women with their biological nature. This is class-bound, as we shall see: the female protagonist is pregnant "because" she is "lower" class.

phor)/metonym of female (sur) reality; it defines what women live with, the penumbra under which our reality takes shape. Yet what is revealed by the events that follow is that rape may not be the worst torment, or rather it is an outrage matched by women's inability to define themselves or the terms of their own representation. As this episode plays itself out in Leader's text, it takes on an increasing air of "unreality," contributing to a dematerialized, grotesque urban landscape, fusing "the sordidly realistic and the phantasmagoric" and juxtaposing "the matter-of-fact and the fantastic" (T.S. Eliot in Spears 140).

To continue: Hungry and worn out, once again without work and with her savings fast disappearing, Pauline feels a sense of growing desperation as the winter begins to close in on her. The combination of her circumstances and her anxiety presumably contribute to her not menstruating, and growing panicked, she considers that she may be pregnant and seeks advice from the dental clinic she has been attending, the only medical institution with which she has any contact. The staff deal cursorily with her, sending her off with a piece of paper on which is written only an address. There the people who ask her if she would like to stay offer no explanations regarding the nature of the place and ask no questions with regard to her ability to pay

or her right to be there; she is further "shocked and revolted" by the manual gynecological examination, and still more disconcerted by the doctor who tells Leader that she is pregnant, presumably, as Leader notes, because she would not be there if she weren't. The pregnancy takes on a reality that it did not previously have, or, from another perspective, the pregnancy must be true, because the doctor has said so; meanwhile the "ape man" of Pauline's hallucinations--, someone who broke into her room and her sleep and raped her,-- suddenly becomes too improbable. "Yet my child must have a father." So the bizarre fantasy of rape is replaced by another that is at once more socially acceptable and thus more clearly sexist/phallogocentric. It is therefore not less horrifying: "In my imagination I picked him up from the streets. I was cold and hungry. . . . I had been tempted," and imagination immediately becomes spoken reality (238-241).⁵

⁵ I have tried to suggest here, as Leader does within the text itself, the ways in which the multiplying possibilities for interpreting reality reflect a multiplying reality. Because this part of an authorial strategy to metaphorize events, or conversely, to redefine narrative event as symbolic metonym, the extended description also contributes to the spatialization of temporality. This distinctive representation of the contemporary urban world is by turns denominated as surreal or unreal. I will return to this topic under a later discussion of modernist style and the autobiography.

As if caught up in some spell (and with only two dollars left to her name), Leader agrees to return to the place with her belongings, by this time convinced that it is a boarding school. Once installed she is forced to undress and shower with kerosene, and is taken to a room in which she is permitted only a few trinkets. Left alone at last by the staff, she becomes the object of attention of the other residents, who ask her, inexplicably, "'What did you do?'" and passively accept her response as an appropriate motive for her presence. It is then that she really looks at the women and notices that "Only the corners of their lips lifted with the sniffing curiosity which could not reach their eyes, because the door to their eyes was closed and locked forever" (249). The woman who had asked her the first question tells her that she has committed herself not to some supportive institution but to a reformatory which defines her, neither as needy nor as a survivor, but as a "wayward girl" and therefore to be brought under the control of its disciplinary institutions (249). She is now a prisoner.

No longer captive of a metaphor, Leader is punished for being a woman, her status rendered illicit

merely by virtue of her biology.⁶ And the prison house itself may be understood as the metonym of the larger urban world, which in equal degrees enslaves/alienates her and robs her and its other female captives of possibility. Two examples will serve to show how Leader renders the urban landscape as a world of the living dead. When the women who have trooped in to meet her drift away (they seem to fade or recede, as if they were wraiths returning to another realm), one woman remains behind:

Her eyes seemed to be the most dead, the most indifferent. They had been dead for a long time. There was even a faint yellow of decay about them which made me turn away. . . .

. . . I looked at her, but her dead eyes were far away. I could not reach them. Then I saw that they had come back from their terrible distance, and were fixed on the bureau top which I had laid the three or four handkerchiefs, all that the young woman had allowed me to take upstairs from my suitcase. . . .

She arose as if in a trance [her eyes] fixed on the red flower. She took the handkerchief in her hand. . . .

'Can I have it? ' . . .

'Sure.' . . .

Without any thanks, or even turn of her head, she took the handkerchief and went out. (249-251)

Even more surreal and horrifying is the spectral landscape Leader describes once she accustoms herself to

⁶ I am reminded here of Margaret Homans' argument that one feminist strategy is to make literally true what has been mythologized by patriarchy (10, 13, 16).

her surroundings. Under the cover of night these women regain a phantasmagoric/illusory freedom, and like the living dead, as Leader describes them, they silently whirl through the halls and cavort without laughter in their rooms, their limbs intertwined on the narrow cots and sofas as they share physical and other intimacies that are denied them in the daylight world (258-259). Beautiful and seductive, this phosphorescent dream world is also a nightmare within the nightmare of the institution within the nightmare of the city; it thus attracts and repels and conveys the unreality of the reality. And indeed the world to which the hegemonic culture has condemned the women is one over which by definition they have no control, therefore one which leaves them without power, and as Simmel insisted, insubstantial.

To recapitulate, Leader draws the modern urban world in such a way that its hellishness is defined in gender terms. First she focuses on the threat of rape, which represents in part the random violence particular to the city but also represents violence that specifically targets women everywhere. Thus rape symbolizes the gendered conversion of the contingent and the necessary that Simmel regarded as central to modern urban life. Then she illuminates darkly the ways in which women's sexuality becomes the basis for dis-

cipline and punishment through institutions that are characteristically urban, specifically as they delineate or are the vehicles for institutionalizing modern class boundaries. Noticeable in Leader's account is the bias that operates to expose and isolate poor, ethnic women. By showing the ways in which class intersects gender, Leader clarifies its importance in feminist analysis. From her point of view, class clearly limits the possibilities for feminine alliance. In fact it insures that one group of women will be disciplined and punished by another group of women, and that both will thereby suffer ignominies of differing but related kinds, while obscuring the phallocentric origins of the system.

For at every step of this unreal process, Leader finds herself further drawn in and defined by middle-class women who ostensibly work on her behalf. First, the doctor who pronounces her pregnant is a woman; she does so on the presumed notion that if Leader is there to see her, it is because she already knows that she is pregnant and that she has done something wrong (the two are always equivalent). Second, the administrator who offers Leader a place in the facility without any explanation, puts Leader, as she herself tells us, on a "fictitious level with this woman and this house." That is, the woman's failure to be honest with her

renders her apparent care and concern a sham; even more, it automatically places Leader in a position in which she must make decisions without the knowledge of what she is committing herself to. Third, Leader is examined by someone she is too inexperienced to know is a psychiatrist, who is "a past master at what might be called a feminized third degree." Because Leader is naive and vulnerable, she "succumbed more to her smiles, her pretense of equality, of comradeship, her protestations of 'I won't tell' . . . , in short, [to] all the paraphernalia of the social service worker" (242). Fourth, she is guarded by nurses and social workers, whose actions are no different from the policewoman set to guard the women at night (274, 257). Finally, another woman who is only subsequently identified observes the women over a period of time as part of the research she is doing, all the time working at her fine embroidery (283), indifferent to them save as they are the objects of her research. Thus Leader enumerates the professional "services" of these women from the point of view of those who are its victims and prisoners. By doing so, she also renders their work ideologically bankrupt.

This particular narrative had of course frequently been written from the point of view of the middle-class woman herself, she "who travels into the alien ter-

ritory of the 'other,' and whose point of view guides us in the reconstruction of our attitudes toward 'those less fortunate than ourselves'" (Shollar 1227).⁷ While its plot was intended to compensate for the class and racial prejudices of the time, its real accomplishment lay in sanctioning a wider sphere for the female bourgeoisie.⁸ In contrast, Leader reverse this female literary tradition. That is, she rewrites the narrative to clarify its class bias and its phallocentrism. That is, her revisionary strategy works to depict the ways in which these women are defined by their bourgeois roles. Their class identities then cooperate to insure that these women carry out the demands of an andro-centric system that at the same time undermines

⁷ Some haphazard best-selling examples include Alice Robbin's *Uncle Tom's Tenement* (1886), focusing on Black Americans, Kelly's collections of short stories dealing with Jewish-Russian immigrants, *Little Citizens* (1904) and *Little Aliens* (1910), Anna C. Rudý's 1908 novel depicting Anglo-American ladies ministering to Italian immigrants in *The House of the Stranger*, and Lucy Furman's *Mothering on Perilous* (1910), *The Quare Women: A Story of the Kentucky Mountains* (1923), and *The Glass Window: A Story of the Quare Women* (1925) about "white trash."

⁸ Glenda Hobbes also discusses this narrative strategy in the context of Appalachian fiction in "Starting Out in the Thirties: Harriette Arnow's Literary Genesis," *Literature at the Barricades: The American Writer in the 1930s*, eds. Ralph F. Bogardus and Fred Hobson [University: U of Alabama P, 1982] 144-161.

sororial relationship.

Not only does Leader expose the women's official complicity in the system and condemn the women as a group in terms of their class privilege. She criticizes, perhaps even more damningly, the personal hypocrisy of the women. Thus, comparing the social workers to the so-called delinquents with whom she is incarcerated, Leader argues that the formers' "superiority consisted in being able to get away with it [the act of sexual intimacy]. They had no fear of being caught; they exercised the proper secrecy and caution, they showed composed eyes to the world" (265). And ultimately, she recognizes the natural reluctance these women might have to give up the comforts, if not the safety, they are afforded by the institution in exchange for their fidelity to its premises. After all, the donations solicited by the brochures will go "mostly to the upkeep of the staff, to the staff's tables, with its biscuits, its aromatic coffee, its plentiful butter and meat and vegetables" (272), while the incarcerated women are fed the dregs and made to work as their own housekeepers and janitors, though suffering from a variety of debilitating conditions. Despite her anger, in other words, Leader is also able to understand the material conditions that allow women

to subsume themselves to an ideology that is antithetical to their real interests.

In addition to focusing on the women who serve to perpetuate patriarchal institutions, Leader's attack is also directed against the textual representations that establish and maintain the phallogentric system. Textuality--and the control of textuality-- is used to represent these women (both those supervising and those supervised) and the institution in the larger society.⁹ Thus Leader notes that letters to and from the inmates in the home are censored (269-270) as the means of controlling access and understanding. On another occasion she lashes out at the sermon she is forced to attend, undoing its complacent judgment of the women being held there. Above all, she scrutinizes and dissects the promotional literature of the agency that controls the perceptions of potential donors. Illicitly wandering

⁹ Leader's critique of textuality takes still another form. Her own misconception/self-delusion with regard to the institution is defined in part through a series of metaphors and images that draws on a genre of popular fiction for girls whose controlling topos/topography was the boarding school. Leader draws on a female literary tradition that is at least as old as Austen's lampoons of gothic and sentimental genres, typically through heroines whose fault usually lies in mis-reading reality as if it were like a sentimental plot, or characters as if they were like the heroes of books or plays. Leader's satirical thrust is also evident, as is her sense of humor--most necessary in making herself the butt of her joke.

through the offices, Leader discovers the material and contrasts its representation with her own. One brochure gives an example of a girl who was brought to the home and cured of her use of foul language. Leader ponders how such a "cure" is effected. Moreover:

it all seemed rather naive, anyway. How about the girl's mind? What went on inside of it? Was it not more black now that there was not the relief of speech? However she did not speak the words any more. That was all the Home cared about. Surface. Surface. If the surface was smooth, who cared what hell went on beneath?

Reviewing another brochure on the importance of the home, Leader again "reads" the institution as concerned only with representation, reflecting its enslavement to the outer moral layer constituted by convention: Thus the publicist

dwelt long and lingeringly on marriage. To get a girl, especially one who had a baby, married, was the peak of the Home's achievement. What sort of a hell went on after the marriage, the Home did not concern itself with. Only to get the girl married. Surface. Surface. Let the surface be smooth. Marriage could conceal anything, and usually did. Marriage could hide a past 'mistake.' No wonder the Home was all for it.

Finally, there is "another page," in which the rhetoric points to deeper causes of social dislocation but then pulls back to the surface to seek glib solutions that once again place the burden on the victim:

Environment was mostly to blame the Home said. I thought: why then were not the homes corrected? Why then were not the poverty,

the too closeness, the lack of humane privacy, the nagging mother, the bullying father--why were not these things corrected? . . . Why did the children have to do the suffering? (270-271)

This critique ends the book. Leader's final retort to her jailers is intended to speak to their desire to contain her and the world according to their narrow, conventional mold: "You want everything to fit a pattern" (272).

Leader was prescient in her analysis of gender and class. She recognized that it was not possible to claim a sisterhood without insisting on difference. She shows gender and class intervening to render the urban landscape alien and threatening to women, particularly those who were not part of the hegemonic bourgeois culture. The analysis "deconstruct[s] the terms of social privilege and power" and thus indirectly "locates the fissures" of Leader's identity (Kaplan). And that knowledge does finally give her the power to obtain her freedom from the reformatory. It does not thereby release Leader nor women like her from their exile at home.

Just as Leader's urban experience is linked to her identity as a woman, so is it linked to her identity as a Jew. The specific category of Jewish experience that shapes Leader's definition of the city and of her expe-

rience in it is arguably the diaspora. While the canonical American reader hears modernist echoes in Leader's text that have their source in the work of such writers as T.S. Eliot, Pound, and Sherwood Anderson, a critic trained in the tradition of another culture must argue that these modernist appropriations echo ancient texts that inscribe the centrality of the Diaspora to the Jewish imagination. The concept of the *galut*, or exile, has shaped Jewish identity, individually and collectively. Leader's text reinscribes the dispossession and exile that mark her origins and identity as a Jew, as that was redefined and reaffirmed by the immediate and local historical experience of displacement through migration and the subsequent iteration in the dispossession of modern life.

The notion of the diaspora stretches back into pre-historical times and the nomadic origins of the Jewish people, to which God's covenant to provide them with a settled land of their own was the antidote. Thus the identity of the Jews was made coterminus with geographical limits and inextricably linked with the concept of the Jews as a chosen people. Yet ironically, both elements--the promised land, the chosen people--are in their very nature compromised, undone, tainted. The original covenant is from the very first premised on a *withdrawal* from the land, on an aliena-

tion from society and its geographical and spatial boundaries. Thus God speaks to Abram:

Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee. (Genesis 12:2)

Having insisted that the Jews will inherit the land, the biblical history traces one dispossession after another: the famine that forces the Jews to travel to Egypt and Gerar (Genesis 12:10; 26; 50:24); the parting of the ways between Abram and Lot (Genesis 12:18) that takes Abram to Hebron; the successful attack of the Assyrians that can be dated to 722 B.C.E., the Babylonian Captivity dating from 586 B.C.E., and the final dispersion resulting from the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in the year 70 of the Common Era are some of the key scriptural events.

Cumulatively, these events define election as an ironic, not to say contingent, aspect of identity, subject to constant renewal and re-dedication, historical and social rather than genealogical or predestined in nature. The promised land, too, is at best an unstable reality--threatened by enemies without and enemies within (Wiener).¹⁰ Consequently, the corporate sense

¹⁰ Thus, in the same article, Eugene C. Wiener points out that despite God's promise of a homeland, it is nonetheless "to be achieved through obstinate striving and legitimated through virtuous action" (141).

of identity comes to derive more from a sense of chosenness as punishment and suffering than reward and redemption and more from a nation in exile than from a nation. In this context, redemption must be understood to mean an end to a riven self-definition; it is also quite specifically, mundane. Election would be signified by the restitution of Eretz Yisroël, the land of Israel.

The promised land itself is highly contested terrain, an ambiguous conceptual category. As A.B. Yehoshua has suggested, the special bond forged between the Jews and their deity, whether defined by the covenant with Abraham or the revelation at Sinai, was established in a sort of no man's land (17). Étan Levine's exegetical reading of the Old Testament lends further support to Yehoshua's notion. Levine argues that the promised land associated with milk and honey is not the paradisiacal home with which tradition and myth have imbued it but rather a land whose topographical and economic conditions favor milk and honey, equivalent to the nomadic and semi-nomadic reality of the Jews. In other words, the concept bespeaks circumstances of bare survival (44) and reflects a "marginal society living on the precipice of catastrophe," in contrast to the relative economic and material prosperity actually afforded by Egypt, Babylon, and

other lands to which Jews have migrated in times of famine and social disorder (52). Thus the promised land, or rather our misreadings of it, represent creative projections of memory and desire, suggesting from still another perspective, the degree to which the Jews defined themselves in relation to exile.

The locative category of the promised land gradually transmutes into a psychological, metaphysical, and existential if not a utopian category. Arguably, Jewish theology is constituted by its response to the concept: its history can be read as a *midrash*, or commentary on exile. (See especially Cohen; Berofsky) This theological tendency reaches its apotheosis in the mystical reinterpretations of the dispersion. The sixteenth-century Lurianic Kabbalah, or mystical theology of the Sephardic people "held that everything had been in exile since the beginning of Creation, and that the task of restoring everything to its proper place has been given to the Jewish people, whose destiny symbolizes the state of the universe at large." Redemption in this context consists in the process of restoration (Rosenberg 40). This interpretation represents the limit of a refusal of territorial power and the rejection of spatial reality as a meaningful dimension in the lives of the Jews.

Overall, the power of the diaspora idea is immense. The concept permeates the Jewish psyche. Many philosophers and theologians have developed subtle and complex theories regarding the diaspora and the relation between the private domain and the historical process; sociologists and psychologists have commented on its impact on the psychology of the group and of the individual. Despite significant, sometimes ingenious differences, certain commonalities of thought emerge in thinkers' meditation on these relationships. Preeminently, the legacy of dispossession and exile has subjected the individuals and their mental life to a certain detachment. On one hand, that detachment may be reflected either by a cosmopolitanism that allows the individual to be everywhere at home, or by a rejection of mundane, secular life in favor of the spiritual world or a purely intellectual existence. On the other, such detachment also leads to a sense of alienation, which gives rise to the feeling that one is nowhere at home or is a one of the living dead (See esp. Wiener 144-145; Neusner 249-251).

Such tendencies achieve their apotheosis in modern life in the conditions of the city; the Jews' archetypal exilic experience is the template for defining the conditions of modernity, articulated, in many cases, by those same Jews who rejected any attachment

to a specifically religious tradition. (I am thinking here of Simmel whose seminal commentary on urban life has seemed to me to reverberate with Leader's own account.)¹¹

Turning to Leader's text, we find the exilic pattern that I have been describing. There is the promised land that has been rendered problematic: hers is the wilderness/wasteland inherent in the original scriptural text and now reinscribed to map the particular ravages of modernity. Leader's flight into the city is also ironic in representing a reversal of the original search and purpose of the immigrant's journey. It is impelled by her desire to be rid of her identity as a Jew; it constitutes a decision to abrogate and deny her past rather than fulfill it. At the same time it reflects the reification of that identity, given American-defined and correlative notions of ethnicity and class that render her always a Jew, an immigrant,

¹¹ One might also point to Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin, as David Frisby has done, or still other members of the Frankfurt School, or even Marx, as Marshall Berman has done in *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982) as Jews who defined themselves according to an Enlightenment ideal, specifically codified by the Sanhedrin Assembly convoked by Napoleon in 1807, which provided full civic equality to Jews, and thus put an end to the notion of the return to Jerusalem and concomittantly to the exile/redemption circuit.

"lower" class.

The sense of choseness, what was once a definition of national community and an expression of shared faith, now becomes lodged in and distorted by romantic notions of otherness. If the consequent anonymity and dislocation that Leader experiences seems also to make possible her self-creation, the intellectual liberation and social emancipation enable a critique of modern life and define the limits of such creation. One's endurance is bought at the price of "a diminished existence" (Wiener 145). Yet, the urban adventure of homelessness/imprisonment initiates the narrative by which Leader gives voice to her exile, and thus establishes the temporal dimension of art as memorial refuge. Thus what Seidel calls "the exilic narrative" makes the diaspora the source of revelation (160); that is, the Hebrew word for exile is associated with *gil-lui*, that for epiphany. Given the epistemological connection, the autobiography as the allegory of the immigrant's exile is fitting. As allegory, it illuminates the relations between expatriatism, exile, and female modernism, helping us to see that the three were interrelated phenomena expressive of the conditions of modernity. As allegorical autobiography it also forces a reconsideration of the class and ethnic/religious elements, which themselves had been reconstructed by

modernity. Finally, the autobiography, Leader's text in particular, also makes comprehensible the development of a modernist style, particularly suited to an allegorical mode.

The structuralism born in the era during which Leader wrote was perhaps most significant in redefining language itself as self-contained, self-referential discourse (Hayman). Non-naturalist narrative, spatial form, heterocosmic alternative realities, mythic constructs--all indicate radical disjunctures in style and redefinitions of art that were the consequences of various epistemological crises and the restructuring of knowledge and reality that served to equate modern art with the avant-garde. A few critics have made efforts to formulate general theories of modernist style, and among the most helpful is one developed some twenty years ago, based on the distinction initially drawn by Roman Jakobson. Defining metaphor and metonym as radically antithetical stylistic modes, Jakobson argued that the former was the characteristic substitutive language of poetry, while the latter was the characteristic associative narrational language of realistic prose (239-259). Giving these categories a modernist inflection, David Lodge subsequently suggested that modern fiction could be characterized both by "an

extreme or mannered drive toward the metonymic pole . . . as well as by a drive toward the metaphoric pole from which it is naturally remote" (Lodge 486) Lodge develops these stylistic conventions in relation to fiction; other critics of narrative and rhetorical methods separately discuss those of fiction, poetry, even drama, but nowhere does there appear to be critical or scholarly consciousness of modernist nonfiction prose, or specifically autobiography. This section, then, seeks to establish nonfiction as a modernist category and to place the rhetoric of the autobiography within this theoretical matrix, using Leader's work as an exemplary text. While it does so, it also seeks to identify the text's allegorical fault lines, the seams Leader mines to give her text its particular linguistic and thematic richness.

Leader uses anti-realist modes of narrative to disrupt our assumptions of what constitutes reality. Her nontraditional style, initially metaphoric, inducts the reader into the child's point of view; with it, Leader is able to render the mysteries of the rooming house:

The cellar of the house was like a gnome's underground home in which I, a mere child, was not small enough nor quick enough to find my way about. When I imagined that I had finally found the door to the way up and out, I had found only the door to another musty labyrinth hung with cobwebs. . . . I might

chance upon a gnome . . . What should I say to the gnome if I met him? . . . The gnome might be as shy as I was. Therefore to avoid mutual embarrassment, I never came without a grownup. I knew too much about gnomes not to know that they would remain in hiding when one of the people was around. They liked the people as little, and trusted them as little, as I did (24-25)

This symbolic discourse may be read as indication of the power of the child's imagination, her isolation and sense of alienation from the community that already seems to judge her so harshly. The other world that the child creates through this imaginative order forms a refuge. Subsequently, the elaborate, almost baroque style inscribes a nighttime journey into the underworld that parallels a deeper chasm between the world and herself.

I walked around the cellar, or rather the labyrinths wound around me. Presently I came to a hole in the ground. . . . It was a hole filled with water, crystal clear and cold.

"Kneel down and taste the water," a voice said.

I knelt down and tasted the water. It was wonderfully good.

"There is a ladder beginning a foot below the top of the water," the voice said again; "descend it. Your eyes are as clear as the water now, clearer than the water, so you will see it plainly" (71)

But when she desires to return to the world to tell her tale, she is told that a condition of her ascent is that she take one of the gnomes with her.

"You need not have come here," said the King. . . . [But] those who go down into the darkness always bring back with them when they return

to the world of light, a sign which sets them
 apart from other men. The gnome goes with
 you. . . . (73)

The journey signals a rite of passage that has left her irrevocably changed. The gnome whom she carries into the world with her, with whom she must now live "day and night," is an embodiment of her deafness--. Such an icon *and* such a handicap are shocking. Within the modernist literary tradition, the traditional figure of blindness is emphasized: we have the re-incarnation of Appolinaire's Tiresias in Eliot's *Waste Land* and his pop transmutation in Fitzgerald's billboard advertisement for Doctor T.J. Eckleburg, to serve as ironic reminders of a divinity scorned, of a no-longer persuasive ideal; in *Leader*, deafness shocks us with its ugly reality--her sickness reflects a diseased world. *Textually*, however, it is also one manifestation of a more general or common obsession of modernist art with ugliness, an anti-aesthetic that was used to betoken a world bereft of beauty (Hayman 7). Like blindness, her deafness is also allegorical; through it is expressed "the silent world." The world does not speak to her, its inaudibility enunciates the loss of meaning that is characteristic of modernity (Kenner, *Pound Era* 26; Frisby 221). Thus the gnome "climbed on the lips of people and snatched to himself

the words that were meant for me, for my ears. . . . he would not let the words come to me, reach me" (76).

The gnome's symbolic vectors are two-dimensional. On one hand, the gnome constitutes the object of people's gaze that, ironically, renders Leader "invisible." In other words, she is reified, perceived in some denaturalized way: Thus meeting the eyes of people, she sees that "they had forgotten me and were seeing only the gnome" (77); on another occasion, she finds herself outside her usual community (on one of the several trips she makes with her mother seeking medical advice, pursuing chimerical solutions) and basks "in their clear glances, in their total indifference to her existence" until the passengers discover her deafness, and she finds herself yet again transformed into the object of their gaze: "a picture, curious, exaggerated, obscene, macabre. . . . They were safe so they could stare. The people. They loved to stare, always standing some inches away from the picture, of course. The people" (113). "But for the people I would not be deaf" (132). The psychic equivalent of this external rejection is the denial of her handicap to herself ("Strangely, the gnome never became as real to me as he was for everybody else . . ."[77]; later, she concedes that the only way "to revoke the image of the gnome" is to "admit that I was deaf"

[178]). It is in and through the gaze of . . . the people that Leader exists as a "negative presence" (228); it is the means by which she becomes absent to herself.

It is impossible not to read this loss of audibility and its consequent submission to the world's gaze as a Lacanian sign of transition into female identity and deafness as the terrific and precise expression of the linguistic deprivation through which female identity is constituted. (I am reminded again of Margaret Homans notion that a feminist strategy often consists of making literally true what has been mythologized by patriarchy). Yet its complement--linguistic plenitude-- also exists, instituted through the same symbolism. If the gnome incarnates the self as other, he also comes to embody the kingdom within, the subjective self, the world of the dream, which find their parallel in the alternate reality constituted by art, and that she names music.

One night, unexpectedly, I returned to the gold cave.

"Will you take back the gnome?" I begged the King.

"I cannot do that," said the King. . . . But I will grant you one wish that may be able to make life more bearable with the gnome."

"Let me hear music," I said instantly.

"You will carry music about with you wherever you go," said the King . . . [which she fails to understand; she cannot yet interpret her own dreams.]

I knew one thing anyway. . . . In that other world, the world of dream, I could hear perfectly. I had heard the King of the Gnomes. . . . (87)

The music when it comes is indescribable: "now wild, now soft; now the penetrating sweetness of a single violin. That must be a gypsy song to which all the gypsies of the world had danced for centuries. Now the music was an opera, although I had never actually heard an opera. . . .":

Presently the music became softer and softer. This was a lullaby, the tenderest lullaby that had ever rocked a child to sleep. . . because it must go beyond silence. (88)

It is this rhythm in her head that for the first time holds out a world of pleasure, to which she returns every night--a world impervious to the gnome, yet created by the very "walls the gnome had built" (89; 79; 208). It presents the possibility that she can create poetry that "fitted with the rhythm of the music, until there was no disharmonious note in the poem" (89). In her dreams, and in her dream of becoming an artist she finds release from the negative presence that haunts her; art is the ideal realm, one that creates "a new reality," in which she is neither out-cast nor exile. That is because "imagination . . . bridge[s] the gap between myself and reality" (236), creating a realm in which she can be present to herself (167).

It is perhaps not a digression to point to related patterns of imagery, one of which lies in the past and her early relationship to her mother, and the other of which is linked to the outside world with which she later came into contact. Significantly, rhythm in Leader's imagination generates an epiphanic moment of intimacy between her and her mother:

My mother snatching a few minutes from the market to iron clothes in the back room. Her hand, red, swollen from hard work, moved over the white expanse of sheet and pillow-case. After a minute, the rhythm I was watching for came, lifted me. I was sailing, far, far over my mother, the red swollen hand, the white expanse of sheet; I was flying on the magic carpet of the rhythm, out of the market, away from the market-smell, over the clock in the jail-tower, over the post-office, out into the green, green fields where there was only freedom. (27-8)

The image is almost perfect counterpoint to a figure in a Marc Chagall landscape and is made buoyant by the same yearning for transcendence and metamorphosis, though unlike the canvas's realization, Leader's prose also iconizes the domesticity that is the basis for transformation. Visual and linear, associated with transport--as flight, as ecstasy--this motif is repeatedly linked to the particular rhythm of poetic creation (121).¹² Thus when she reads or studies the

¹² The image of flight here is of course the counterpart to its constitution as escape/exile within the matrix of deprivation and othernesss.

works of others, Leader is searching for "a rhythm that could attract the attention of my own particular rhythm" and which, in turn, "could release my own rhythm, awaken the music in my head as my mother had awakened it ironing the white expanse of sheet and pillowcase" (156; and again almost exactly repeated 166). And, in the words of her own creating, she seeks an equivalent rhythm, "as I followed years ago the movement of my mother's hand across the white expanse of sheet, waiting for the rhythm that came and took me away from the market to another world" (120-21). Notably, the power of poetic creation and imaginative transcendence is linked to and derives from the artist's mother. This undergirds the symbolic gnome world, and as such argues for a model of female creativity that is posited by feminist Lacanians and post structuralists as well as the one articulated by the American Chodorow (*New French Feminisms; Reproduction of Mothering*).

The pre-verbal world of the child is conceived in terms of *images*; the world of mature creativity is imagined through a process of dramatization or externalization/personifications. That is what is originally metaphoric becomes metonymic, a distinction to which I will later return.

As I earlier suggested there is another cluster of images that relates to Leader's young adulthood. It originates in the bohemian world with which Leader comes into contact as an adult. That world, indeed, is the social token, or externalization, of the world of the imagination: it elicits in her a desire to "be free of this cage [to which she had restricted herself]." And for a brief time, she succeeds in winning that freedom. "When I entered the cafeteria [at which the group congregate], I left my cage outside on the sidewalk, as one leaves one's rubbers and umbrella on a rainy day" (221). This is possible, partly because she recognizes herself in them, them in herself:

How wild they looked, but no wilder than I looked. It was as if I recognized my own by this wildness, this wildness that was akin to my own wildness. Their hair was not smooth and composed, their eyes were not smooth and composed. I recognized them. (207)

Moreover, they are to be distinguished from "the people": "Poets were the beautiful people of the world. Poets were not the people" (154). They are not the people, because for them mere fact or sensation does not define experience:

That thing we had in common set us apart from the rest of mankind. We were child-men and child-women. We would never grow up and bow down to reality. We would ever chase butter-

flies in our brain. The rest of mankind had
no butterfly in their brains.

Language rather than the empirical world defines
reality.

These people were wonderful, I thought,
because they could talk my talk, or rather
the talk that went on in my head. They could
use words which I had come upon only in
books. I, too, had used these words--in my
head. But they used these words easily, as
if they were everyday words, as if they were
their living language. (214)

Language lives, and creates its own reality.

Thus Leader creates an extraordinary gnostic lan-
guage/world/reality. Particularly interesting, or
definitive for what might be called modernist discourse
is the degree to which the symbolic world is fore-
grounded, or rather the way in which figure and ground,
to draw on an older dualistic critical paradigm, are
made to occupy the same plane. What we have here is
not simply what Hayman in discussing the salient fea-
tures of modernist technique has called "nodality," the
clustering and repetition effects that are intended to
achieve accessible patterns found in "texts that fore-
ground language and rhetorical effects" as a substitute
for "relatively plotless structures" (10-11). Instead,
the text may be seen as a paratactic structure, imitat-
ing at the level of form, the grammatical structure
that lacks subordination and coordination. Formally,
the text eliminates the equivalent of linear perspec-

tive (and thus the illusion of subjective mastery). Or, to return to Lodge's stylistic categories, metaphor and metonym become interchanged and linked. Instead of telling us the story of her deafness, Leader first describes a labyrinthian underground and then narrates a tale of the descent to the world of the gnomes. By this transposition of the symbolic and the mimetic, the inner ear for the outer ear, what was metaphor becomes metonym: in effect, language *becomes* reality. At another level, metaphor as metonym transmutes to linguistic allegory; language is equated with the gnome world, which provides an originary mythos or the founding basis for modernity, as I have suggested above. It establishes the preconditions of life in the city and defines the terms of existence within the modern, urban landscape. Put another way, the gnome world represents Leader's reality--the deafness, the sexual desire, her imagination that are its constitutive elements--, and it is that reality that defines her relation to the city. Insofar as the urban landscape is a reflection of that reality, is dynamically shaped by that reality, it is overtaken by the gnome world and becomes the space wherein the imagination is allowed its full freedom. It is thus the gnome world/the mythical order that brings the mundane order into being.

Many theories have been propounded regarding the dominance of myth in modernist literature. For Eliot, classical myth incarnated the values of the past; for Yeats, Irish myth provided a substitute reality; Joyce used it out of a diminishing conviction that there was any external reality to which the inward search for meaning related (Gamache 33). Many critics have come to see myth as the temporal equivalent of the spatial abstraction that overtook the visual arts, a means of abrogating the historical world in favor of a timeless order that provided a refuge against the horror of modern life. While this has been the view of critics such as Kermode, Frank, and Worringer, Spears has argued that Freud and Jung have forced us to reinterpret the nature of myth; rather than understanding it as a refuge from reality, it might better be understood as the means by which one ties one's own life into that of the collective unconscious (66-68), which in the context of autobiography provides a meaningful alternative to the relationship of the individual to the past/history. Lehan, too, has asserted a more positive role for myth, arguing that, as the vehicle of the imagination, it potentially breaks "the hold of the imperial, commercial culture" (71). As we have seen, both these characteristics undergird the mythopoetics of *And No Birds Sing*. It breaks through a

mundane/modern reality that defines both women and Jews as others and fructifies the self by its relation to art; this mythopoetics is the basis for a new, gendered subjectivity and a new aesthetic form. The autobiographical structure appropriates modernist linguistic/stylistic techniques to fashion a personal myth charged with social/feminist significance. Yet the autobiography offers us a painful revelation regarding the conditions of modernity that stongly limit or render improbable agency and social transformation.

Consequently, it is virtually impossible to accept the arguments that Spears and Lehan have made without reservation. The collective unconscious that Leader's work taps into does not disrupt or permanently transform reality, nor does it provide for a revolution in consciousness. If anything, the result is a stand-off. For there is an alternative to the allegorical reading I have suggested above. Rather than generating the mundane reality, the gnome world exists as its antithesis: it argues for the equality of female desire, equating the subjective world with the objective one, even as the autobiography contains and encompasses both and thus establishes limits to the transforming powers of the female imagination. While unmasking some of the ideological presumptions of

universal identity or classless feminism, Leader's autobiography does not assert the power of the collective will to bring a new world into being, much less to bend the world to one's individual will. Specifically, even the limited desire to become an artist is thwarted in, if not by, the text. At best, there is a tone of resignation, if not quite of gratitude, at having escaped the worst excesses/oppression of the modern world. One completes the study of modernist autobiography with an awareness that the world was incommensurate with female desire, and that modern woman was haunted by a sense of her own incompleteness. Both elements continue to shape women's views today and to shape the texts they use to represent them.

Finally, then, Leader is among "the first- and second-generation immigrants," traveling a path that took them on a journey in the opposite direction of those who expatriated themselves, yet remained at one in spirit with those women who chose to liberate themselves from tradition. Like them, she acted as a "cultural mediator between Europe and America," in the transaction of literary modernism, giving "American artistic experimentation [not only] an international as well as a nativist spirit" but one that is darkened and ruptured by the experience of being a working-class woman (Homberger 155).

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